



Readings, Reflections, Prayers

August 2021

Walking in Wisdom

**God's Guidance for Normal People (Like Me)
Part 3**

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

Monday, August 9: Titus 2 and Proverbs on Family

Here are two “random” proverbs on families – to celebrate and to think about:

- *"Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children."* (17:6)
- *"Young people who obey the law are wise; those with wild friends bring shame to their parents."* (28:7)

In his letter to Titus, Paul emphasizes that ALL people – no matter what your stage in life, generation, gender, employment situation, etc. – are called to live wisely and well as people of God. The specifics of what one group are supposed to live out are less important than the general principles:

- Everyone is to love the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.
- Everyone is to love their neighbour as themselves.
- Everyone is to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- Everyone is to speak lovingly and wisely.
- Everyone is to walk in step with the Spirit (including things like self-control, integrity, etc.).
- Everyone is to put their hope in Jesus and find their strength from Him.

If Paul were to write to Titus about you instead of about the older/younger men/women slave/free, what would he say? *"Titus, teach ____ (your name) this ..."* *"Encourage ____ to be ..."*

What is God saying to you today? How can His Spirit change you, today?

*Lord, take full possession of my heart.
Raise there your throne
and command from there as you do in heaven.
Being created **by** you, let me live for you.
Being created **for** you, let me always act for your glory.
Being redeemed **by** you, let me give to you what is yours
and let my spirit cling to you alone.
Amen.*

John Wesley (1707-1788)

Tuesday, August 10: Self-control and Patience and Galatians 5:22-23

Theodore of Heraclea (281-319 AD) was a Christian leader, during the time the Roman Emperor, Licinius, began a fierce persecution of Christians. While Licinius was visiting, Theodore gathered all the gold and silver statues of the gods in Heraclea at his house, smashed them into pieces then distributed the wealth to the poor. Theodore was arrested and subjected to torture, crucified, and finally beheaded by the sword. Theodore wrote, *"Adam sinned by eating; Christ prevailed by self-control."* Self-control is important.

Reflect on these proverbs:

- *"Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city."* (16:32)
- *"A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls."* (25:28)

Reread **Titus 2** – how many times does Paul mention “self-control”? Read **Galatians 5:22-23**. Use Paul’s list of the “fruit of the spirit” as a tool to evaluate your life. How are you doing on each of these qualities? Which direction are you moving on each one?

- Are you becoming more loving? Or less loving?
- Are you becoming more joyful? Or less joyful?
- Are you becoming more peaceful? Or less peaceful?

- Are you becoming more kind? Or less kind?
- Are you becoming a better person? Or less good?
- Are you becoming more faithful (to God? To others?)? Or less faithful?
- Are you becoming more gentle? Or less gentle?
- Are you becoming more self-controlled? Or less self-controlled?

None of us is perfect at any of these, of course. But the direction you are moving is critical. If you are moving towards being **more** like these "fruit of the Spirit" – great. That is evidence that you are walking in step with the Spirit. Keep at it. Never get complacent. There is always room for growth.

If you are becoming **less** loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and/or self-controlled ... what's going on? Most likely you are also struggling to "walk with the Spirit." Your relationship with Jesus is probably not what it should be. What will you do about it – this moment?

Spend some time in prayer ...

*God, to know you is true life.
To serve you is perfect freedom.
To love you is the genuine satisfaction.
To praise you is the joy and happiness of the soul.
I praise and bless and adore you.
I worship you. I glorify you.
I give thanks to you for your great glory.
I humbly beg you to live with me, to reign in me,
to make this heart of mine a holy temple,
a fit habitation for your divine majesty.
Amen.*

Augustine (354-430)

Wednesday, August 11: The Simple ...

Among those who are "not wise" are those Solomon calls "simple." That sounds derogatory. What Solomon means by that, however, is that some people choose an easy/simple way to live: they don't think. These "simple people" don't think through the consequences of their actions beforehand. They don't bother reflecting on issues of morality and ethics. They don't make the effort to ask, "*What would God want me to do?*" They choose the simple way: they let others do the thinking for them; they follow the crowd.

"How long will you simple ones love your simple ways?" God asks (Proverbs 1:22). The Lord goes on: "*The waywardness of the simple* (those who insist on doing what they like, when they like, how they like, without thinking) *will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them ...*" (Proverbs 1:32).

Going "with my gut" or "following the crowd" seems like a freeing way to live. It also means I don't think for myself. Instead, I defer the responsibility by letting others think for me. Solomon warns that going through life without taking the time and making the effort to wrestle with hard questions yourself leads to disaster. I need to ask: What would the Lord want me to do? What are the consequences of my choices – for myself? For others? For the kingdom of God? For God's creation?

Read the proverbs below. Each needs to be read and considered on its own: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- "*The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps.*" (14:15)
- "*How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? ... For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.*" (1:22, 32)

- *"Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight."* (9:6)
- *"The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge."* (14:18)
- *"The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty."* (22:3)

Paul writes, *"Stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults"* (1 Corinthians 14:20). In other words – first, think about what is a godly decision. Second, act. This way you will choose to do what is right and keep yourself pure (being "infants" in regard to evil). This is not an easy or simple way to live ... it is a fulfilling, meaningful, purposeful way to live. What is God saying to you?

*We desire, Lord, that you add to all our other gifts the gift of faith:
faith that lights up the world with a light that never sets,
faith that shines brighter than the day,
faith that completely clears the night out of our experience.
We humbly ask you to grant us faith that shall give us victory over the world and over ourselves
and that makes us courageous in all temptation
and makes us conquerors – more than conquerors – through him who loves us.
Amen.*

Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)

Thursday, August 12: Proverbs on Integrity and James 3:13-17

"If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters," writes Alan Simpson. Integrity, like trust, is much easier kept than recovered. Once integrity has been compromised it is very hard – if not impossible – to "earn" it back.

Read each proverb, below, thinking about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life, right now?

- *"Whoever walks in integrity walks securely but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out."* (10:9)
- *"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold."* (22:1)
- *"Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness."* (14:22)
- *"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity."* (11:3)
- *"Righteousness guards the person of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner."* (13:6)

How does James (James 3:3-7) make a similar point? What is God saying to you, today?

Will Rogers once quipped, *"Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip."* There is good wisdom here.

*Send forth your light and your truth, that we may always live in you, our God.
Let us feel your love, that we may be, as it were, already in heaven.
Following your way, help us live our lives, filled with your love and joy.
Just as you lead, let us be ready for every work,
ready to speak or be silent,
to go out or in,
to stay or to depart.
Lord, our true happiness comes from obedience to your will.
Amen.*

Henry Martyn (1781-1812)

Friday, August 13: Proverbs on being a "Good" Person

"I have had more trouble with myself than with any other man I have ever met," wrote D.L. Moody, founder of Moody Bible Institute. I can empathize with him. Qualities like integrity, good character, unqualified honesty, an uncompromising heart are just a commonsense way to live. They SOUND easy. In the rough and tumble world of real life, they can be very difficult to live out.

U.S. Senator (and former Ottawa Rough Riders quarterback), J.C. Watts says, *"Character is doing the right thing when nobody's looking. There are too many people who think that the only thing that's right is to get by, and the only thing that's wrong is to get caught."*

Read each proverb, thinking about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- *"The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good."* (15:3)
- *"Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and humankind."* (3:3-4)
- *"Gossips betray a confidence, but the trustworthy keep a secret."* (11:13)
- *"The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good rewarded for theirs."* (14:14)
- *"Good people obtain favor from the LORD, but he condemns those who devise wicked schemes."* (12:2)
- *"Like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him; he refreshes the spirit of his master."* (25:13)

We can all think of people who do not model integrity, whom we cannot trust, or who show poor judgment. One Proverb describes such people in graphic terms: *"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman (or man) who shows no discretion"* (11:22). None of us want to be that person (I hope).

"The only correct actions are those that demand no explanation and no apology," says Red Auerbach (former NBA coach). Integrity doesn't exist in shades of grey. It's black or white. You have it or you don't. Our character doesn't change with the seasons or come and go with the weather; it is a foundational building block of who we are. If we can look in the mirror and say, *"There is a person who will never cheat"* – we never will. If we can look in the mirror and say, *"There is a person who has integrity"* – we will live with integrity. Try it. Find a mirror, look yourself in the eye and say, *"I will live this day in a godly way. Today, I will live with integrity."* Now, do it. In every situation and circumstance, live your faith.

*Lord Jesus, I believe you're able and willing to deliver me
from all the care, unrest, and bondage in my life.
I believe you died to set me free, not only in the future, but now and here.
I believe you are stronger than any sin;
you can keep me from falling in its snares.
Lord, I'm going to trust you to keep me.
I have tried keeping myself, and I have failed most grievously.
So now I will trust you.
I give myself completely to you.
Body, soul, and spirit, I present myself to you as a piece of clay,
to be fashioned into anything your love and your wisdom shall choose.
I am yours.
I believe that this poor, weak, foolish heart is filled with your Spirit.
I believe you have begun to work in me, to will and to do your good pleasure.
I trust you completely.
Amen.*

Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911)

Saturday, August 14: Proverbs on Pride

Wiktionary (online dictionary) lists 10 meanings for "pride" including:

1. "A sense of one's own worth and abhorrence of what is beneath or unworthy of one; lofty self-respect; noble self-esteem; elevation of character; dignified bearing; proud delight – in a good sense." Pride – in the sense of taking "pride" in my work, being diligent, doing the best I can, etc. – is a great thing. It is totally appropriate.
2. "The quality or state of being proud; inordinate self-esteem; an unreasonable conceit of one's own superiority in talents, beauty, wealth, rank etc., which manifests itself in lofty airs, distance, reserve and often contempt of others." This is not a good thing.
3. "Proud or disdainful behavior or treatment; insolence or arrogance of demeanor; haughty bearing and conduct; insolent exultation." This is not good either.

In terms of the "negative pride," Solomon writes:

- "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).
- "People may think all their ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart. To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. Haughty eyes and a proud heart – the unplowed field of the wicked – produce sin." (21:2-4)
- "Do you see people who are wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for fools than for them." (26:12)
- "The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished." (16:5)
- "Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice." (13:10)
- "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." (11:2)
- "Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honor." (29:23)

Reread each proverb, thinking about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

The healthy kind of pride is a good thing. But such a healthy self-concept comes out of deep humility. Humble people know they have talents, gifts, abilities, resources, AND they know these are gifts from God. These are His good gifts, to be used for His kingdom and His glory. "Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all ..." wrote William Temple. Consider these proverbs today, as well:

- "Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD, and humility comes before honor." (15:33)
- "Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor." (18:12)
- "Humility is the fear of the LORD; its wages are riches and honor and life." (22:4)

From today's proverbs, which speaks to you the most? Why? What is God challenging you to do today?

*Help me, Lord, to know what I ought to know,
to love what I ought to love,
to praise what delights you most, to value what is precious in your sight,
to heed what is offensive to you.
Do not allow me to judge according to the sight of my eyes.
Above all, help me always to inquire what is the good pleasure of your will.
Lord Jesus, help me to imitate you in all things.
Let your servant be trained in your life, for there is my salvation and true holiness.
Amen.*

Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471)

Sunday, August 15: Proverbs on Praise *and* 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Roman philosopher, Cicero, wrote, *"We are motivated by a keen desire for praise, and the better a man is the more he is inspired by glory."* Do you agree? Why? Why not?

There is some truth to the fact that we all love to be praised. Like pride, praise can be a positive thing in our lives. Genuine praise can encourage us as we seek to serve God by using our talents, abilities, and gifts for His glory. If discipline and correction are negative ways of directing our behaviour, sincere praise is a positive way of encouraging us to be more and more the people God wants us to be. We understand this with children: well-deserved praise reinforces a child to continue in good behaviour. The same is true of adults. Honest praise encourages us to use our gifts to do what is good, true, right, and godly.

But seeking praise – to inflate my ego – can be a negative thing. When I feel insecure, I can obsessively seek praise from people (not as sincere affirmation that I am serving the Lord, but as a boost for my wounded pride, bruised ego, or chronic need for approval). That kind of attention-seeking is not healthy.

Our challenge is to do what is right in all circumstances. If people affirm us in that – great. If not, that's OK, too. We never want to seek praise as an end in itself. We certainly never want people to "lie" in their praise – praising us when we actually deserve to be corrected or straightened out. Consider these proverbs: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life?

- *"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring."* (27:1)
- *"Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips."* (27:2)
- *"If you play the fool and exalt yourself, or if you plan evil, clap your hand over your mouth."* (30:32)
- *"Those who forsake instruction praise the wicked, but those who heed it resist them."* (28:4)
- *"The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by their praise."* (27:21)

What can you learn from these proverbs? How can you integrate this into your life – now? 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 remind us that our only real basis for boasting is the grace and love of God in our lives.

Finally, think on this from Abraham Lincoln: *"What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself."* Enough said?

*Christ Jesus, when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness,
give us the sense of your presence, your love, and your strength.
Help us to have perfect trust in your protecting love and strengthening power,
so that nothing may frighten or worry us.
Living close to you, help us see your hand,
your purpose, your will through all things.
Amen.*

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556)

Monday, August 16: Proverbs on Being Even-Tempered

Did you ever think about the fact that for every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness? Will Rogers once observed that, *"People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing."*

My experience with anger is that it can be very destructive – to myself (the only one who gets hurt when I kick the wall is myself) and to others ... the words I can say or the things I can do in my anger can be VERY hurtful. Several friends have advised me: *"It's OK to write angry letters to people who have hurt you ... but NEVER send them. After a week, shred them."* There is therapy in writing out your feelings; but then destroy the document. I have learned to NEVER write an angry email or text AND SEND IT, ever. It's too easy to hit "SEND" and regret it the next millisecond. Always communicate face-to-face on tough issues.

Consider these proverbs: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life?

- *"For as churning cream produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife."* (30:33)
- *"An angry person stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins."* (29:22)
- *"Do not make friends with the hot-tempered, do not associate with those who are easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared."* (22:24-25)
- *"Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs."* (10:12)
- *"The hot-tempered stir up dissension, but those who are patient calm a quarrel."* (15:18)
- *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."* (15:1)

How can I integrate this wisdom into my life – this instant?

Alexandre Dumas, author of *The Three Musketeers*, wrote, *"There is nothing more galling to angry people than the coolness of those on whom they wish to vent their spleen."* Keep your cool ... no matter what.

Walter Anderson comments, *"If you're angry at a loved one, hug that person. And mean it. You may not want to hug – which is all the more reason to do so. It's hard to stay angry when someone shows they love you, and that's precisely what happens when we hug each other."*

Paul quotes Psalm 4:4: *"Don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:26-27). What do you need to learn today?

*Lord, my God, the horrors of darkness were gathered around me and covered me all over.
I saw no way to carry on.
I felt the misery of my fellow creatures separated from the divine harmony,
and it was heavier than I could bear, and I was crushed under it.
I lifted up my hand and stretched out my arm, but there was none to help me.
I looked round about and was amazed.
In the depth of misery, Lord, I remembered that you are all-powerful,
that I had called you Father, and I loved you.
So I was made quiet in your will, and I waited for deliverance from you.
You had compassion on me when no man could help me.
Humility under suffering was shown to us in the most perfect example of your Son.
You taught me to follow him, and I said, "Father, your will be done."
Amen.*

John Woolman, in the early stages of smallpox (1720-1772)

Tuesday, August 17: Proverbs on Being 'Good News'.

Do you know anyone who is depressing to talk to? They're always up on the latest BAD news in the world? Their lives are always in crisis? They love to tell you all the terrible things they are experiencing? Are they "life-giving" and energizing to you?

Do you enjoy those people? Do you seek them out to spend time with? Probably not ...

Do you know anyone who makes you feel good when you talk to them? Who can see God's Spirit at work in their lives and in the world? Who is a genuinely positive person? Who always knows some good news? Who may have their problems, but can see that there are others worse off than they are? Who are encouraging and life-giving to you? Who make you smile? Who energize you?

Do you enjoy these people? Do you seek them out to spend time with? Probably you do ...

- "A person finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word." (15:23)
- "Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones." (15:30)
- "Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land." (25:25)

Try to be "good news" today. Try NOT to complain about anything today. Try not to say anything negative about anyone today. Try to encourage and build up someone else today. Talk about the good things the Lord is doing today. Be thankful today ... and share your thankfulness with others ...

*Make us content, Lord, with the necessities of life.
Keep our hearts from delighting in honors, treasures, and the pleasures of this life.
Give us Lord, such taste and feeling for your unspeakable joys and heaven
that we may always long for them.
'Your Kingdom come, Lord; your will be done, Lord' – in and through my life.
For the sake of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end.
Amen.*

Edmund Grindal (1519-1583)

Wednesday, August 18: Philippians 4:4-7 and Proverbs on a Joy

Paul, writing from a Roman prison, writes, *"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again – rejoice. Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."* (If you haven't memorized these verses, you could)

The Spirit of God, living in us, can give us that kind of joy, even in the most difficult of circumstances. Joy comes from knowing that we are safe and secure in God's hands, no matter what.

Consider these proverbs: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life?

- "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." (17:22)
- "The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing." (10:28)
- "Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy." (12:20)
- "A person finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word." (15:23)
- "Evildoers are snared by their own sin, but the righteous shout for joy and are glad." (29:6)
- "A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit." (15:13)
- "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." (14:30)

Jesus says *"Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). How can you find joy knowing that you are in His hands ... always?

*Lord, may you give me ...
For every storm, a rainbow,
For every tear, a smile,
For every care, a promise,
And a blessing in each trial.
For every problem life sends, a faithful friend to share,
For every sigh, a sweet song,
And an answer for each prayer.
Amen*

Thursday, August 19: Proverbs on Justice

In our society we value justice. Justice is a key to a civil society. We believe a strong, fair, transparent, trustworthy justice system is critical. It gives us security and confidence that, as we live within the rules, we will be protected and that those who break the rules will be punished. We can be thankful.

But the world is not always that fair. Within organizations, people get promoted based on who they know not what they know. While officially we don't like to admit it, racism, sexism, ageism, and other -isms are alive and well in our community. On a global scale, we know that large corporations often treat employees, communities – even whole nations – unfairly in terms of profits, wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Jesus emphasizes justice. Speaking to the religious people of his day, He says, *"You are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but ignore the more important aspects of the law – justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things."* (Matthew 23:23)

Consider these proverbs: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life?

- *"When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers."* (21:15)
- *"It is not good to be partial to the wicked and so deprive the innocent of justice."* (18:5)
- *"A corrupt witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down evil."* (19:28)
- *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."* (31:8-9)
- *"The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern."* (29:7)

Are there situations in which you need to speak up for justice or in which you can act justly? Will you do it?

*Sometimes I crave the unbridled joy of childhood.
I remember how it felt to pedal my bike fast, wind whipping through my hair, without a care in the world.
I long for the innocence of seeing life through a child's eyes, to laugh, sing, and play again.
Now I feel as if my joy has been pushed deeper down inside me.
Jesus, You show me that true joy is the reassurance of Your presence,
and the contentment of knowing Your love.
Joy is in Your creation, in the beauty of the earth.
Joy is in a smile, a kind word, a laugh, and a song.
But most of all, joy is found in worship of and in thankfulness to You.
Worldly happiness is temporary, but Your joy is eternal.
It exists no matter what my circumstances may be.
It is accepting Your love with a simple, childlike faith.
Joy is discovering new things about You every day.
Oh, thank You, dear Jesus, for Your joy!
Amen*

Friday, August 20: Proverbs on Security

Our security is found in God. The wisdom literature uses a variety of ways to express this: God is our rock, our fortress, our deliverer, our salvation, our strength ...

As individuals – as a culture – we like to think we're in charge of our own lives. We prefer to believe we are masters of our own destiny. We can provide for – and protect – ourselves very nicely, thank you very much. In many ways we can (and should) look after ourselves. But ultimately the global economy, my health, even my personal safety is not completely within my control. I have to trust God.

Yes, we can – and do – need to care for ourselves as much as possible. But Proverbs reminds us that,

ultimately, our trust must be in our Lord. We NEED to trust Him, rather than our own strength, our own cunning, or other people.

Read each proverb, below, on its own. Pause after EACH verse and think about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- *"Hopes placed in mortals die with them; all the promise of their power comes to nothing."* (11:7)
- *"Those who fear the LORD have a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death."* (14:26-27)
- *"The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."* (18:10)
- *"The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous."* (15:29)
- *"The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked."* (10:3)
- *"When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever."* (10:25)

*Lord, fill us so completely with your Spirit.
As we go from one thing to another, may we go from strength to strength,
always filled with your praise.
In all we do, may we find the joy of the Lord to be our strength.
May we know God's strength, until the time when the work of this world is finished,
the weary hours come to an end,
and our eyes shall rest for a while.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*

George Dawson (1821-1876)

Saturday, August 21: Proverbs on Good Government *and* Romans 13:1-8

Solomon gathered proverbs from across the Jewish tradition and wrote many himself, to help Hebrew young men mature to be political, business, community, and military leaders. As we have read, the proverbs deal with issues such as wise speech, integrity, character, good friendships versus the company of fools, sexual morality ... and how to be good leaders. Proverbs is holistic wisdom for the whole of life.

Consider what these proverbs say to government leaders, business leaders, volunteer leaders ...

- *"Eloquent lips are unsuited to a godless fool - how much worse lying lips to a ruler."* (17:7)
- *"A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops."* (28:3)
- *"If a ruler listens to lies, all his officials become wicked."* (29:12)
- *"By justice a king gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down."* (29:4)
- *Love and faithfulness keep a king safe; through love his throne is made secure."* (20:28)
- *"If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will be established forever."* (29:14)

It would be good if all politicians and business leaders read these words of wisdom – and followed them. It would be good if all of us read these words of wisdom, and – as they apply to our circumstances – followed them. Reread them, thinking about how the principles relate to your life ...

Let's think about the world of politics for a moment. Part of Canadian culture is a morbid delight in cutting down politicians. Whether or not we agree with the policies of individual politicians or parties, think about how difficult a job they have, especially in these hard times. Think about the harsh criticisms, long hours, unrealistic expectations, time away from home, pressure from lobby groups, party policies, etc. Our leaders, as people just like us, need our prayers. And they certainly need our prayers for wisdom, justice, integrity,

and compassion in their policy-making.

Another issue Proverbs considers is how we relate to government officials. Not many of us are called to be in upper leadership positions (phew). Here is some wisdom for how we can relate to those who are ...

- *"One who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the king for a friend."* (22:11)
- *"Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone."* (25:15)
- *"Fear the LORD and the king, my son, and do not join with rebellious officials, for those two will send sudden destruction on them, and who knows what calamities they can bring?"* (24:21-22)

Good advice. Read Romans 13:1-8. How do Paul's words complement what Solomon wrote in Proverbs? How can you take something you learned today and apply it to your life?

*Through every minute of this day, be with me, Lord.
Through every day of all this week, be with me, Lord.
Through every week of all this year, be with me, Lord.
May every minute and day and week and year be under your Spirit's guidance.
When my time is past, may my time be well spent for you.
When my work here on earth be done, may it all be done for you.
And may I, at last, be at rest with you, Lord.
Amen.*

John Oxenham (1852-1941)

Sunday, August 22: Proverbs on Anxiety *and* Matthew 6:25-34

What gets accomplished when you put the world's ten best worry-ers in one room for a weekend? Absolutely nothing. Worry achieves nothing.

We all have experienced worries, stresses, and anxieties that have sapped our souls of joy. We carry yesterday's problems with us; we are anticipating tomorrow's problems; AND we struggle through today. Like Mark Twain we can say, *"I have known a great many troubles ..."*

Actually, Twain wrote, *"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, **but most of them never happened.**"* Twain's second clause is probably true for our lives, too. At times when we saw ten troubles coming down the road towards us, nine of them probably ended up in the ditch before ever reaching us. But we spent time and energy worrying about them, anyway. We lost so much potential joy.

"Worry, doubt, fear and despair are the enemies which slowly bring us down to the ground and turn us to dust before we die," observed General Douglas MacArthur (who knew what he was talking about). Worry is so hard on us – and so insidious. We need to come to grips with it.

Read each proverb, below, on its own. Pause after EACH verse and think about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- *"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up."* (12:25)
- *"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. The LORD works out everything to its proper end – even the wicked for a day of disaster."* (16:3-4)
- *"The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD."* (21:31)
- *"Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off."* (23:17-18)

Read Jesus' counsel on worry in Matthew 6:25-34. What is He saying to you?

In conclusion, reflect on these thoughts:

- *"For peace of mind, resign as general manager of the universe."* (Author Unknown)
- *"Any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be made into a burden."* (Corrie ten Boom)

*Lord, I thank you that you know all about us.
You know our imperfect deeds done on your behalf.
You know our impure motives.
Overlook our failures.
Please take into account the love in our hearts.
Thank you that it is you who creates any good desire in us by your Holy Spirit.
It is you who gives us strength, power, and passion to fulfill any good works.
Jesus, increase in us a desire to live as you lived.
Help us to live in a way that shows forth your person in all we do.
Amen*

James S. Bell, Jr.

Monday, August 23: Proverbs on Money and Matthew 6:19-24

Solomon wanted the leaders of Israel to be ready to deal with ALL the challenges of life. One of the big issues in life – which we all must come to terms with – is the wise handling of money. Solomon might have appreciated this wisdom:

- *"Money often costs too much."* (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
- *"Too many people spend money they haven't earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people they don't like."* (Will Smith)

Did you know Jesus speaks more about money than almost any other subject? Even before Jesus spoke about worry (Matthew 6:25-34), He spoke about money (Matthew 6:19-24). Read Jesus' words in Matthew 6. What is He saying? How does His counsel apply to your life, today?

Now read each proverb below. Pause after EACH verse and think about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- *"Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf."* (11:28)
- *"Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow."* (13:11)
- *"Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death."* (11:4)
- *"A kindhearted woman gains honor, but ruthless men gain only wealth."* (11:16)
- *"Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil."* (15:16)
- *"Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud."* (16:19)
- *"Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit. In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle."* (23:4-5)
- *"The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it a wall too high to scale. Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour."* (18:10-12)
- *"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold."* (22:1)

Which proverb(s) resonates with you? Why?

What is the Lord saying to you today? What will you do about it?

*I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,
 I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
 I asked for health, that I might do great things,
 I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
 I asked for riches, that I might be happy,
 I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
 I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,
 I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
 I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,
 I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
 I got nothing that I asked for – but everything I had looked for.
 Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered.
 I am, among all men, most richly blessed.
 Amen*

Prayer of a seriously wounded Confederate soldier

Tuesday, August 24: Proverbs on Integrity in Business and 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. wrote, "*A man is usually more careful of his money than of his principles.*" Do you know anyone who scrupulously counts every penny, but compromises their integrity?

Solomon knew very well that one of the areas of life in which people are tempted to compromise their integrity is in business. If you want to be competitive – if you want to get ahead – you have to play by the same rules (or lack thereof) as everyone else, right? So, if your competition is crooked, you have to be crooked, too – right?

The stakes can be high – financially – if you are not competitive. To maximize your profit, is it OK to compromise your convictions (even just a little bit)? Is it OK to do whatever your competition does? Jesus asks, "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26). Is financial profit the ONLY important thing in business? Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10. What does Paul say about money in this passage? How does it apply to you?

Solomon challenges us to live by highest of standards. Never to compromise. Not to sink to the lowest common denominator, but to invite our competitors to live by the best business morals. We may make a bit less money, but we will live with integrity, have a clear conscience, and be lights shining in the darkness.

Now read each proverb below. Consider each on its own: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- "*The LORD detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him.*" (11:1)
- "*Differing weights and differing measures – the LORD detests them both.*" (20:10)
- "*Food gained by fraud tastes sweet, but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel.*" (20:17)
- "*Ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value, but righteousness delivers from death.*" (10:2)

What wisdom are Jesus, Paul, and Solomon giving you, today? How can you live these principles?

Solomon gives some further advice on wise business practices:

- "*The wise store up choice food and oil, but fools gulp theirs down.*" (21:20)
- "*'It's no good, it's no good.' says the buyer – then goes off and boasts about the purchase.*" (20:14)
- "*Like an archer who wounds at random is one who hires a fool or any passer-by.*" (26:10)

Do you agree? Do you need to apply any of this wisdom to your life?

*Jesus, fill me with your love.
Please use me a little for your glory.
Accept me and my service.
Take for yourself all the glory.
Amen*

David Livingstone (1813-1873)

Wednesday, August 25: Proverbs on Work and Laziness and Ephesians 2:1-10

What does success in life look like? What does **godly** success in life look like? How would you answer that?

A talk show psychologist like, Dr. Phil, might paraphrase it like this, "*What would life look like if you were self-fulfilled, happy, and content?*" How would you answer that?

According to ads on TV or YouTube, a full life might be lying in a hammock on a tropical beach, with a drink (or several), a beautiful/handsome companion (or several), and nothing to do but watch the waves roll in ...

Is that what life is all about? For me, a couple of days of carefree Tropicana might be nice, but then I'd want to **do** something ... something meaningful ... something that made a difference for people around me ... something that mattered to the Lord ... something that made life worth living ... something to get out of bed for ... I'd want to actually be a living person, not a vegetable baking in the sun ...

Sociologists might blame John Calvin and his so-called "Protestant work ethic" for my desire to have life matter and to serve God. But this goes deeper than Reformation theology. In Genesis 2:15 we read that, "*The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.*" From the very beginning, we were created to tend and care for God's creation – the natural world and other people. That's inextricably woven into who we are, as human beings created "*in the image of God*" (Genesis 1:27).

We are fulfilled, content, and joyful when we are being the image of God: making a difference in the lives of other people, caring for the world around us, and serving the Kingdom of God. Those of us who have volunteered with children, in a hospital, with youth, at the Soup Kitchen, or in cleaning up a park know the peace, joy, and satisfaction that comes from doing something that matters.

The self-indulgent laziness that the ads try to sell us (let's call it what it is) may be OK for a couple of days. But it won't bring the deep contentment and meaningful joy it promises. Even in retirement, the Bible encourages us to keep busy. There are always meaningful things we can do to care for others, for creation, and to build God's Kingdom. In the Bible, a healthy balance of work and leisure is the norm ...

Read each proverb below. Pause after EACH verse and think about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- "*Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.*" (10:4)
- "*Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labor.*" (12:24)
- "*The sluggard says, 'There's a lion outside. I'll be killed in the public square.'*" (22:13) (In other words, this lazy-bones makes up (absurd) excuses why he can't work).
- "*Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare.*" (20:13)
- "*A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.*" (13:4)
- "*I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.*" (24:30-34)
- "*All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.*" (14:23)

- *"Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house."* (24:27)
- *"Those who work their land have abundant food; those who chase fantasies have no sense."* (12:11)

In Ephesians 2, Paul emphasizes that our "work" does not save us. Salvation is the free, gracious gift of God. However, we are saved to do good works (2:10). I cannot earn my salvation – that is God's blessing to me. However, I am saved for a purpose: to serve God by blessing other people and His creation.

*Lord Jesus, I approach your banquet table
not relying on my own merit, but only on your goodness and mercy.
I have sinned in body and soul, and by my careless thoughts and words.
Lord, I trust in your mercy, for it is without limit.
Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.
The depth of your compassion never ends.
Thank you for your saving sacrifice, offered on the cross for all mankind.
Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for washing away the sins of the whole world.
Merciful Father, take away all my offences and sins.
Help me to do your perfect will.
Amen.*

Ambrose of Milan (340-397)

Thursday, August 26: Proverbs on Loans *and* Romans 13:8-14

Have you ever got a phone call "from the CRA" threatening you with legal action if you didn't send them money – right now? Have you received an email saying your uncle is in jail in Africa; you need to send money – right now? Have you been informed that you've just inherited \$1 million from a long-lost relative; all you have to do is fill out an online form with your banking information, and the money will be transferred to your account – right now? I hope you recognise these as scams. I hope you don't respond.

We need to be wise in our dealings with people ... especially when it comes to finances.

"The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" wrote Paul (1 Timothy 6:10). We recognize that in ourselves. We also recognize that in other people. Others are just as susceptible to the same temptations of money as we are. And many people are totally unscrupulous, trying to take advantage of vulnerable people.

Proverbs warns us:

- *"Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to shake hands in pledge is safe."* (11:15)
- *"Do not be one who shakes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you."* (22:26-27)
- *"One who has no sense shakes hands in pledge and puts up security for a neighbor."* (17:18)
- *"If you have put up security for your neighbour, if you have struck hands in pledge for another, if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth, then do this, my son, to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbour's hands: Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbour. Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids. Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler."* (6:1-5)

This makes sense, doesn't it?

Romans 13:8-14 also talks about debt – from a very different perspective. This is "good" debt. What is Paul's point in this passage? How can you apply these principles to your life, today?

*Jesus, when I deal with those who need you,
 help me to talk to them the way you did.
 When I meet those who need a kind word or deed,
 help me to reach out to them, just like you did.
 When I see injustice, help me to confront it, just like you did.
 When I have a decision to make,
 remind me to go to the Father and talk to him about it, just like you did.
 When I am mistreated or spoken ill of,
 help me to respond to it without an 'eye for an eye,' just like you did.
 Amen.*

Tracy Macon Sumner

Friday, August 27: 2 Corinthians 8:1-14 and Proverbs on Non-Generosity

Some people are very generous with their money. Others are not. You probably know people who are at either ends of the "continuum of generosity." some people are so generous they do without a lot of comforts themselves to bless the Lord, His work, and other people; but other people we know have never given one penny to one charitable cause in their entire lives.

Who tend to be more content people? I find the generous people I know are typically more joyful, more fulfilled, and more content.

We could be TOO generous. The Bible does NOT encourage us to irresponsible with our money to the point that we become a financial burden to other people, because we are giving so much away. However, the Bible does warn us that money is far from the most important thing is our lives; it can offer us a false sense of true security. Scripture also reminds us that all we have is a gracious gift from God – it is He who has given us the health, knowledge, skills, and opportunities to earn what we have. None of us is a self-made person. All we have is a gift from God ... and as such we are His stewards of all we have, including our money. Our task is to be wise stewards of what God has given us.

In some ways, those of us with more resources or money have it tougher than those with little. God has given wealthier people a bigger stewardship challenge than others of us.

Today we will look at what Proverbs has to say to those who choose to hold on tightly to what He has given them. Tomorrow we will look at proverbs on generosity.

Reflect on each proverb below. Pause after EACH verse and think about: What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- *"The stingy are eager to get rich and are unaware that poverty awaits them."* (28:22)
- *"The greedy bring ruin to their households, but those who hate bribes will live."* (15:27)
- *"The greedy stir up dissension, but those who trust in the LORD will prosper."* (28:25)
- *"One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty."* (11:24)
- *"People curse those who hoard grain, but they pray God's blessing on those who are willing to sell."* (11:26)
- *"Don't eat with people who are stingy; don't desire their delicacies. They are always thinking about how much it costs. 'Eat and drink,' they say, but they don't mean it. You will throw up what little you've eaten, and your compliments will be wasted."* (23:6-8)
- *"Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given."* (25:14)

Is God speaking to you through any of these proverbs?

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-14, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to an offering for Christians who are destitute in Jerusalem (Corinth is a wealthy trading/business/financial city in southern Greece). He contrasts the non-generosity of the wealthy Corinthians with the overwhelming generosity of the much poorer Christians in Macedonia (Macedonia, including Thessalonica and Philippi, in northern Greece, was a much poorer area than Corinth). Paul is subtly encouraging a "Battle of Alberta" (actually, a "Battle of Greece") to see who can be more generous.

Wouldn't it be interesting if we tried to out-generositize one another? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we saw giving as a privilege rather than a duty?

Paul reminds us of the generous love of God – He gave us His Son, Jesus. How should that encourage our generous response back to Him?

*Govern everything by your wisdom, Lord.
your love is that which I desire to always live and grow within me.
May I always serve you as you choose, not as I choose.
Let me die to myself that so I may serve you.
Let me live to you, who in yourself are the true life.
Amen*

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Saturday, August 28: 2 Corinthians 9:1-14 and Proverbs on Compassion for the Poor ...

The saga of the Corinthians offering to the desperate plight of Christians in Jerusalem continues ... the wealthy Corinthians had promised an offering but now are reneging on their pledge. If they did have to give, they were NOT going to have a good attitude about it – they were downright grumpy and miserable. Paul encourages them to see giving to the Lord as a privilege and honour. Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-14.

Proverbs encourages generosity, too: Read each proverb below. Pause after each one thinking about ... What is the author saying? What does it mean? How does it apply in my life? How can I integrate this into my life – this instant?

- *"Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses."*(28:27)
- *"The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor."*(22:9)
- *"A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."*(11:25)
- *"Those who oppress the poor to increase their wealth and those who give gifts to the rich—both come to poverty."*(22:16)
- *"Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will exact life for life."* (22:22-23)
- *"Whoever increases wealth by taking interest or profit from the poor amasses it for another, who will be kind to the poor."*(28:8)
- *"Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you"*(23:10-11). In those days, boundary stones established property lines, like modern day plot plans. Dishonest people used to try "sneakily" to move boundary stones to enlarge their territory at the expense of others. Not a godly thing to do. Is there a contemporary equivalent? Do people ever try to take advantage of others, today, and "steal" from them in sneaky ways?
- *"Whoever robs their father and drives out their mother is a child who brings shame and disgrace."* (19:26)

"Remember," Paul writes, *"A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want*

each of you to take plenty of time to think it over and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7 *The Message* translation). How is God speaking to you today?

*Lord, grant us faith, the faith that shows us God in all things.
Gives us eyes to see Christ, where our eyes see only a poor person.
Gives us eyes to see the Saviour, where we feel only pain.
Lord, grant us the faith that inspires us to serve you,
without shame, without fear, and without ever retreating.
Grant us faith that knows how to go through life with calm, peace, and profound joy.
Grant us faith that draws closer and closer to you.
Amen*

Charles de Foucauld (1856-1915)

Sunday, August 29: Romans 12 and Proverbs on Giving to the Lord

On the cross, God gave Himself, though Jesus, as a sacrifice for us. Out of His love for us, He gave up everything. Our response to God's unfathomable love ought to be to give ourselves back to God. Read Romans 12. This is exactly what Paul is encouraging us to do.

This is Eugene Peterson's (*The Message*) translation of Romans 12:1-2: *"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you."*

But what does that really mean? What does it look like in practice? Paul goes on to give specific examples in Romans 12:3-21. There are many good pieces of advice here. In particular notice that we are ...

- to be good stewards of the gifts (in terms of talents, abilities, time, and finances) with which the Lord has blessed us (12:6-8);
- to care for people: those in need emotionally, spiritually, physically – and financially (12:9-13);
- to relate to difficult people with integrity (12:14-21). Again, there is a spirit of generosity here: we respond to the hostility of others by giving love.

What speaks to you most from Romans 12?

Consider this wisdom from Proverbs and the prophet Malachi:

- *"Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."* (3:9-10)
- *"Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. But you ask, 'How are we to return?' 'Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.' But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' 'In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,' says the LORD Almighty. 'Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the LORD Almighty."* (Malachi 3:7-12)

How is God speaking to you? How can you integrate this wisdom into your life, today?

*Lord of hosts, hold us fast so we won't fall from you.
Increase our faith and help our unbelief.
Draw us close to you.
May we live godly lives for your glory.
Amen.*

James Pilkington (1520-1576)

Monday, August 30: Proverbs on Diet and Self-Care *and* 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Life has many facets. Among the topics Proverbs explores – perhaps surprisingly – is our diet and how we care for ourselves physically. Consider these words of wisdom:

- *"If you find honey, eat just enough – too much of it, and you will vomit."* (25:16)
- *"Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path: Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags."* (23:19-21)
- *"Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise."* (20:1)
- *"Whoever loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich."* (21:17)
- *"Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 'They hit me,' you will say, 'but I'm not hurt. They beat me, but I don't feel it. When will I wake up so I can find another drink?'"* (23:19-35)

We can understand that this is good counsel to people who will be the political, economic, and military leaders of Israel.

1 Timothy 3 provides wisdom for leaders in the church. The terms "overseers"/"bishops" (3:1) and "deacons" (3:8) have been (and still are) understood in different ways. Often the first term is understood as "ordained clergy"; the second as "lay leaders." We don't really know exactly who Paul meant. We do know these refer to positions of leadership in the church, however that worked out in practice. These qualities really should characterize every one of us who loves Jesus and seeks to follow Him.

Could this passage describe your life? What aspect of Paul's writing do you find particularly challenging? Why? What do you need to work on this week?

*Jesus, poor, unknown, and despised, have mercy on us.
Let us not be ashamed to follow you.
Jesus, accused, and wrongfully condemned,
teach us to bear insults patiently and let us not seek our own glory.
Jesus, crowned with thorns and hailed in derision –
buffeted, overwhelmed with injuries, griefs and humiliations –
Jesus, hanging on the accursed tree, bowing the head, have mercy on us.
Conform our whole lives to your Spirit.
Amen.*

John Wesley (1703-1791)

Tuesday, August 31: Celebration of Wives (Proverbs 31:10-31)

Proverbs has much wisdom on relationships, marriages, and sexuality, as well. We will look at some of this insight over the coming days.

One of the most significant passages in Proverbs is a “Hymn to a Good Wife” in Proverbs 31:10-31. Read it thoughtfully. What are the characteristics of a good wife? What surprises you? What speaks to you most?

Remember Proverbs was specifically written to men. Thus this focus on a good **wife** makes perfect sense. However, while this is specifically written about wives, its principles could be applied to men, too. It could very easily be reworded as a “Hymn to a Good Husband” or simply a “Hymn to a Godly Person.”

If you were to apply the principles to your life, how well would they fit?

Are there some qualities of a godly person that you can apply to your life from this passage?

*God, make me pray for life: O, braver than this.
Let me straighten after pain, as a tree straightens after the rain, shining and lovely again.
God, make me pray for life; much braver than this.
As the blown grass lifts, let me rise from sorrow with quiet eyes, knowing your way is wise.
God, make me brave; life brings such blinding things.
Help me to keep my sight.
Help me to see the fact that out of darkness comes light.
Amen*

Unknown

Wednesday, September 1: Proverbs on Spouses

Remember Proverbs was written/edited by Solomon – a man. The other wise sages quoted in Proverbs are all men. At that time, the educated, wise-folk of the community were mostly men. The people they were grooming for leadership were men. That was the cultural norm of their time; it was a patriarchal community (though more equitable than some). Therefore, Proverbs is written from a masculine point-of-view.

However, most of the advice to ancient Jewish men can apply to either men or women in contemporary culture. Therefore, if we read advice to “husbands” or “men” in Proverbs, it should apply to both men and women in our culture. And if we read advice to “women” or “wives” in Proverbs, it should apply to both women and men in our culture. Much of it can also be applied to singles today – men or women. So, as you read the following proverbs – thinking about what each means, how it applies to your life, and how you can live it out today – change the gender-specific words to apply to your life and situation:

- *"A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones."* (12:4)
- *"Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD."* (19:14)
- *"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."* (21:9, 25:24)
- *"Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife."* (21:19)
- *"A quarrelsome wife is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."* (27:15-16) (Let's change the gender reference, guys: *"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome husband;"* *"Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging husband;"* *"A quarrelsome husband is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm; restraining him is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."* Does that describe you?)

Of course, these verses refer specifically to married folks. Singles ... before you think you're off the hook, think about the qualities of godly people that each proverb (above) is referring to? Do these qualities describe you (noble character, prudence, non-quarrelsome, non-nagging, etc)?

What are the qualities of a godly person that Solomon is encouraging us to put into practice? Do they describe me? How can I continue to grow in these qualities of character?

*Lord Christ, call us, along the way of your cross.
Draw us nearer to the foot of your cross.
Help us know the love of your cross.
Cleanse us with the pardon of your cross.
Instruct us in the school of your cross.
Help us walk in the way of your cross.
Bring us to the victory of your cross.
Seal us in your kingdom, in the Name of Jesus,
Amen.*

Eric Milner-White (1884-1963)

Thursday, September 2: Proverbs 5

C.S. Lewis says, "A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it really is. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would be like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in."

At the very beginning of the Book of Proverbs, Solomon spends a whole chapter talking about sexual morality and marital fidelity. Proverbs 5 is one extended wisdom poem on the sanctity of marriage, marital faithfulness, and sexual purity.

Note:

- Sexual temptation was just as real thousands of years ago as it is now.
- Sexual purity was just as much a challenge then as now.
- Sexual purity and marital faithfulness was just as important then as now.
- The consequences of sexual promiscuity or marital infidelity were serious then – and now.

These days men may not be as tempted by prostitutes as back then (prostitution was part of several major pagan religions back in that day), but men are tempted by internet pornography, explicit films, etc. These temptations are damaging to our minds and to our relationships. They reduce women to physical bodies ... with no emotions, personalities, spirituality, or abilities beyond their sexual identities. We may – unknowingly – begin to compare our spouse to the supermodels that saturate the media.

While men are often tempted by pornography, some have suggested that some women may be tempted by romance. In the *Alpha Marriage Course*, Nicky and Sila Lee suggest the "fantasy" world of romantic novels/movies as a rough equivalent for some women to the lure of pornography for some men. Idealized romantic stories can make women dissatisfied with their relationships – their real men just can't compare with the romantic superheroes in the stories. Do you agree? Why? Why not?

Our challenge is to keep our minds pure. That takes self-discipline. It may take accountability to one another, too. When we ask a trusted friend to keep us accountable, we are more likely to resist temptation.

Be honest with the Lord in your prayers, today. What are your struggles with sexual purity. Ask for His help and encouragement to be pure in your relationships, thoughts, and lifestyle.

*Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry,
too real to hide, and too deep to undo.
Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what our hearts can no longer bear.
Set us free from a past that we cannot change.
Open to us a future in which we can be changed.
Grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image,
through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.
Amen.*

PCUSA Book of Common Worship

Friday, September 3: Proverbs 6:20-35

Men (and women – it takes two to tango) in Solomon's time really seemed to struggle with sexual lust and marital infidelity.

Temptation still happens. Honestly recognizing that temptation is real, what matters is how I choose to handle it. James writes, *"God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, 'God is tempting me.' God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death."* (1:12-15)

Regarding sexual purity, Solomon is brutally blunt: *"Adultery is a brainless act, soul-destroying, self-destructive; Expect a bloody nose, a black eye, and a reputation ruined for good"* (6:32-33 *The Message*). If Solomon has credibility in writing about any subject, marriage relationships might be one of them.

Elsewhere in Proverbs, Solomon writes:

- *"My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways, for an adulterous woman is a deep pit and a wayward wife is a narrow well. Like a bandit she lies in wait, and multiplies the unfaithful among men."* (23:26-28)
- *"This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.'"* (30:20) (Again, these proverbs apply to women and men equally; we can change the referents. There is no double standard here).

The message of Proverbs – as elsewhere in the Bible – is that God created us sexual beings. That is a good thing. But our sexuality is to be expressed in a loving, committed marriage relationship.

This is hard for singles. Paul, in his writings, is brutally honest about that (Paul, we think, was single; Jesus certainly was – as single men, they faced the same temptations we all do). But sexual purity is still God's will. It is even a challenge for some married people (one well-known British theologian once commented, *"I am a non-practicing adulterer ..."* referring to his own personal struggle with lust). But like other tough commands from God, just because they are difficult doesn't give us an excuse to compromise our integrity.

Sexual purity is important to God. Our bodies are His temples. If sexual purity is a struggle for you, take the risk of talking to a *good, trusted, godly* friend. Hold one another accountable. Encourage one another. Don't give in to the temptations from our culture. At the end of the day, they only lead to regret.

*Heavenly Father, I pray for purity in my heart today and everyday.
Purify my thoughts, actions, and motives Lord.
Put to death the misdeeds of my flesh.
Bring to mind those things that are not pleasing in your sight.
Help me to repent.
Lord, cleanse me today.
Holy Spirit renew a right spirit in me.
Take away my heart of stone and give me Your heart.
I take captive my thoughts, and I make them obedient to You, Christ Jesus.
Lead me in the ways that I should go.
I pray that the inner recesses of my mind, body and soul are purged and pleasing to you.
Lead me in a life of holiness, purity, and love.
When you guide me in all things, my heart and spirit are filled with Your joy.
Thank you, Jesus.
Amen.*

J. Reese

Saturday, September 4: Proverbs 1:1-7

Today and tomorrow, we are going to conclude our study of Proverbs by reminding ourselves of some of the key points in the book.

Reread Proverbs 1:1-7. What is Proverbs all about? Where do understanding/knowledge/wisdom come from?

Consider these proverbs from throughout the book. They illustrate some of the key themes we have thought about over the past three months. What resonates with you?

- *"Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* (9:9-10)
- *"The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin."* (10:8)
- *"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."* (13:20)
- *"The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps."* (14:15)
- *"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans."* (16:3)
- *"The wise fear the LORD and shun evil, but a fool is hotheaded and yet feels secure."* (14:16)

What has been the most important lesson you have learned from Proverbs? If you have kept a journal, look back on what you have noted. If not, still think back: how has God worked in your life through Proverbs?

What do you still need to work on? How can you continue to grow and mature in your walk with God, today?

*God, you know our hearts.
You see our temptations and struggles.
Have pity on us and deliver us from the sins which make war upon our souls.
You are all-powerful, and we are weak and erring.
Faithful God, our trust is in you.
Deliver us from the bondage of evil.
Grant that we, from now on, may be your devoted servants.
Protect us from evil.
May we faithfully follow in your way.
May we serve you in the freedom of holy love,
for Jesus Christ's sake.
Amen.*

Eugène Bersier (1830-1903)

Sunday, September 5: Proverbs 3:1-26

- Do I really believe in God?
- Do I really believe God is good?
- Do I really believe God can and will do things in our world?
- Do I really believe God can and will do things in my life?
- Will I live what I believe?
- Will I act on my faith?

Those are questions that run in the background of story after story throughout the Bible – think of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Daniel, Peter, Stephen, James, Paul, John ...

Those are questions that run in the background of some of the great biographies through the ages – think of the early martyrs (google Polycarp and Justin Martyr, for instance), the early missionaries (Francis Xavier, Jean de Brebeuf, William Carey), and more recent models of faith including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.S. Lewis, Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Francis Collins, and so many more ... Think about some of the men and women of God you have known in your life – people who really knew/know God ...

As you read through Proverbs 3, reflect on how these verses describe a person who really does know God.

We all struggle to live out these verses. Welcome to being human. But they are an inspiration to us to keep on trying to live our faith with integrity, wisdom, and hope.

When we do fall or fail ...? The good news is that Jesus freely forgives us. He gives the opportunity to start over – again, and again, and again, and again ... Don't give up. Keep inspired. Keep trying.

Here is Proverbs 3:5-6 in two other translations:

"Don't lose your grip on Love and Loyalty. Tie them around your neck; carve their initials on your heart. Earn a reputation for living well in God's eyes and the eyes of the people. Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track." (The Message translation)

"Let not mercy and kindness [shutting out all hatred and selfishness] and truth [shutting out all deliberate hypocrisy or falsehood] forsake you; bind them about your neck, write them upon the tablet of your heart. So shall you find favour, good understanding, and high esteem in the sight [or judgment] of God and man. Lean on, trust in, and be confident in the Lord with all your heart and mind and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways know, recognize, and acknowledge Him, and He will direct and make straight and plain your paths." (Amplified Bible)

Through His power, God helps us to take little steps forward (even if we do occasionally slip half a step back). Keep on walking the walk ...

*Let us go forth
in the goodness of our merciful Father,
in the gentleness of our brother Jesus,
in the radiance of his Holy Spirit,
in the faith of the apostles,
in the joyful praise of the angels,
in the holiness of the saints,
in the courage of the martyrs,*

*Let us go forth
in the wisdom of our all-seeing Father,
in the patience of our all-loving Brother,
in the learning of the apostles,
in the gracious guidance of the angels,
in the patience of the saints,
in the self-control of the martyrs.*

*Such is the path for all servants of Christ,
the path from death to eternal life.
Amen.*

Celtic Prayer