Proverbs

The People You Meet Along the Way

Josh and Jen Combs



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First Edition, May 2022

Published by:
The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd.
Holly, MI 48442

Scriptures are taken from the Bible,
English Standard Version (ESV)



THE RIVER CHURCH

Printed in the United States of America

To Claire-Anne, Belle-Anne,

Maverick Tedder,

Ruby-Sue, and Mavis Merrill…

Get Wisdom.





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Preface

In the book of Proverbs, the reader is invited to observe and overhear a private conversation. It's a special time of instruction between Solomon and his son or another wise man and his son or student. When my wife Jen and I agreed to take on this project - actually when Jen agreed with my crazy idea of taking on this book - we quickly had a pretty clear vision for what we wanted to say and who we wanted to say it to. From beginning to end, we really had our five children in mind. For us, we have entered a really strange, wonderful, and terrifying season of life. We have three teenagers; our youngest two daughters aren't toddlers anymore and are racing through their elementary school years. They are careening their way towards adolescence. As of this writing, our oldest is a high school senior and her sister is only a year behind her. The two of them have started taking college classes at a local community college. It's been a joy to see them venture outside of the Christian bubble that they've spent the vast majority of their life in. Set before each of them, and us, is the way of the fool or the way of the wise. The language of Proverbs has become common in our home. We quote Proverbs 1:20 often. When someone is clearly headed in a foolish direction one of us, usually my wife, putting on her best preacher voice, will proclaim, "Wisdom cries…in the street!" A slight paraphrase of Proverbs 1:20, but the point is still clear. Wisdom gained from experience helps to give caution, warnings, and help.



In Proverbs, God is welcoming us to a free, all-you-can-eat buffet of wisdom. The Lord is of course the source, but the sages (wise teachers), Solomon included, impart to the reader a path to peace, joy, and tranquility. Years ago, I heard a quote by Oscar Wilde that has really rattled my soul. "With age comes wisdom, but sometimes age comes alone." Jen and I genuinely want to invite you on this journey with us as we follow the beckoning and welcoming voice of Wisdom.

I will write most chapters as a study of a particular character in Proverbs, while Jen, as a loving mother, and I suppose Lady Wisdom, will end those chapters with a letter to our kids. Sometimes we will trade jobs and she will write the chapter and I will write the letter.

As you read this book, you'll notice that Jen and I have extremely different writing styles. My wife is able to write in the exact same way that she speaks. She's down to earth, loves hanging out in the barn (it's her barn), as well as tackling and learning a new homesteading project. She's a doer and kinetic learner. For me, on the other hand, I still write like I'm trying to use big words to impress a teacher or professor. Sometimes I'll be myself and then other times I will try to impress you with a lengthy quote I found in some old book. I'm trying to prove that I've done the research. I'll chase pointless rabbit trails and write lengthy introductions. I'll unncessarily use obscure or big vocabulary words. Just laugh at me and keep reading. I want to be a good writer, but I think I'm still just a speaker who writes, not a writer who speaks.[1]

To help you understand the layout of the book ahead, the first person/character in the book is the Lord, while the rest are fictional archetypes. With this in mind, you'll probably notice a more formal style to chapter one, two and three. This is because the Lord is the only real "person" in the book. The rest are fictional characters, so they provided a bit more creative license.

As I've studied the book of Proverbs, I have relied heavily on the teaching of Paul Koptak, Derek Kidner, Bruce Waltke, and Ray Ortlund. These men are professors and pastors who have written commentaries, lectured, and preached on Proverbs. Their wisdom and instruction has been incredibly helpful and insightful. I have thoroughly enjoyed their teaching.

You'll also notice in the introduction multiple references to *"Pilgrim's Progress"* by John Bunyan. If you haven't read this book or if you aren't familiar with it, don't worry. It isn't a prerequisite.

Jennifer and I sincerely hope and have been praying that God will use this book greatly in your life. We pray that this journey through Proverbs will deepen or even ignite a friendship with Jesus and the wisdom that He is and that He gives.

Josh and Jen





Introduction

In the summer of 2018, Jen, our five kids, and I loaded into our blue Dodge Caravan for an epic 40-day road trip out west. In the Bible, 40 is often associated with testing. In the Genesis account of the flood, the Bible says it rained 40 days and nights. After fleeing Egypt, Moses spent 40 years in obscurity as a shepherd. The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus spent 40 days fasting after His baptism in Matthew chapter 3. So we probably should have come home on day 39 just to avoid adding any further tests to a 40-day family road trip. Thankfully, we had an incredible time. Truly the greatest trip of my life! We swam, hiked, climbed, camped, rafted, fished, drove another few hundred miles, visited museums, national landmarks, ate at local hole-in-the-wall restaurants, and then drove a bunch more. We saw elk, bison, moose, deer, herds of sheep, bighorn sheep, countless bald eagles, and bears. In the middle of the night, one bear decided to put his nose up to an open window screen and take a sniff of my oldest daughter's feet. That was a strange wake-up on Father's Day.



The trip was epic. From Michigan, we drove through Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and eventually through the Upper Peninsula across the Mighty Mac and south to home. We drove thousands of miles. I did some quick math; we drove 1,678 miles to our first official stop. We drove another 1,000 plus miles to different sites. Then from Laramie, Wyoming, we took the long way home and logged more than 1,500 miles. Even writing about that trip, I would get in the car right now and do it all over again. Memories were made that will last for a lifetime. Pictures, sadly, just can't do it justice. We slept in double-stack bunks in our 12-foot by 20-foot tent, had military-grade blankets that got us through the 30-degree nights in West Yellowstone, packed and unpacked so many times we were able to set up our whole site in 15 minutes during a hail storm in Wyoming. The strangest events of the trip were the two snowball

fights we had, in June and July, one on a mountain in Colorado and another in Jackson Hole. We named the trip “Operation Jocularity.” Oh, and did I mention WE DROVE!

I recently saw the painting *“Going and Coming”* by Norman Rockwell. It’s a fabulous visual of the classic family trip. The top half of the painting shows a family excited and energized as they depart for their family trip. The bottom half of the painting is the same family returning. They all look exhausted and stressed, even the family dog. The dad who is driving looks super eager to get home and out of the car. I can understand that feeling.

Throughout our trip we saw, met, and observed a lot of people. I mean we saw a lot of interesting and diverse people. When you go to four rodeos in three states, you’re bound to see some fascinating folks. At the time, I didn’t realize that Yellowstone was an international tourist destination. People from all around the world, various nationalities, races, and religions all packed together trying to get a good picture of them and their family on Artist Point. If you don’t know what that is, *Google* it. It’s beautiful. One evening while we were sitting around the campfire in Lava Hot Springs, Idaho, we noticed a family of four pull in, in what was clearly a rented RV. By this point, we felt like seasoned campers. I mean, we did have three weeks under our belt. As the family exited the Cruise America camper, I noticed they had two younger kids. I told one of my kids to offer them a s’more. Who doesn’t love a s’more? Well, I didn’t realize it, but they were from Europe and had zero idea of what a ‘s’more was. That, folks, may singularly be the downfall of Europe. I felt like we were living in the movie *“The Sandlot.”* They wouldn’t have gotten the reference, but I wanted to yell, “You’re killing me Smalls!” I didn’t.

We met a ton of people. Honestly, some folks that were great to talk to, camp next to, and raft with, while others made us sad,

annoyed, frustrated, or even mad. For others, their family situation or dynamics were clearly challenging. That road trip taught me so much about life. In the words of Tom Cochrane, *"Life is a Highway."* Or the way I would say it, life is a road trip. You are going to meet a lot of people, face a lot of different circumstances, some challenging and sorrowful, and others that'll be joyous and exhilarating. You'll experience valleys and mountain tops and treacherous bridges. Life is truly full of surprises as we progress through this "road trip." The Christian life, specifically, has been compared to a long journey, most notably in the book *"Pilgrim's Progress."*



Outside of the Bible, it is the most popular and widely distributed Christian book of all time. It was written by a tinker turned preacher, named John Bunyan. His allegory of the Christian life is a story of a fictional (but oh so real) man named Christian who must make his way from his doomed city, appropriately named "The City of Destruction" to "The Celestial City." Along his way, he meets a variety of people, faces difficult obstacles, and is nearly overcome by his own doubts and fears. He is joined by friend and foe. It's the story of sin, salvation, and the journey to Heaven.

As I've approached the book of Proverbs, I cannot help but see the parallels. Like my family's road trip and Bunyan's classic tale, we are all on a journey. The Bible provides Proverbs as the map, or more appropriately, the itinerary for a good trip. The sages of Proverbs tell us where to stay on our "road trip" and places to avoid. Every generation of actual travelers has had their maps. When I was young, we would get a Trip-Tik from AAA. When Jen and I moved to Texas two weeks into our marriage, we printed MapQuest directions and headed out. Now we have GPS, Yelp, and internet reviews right on our phones, tablets or dashboards. Proverbs is the guide through this world. It is the Heavenly Father's world and Proverbs is complete with maps, itineraries, reviews, do's and don'ts, detours, places to

avoid, and great places to find a peaceful night's rest. We could name this trip "Pilgrim's Progress through Proverbs." (Keep count of alliterations…there'll be a bunch of them before we are done.) Proverbs is a guide to having a safe and prosperous journey. It is the Wise Travelers Guide.

In *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* Bunyan creates a variety of different characters meant to illustrate spiritual truths. One that particularly sticks out to me and I think is pertinent to Proverbs is a character named "Mr. Worldly Wiseman." Rather than encouraging Christian, the main character, to stay on the road that he had originally set out on, this "Wiseman" offers another path. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." In the allegory, Christian is led away from the gospel path to a dead end. What appeared to be wisdom was actually foolishness. Like Christian's epic adventure, in *"Proverbs: The people you meet along the way"*, we too are going to run into some different characters, including some that will encourage us to stay on the straight and narrow and others who will offer a "better" way. We will encounter a Father and Mother, and see ourselves as the Simple. We will hear the invitation of Lady Wisdom and battle the allurement of the party-girl Ms. Folly. Along the road, Forbidden Woman will sing her sweet, seductive, siren song. We will watch in horror as a young man races into her bedroom only to find it is Hell. The Sluggard, Thieves, Liars, Critics, and Know-it-alls will all cross our path. We will try to steer clear of the Angry Man and his cousin the Drunkard. Humility will bless us with his presence, while friends and neighbors will make the journey less lonely. And all this time we will be trying to avoid marrying a crazy person, while searching for the prize of a Proverbs 31 Woman or godly man. As we study these characters in Proverbs, we may even see faces of particular people we know or we may see ourselves, both the good and the bad. We will see if we join the ranks of the wise or "the chain of fools."[2]

Within the Bible, Proverbs is categorized as Wisdom Literature. The books of wisdom include Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, King Solomon is the speaker. Although he is not the singular author of these books, he is the unifying voice. Solomon was the wisest man to ever live. In 1 Kings chapter 3, Solomon has risen to the throne and rules the powerful kingdom of Israel. In a dream, the Lord appears to the newly crowned King and simply says, "Ask what I shall give you" (verse 5). Solomon asks the Lord for "an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" (verse 9). In response the Lord says:



> "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." (1 Kings 3:11-15)

> "Long life is in [wisdom's] right hand; in [wisdom's] left hand are riches and honor." (Proverbs 3:16)

At the very outset of Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes, "The Words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). Solomon is the preacher, the "proclaimer,"[3] the "speaker,"[4] and the "spokesman"[5] of and for wisdom. Eugene Peterson describes Solomon's role in Ecclesiastes as "the Quester."[6] The wise King Solomon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, leads our journey, our quest for the treasure of wisdom.

Like Ecclesiastes, Proverbs begins in a similar way:

> "The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth – Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:1-7)

Solomon tells us that there is something for everyone! The wise who need help can find it here. The simple, confused, or overwhelmed can find their answers here. The understanding can get guidance and the wise can continue to grow in wisdom (See Luke 2:52).

Sadly, Solomon strayed from the Lord and the path of wisdom. We do not know if, like Christian, he found his way back. One author wrote of Solomon, "…a life beginning magnificently ended miserably. The man who penned and preached a thousand wise things failed to practice the wisdom he taught."[7] "When Solomon was old," the Scripture says, "his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God" (1 Kings 11:4). For all of his wisdom and power, the wisest man ever to live seems to have ended life as an old fool. He knew what to do but didn't do it. Solomon's life is a tragedy. The Bible challenges us to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving" ourselves (James 1:22). We can possess all the knowledge in the world, but that isn't wisdom. Author Derek Kidner writes "Many are the reminders, however, that even the best training cannot instill wisdom, but only encourage the choice to seek it."[8] Wisdom can simply be described as knowing

what to do with knowledge and then doing it. Will you choose the path of the fool, which is labeled “Wisdom of this world” and will happily provide you with astounding confirmation bias or will you choose true wisdom?

Every quest, every trip, has a beginning. The start of our journey is with the Lord. Bypassing the Lord simply turns Proverbs into surface-level morality…a sort of Christian fortune cookie, just without the lucky lottery numbers or cookie. All joking aside, without first coming to the Lord, the path of Proverbs won’t make any sense. It will be experientially true because everyone, at least for a moment, regrets the pain of their foolishness and admires the wise. However, there is no escaping the fool’s trail without beginning with the ultimate source of wisdom. Proverbs is clear “…the Lord is the beginning” (1:7). On this pilgrimage, this journey, this road trip, let’s begin *our* progress with the Lord. After all, He’s the one who gave us life in the first place.





1.

The Lord
Part I

What is taught about the Lord in Proverbs, this book of wisdom, is predicated upon an understanding that the reader will be familiar with where Proverbs rests within the Biblical narrative. Proverbs assumes an awareness of certain Biblical events, such as: the creation story (Genesis 1-2), mankind's fall into sin (Genesis 3), God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12), the Exodus, the Law given to Moses, David, the history of Israel, and the prophets. That's why to begin a road trip through Proverbs, we actually have to go back and "pack some bags," so to speak.

Whether someone knows the story of God's revelation in the Bible or not, in a real practical way, Proverbs speaks to all of humanity, who understand desire, failure, brokenness, power, poverty, wealth, marriage, betrayal, family, friendship, and the broad range of issues within the human condition.



As the story of the Scripture begins in Genesis and God reveals Himself, the plotline of the Bible seems to take a strange turn from the Promised Land to Egypt. In the book of Exodus, Egyptian society was the most sophisticated and powerful on the planet. They were great students of science, history, art, architecture, and *proverbs.* There are actually many parallels with the biblical book of Proverbs and the Egyptian book, *"Instruction of Amenemope."*[9] For all the education and wisdom in Egypt, the foolishness of polytheism ran rampant. Among their gods and goddesses, worship in Egypt even included the Pharaoh himself. He was viewed as being one of the gods. So when Moses returned from exile to address the most powerful man on the planet, and began with the prophetic introduction, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go!'" (Exodus 5:1), those words fell on deaf ears and a hard heart. For a man who viewed himself as God, Pharaoh's response made sense. "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). Pharoah's words

drip with arrogance and insult. What this great King of Egypt didn't realize was that he had officially set himself and his people on a collision course with Jehovah - the Creator, Sustainer, and real God of the universe. The very breath in Pharoah's lungs, which was a gift from God, had been used to disrespect God, God's messenger Moses, and God's enslaved people Israel. The fate of Pharaoh and all of Egypt seemed to be sealed.

The King of Egypt would learn the answer to his defiant questions. Ten devastating plagues would cripple his nation, destroy the pantheon of Egyptian deities, and eventually claim the life of his oldest son and heir to the throne. He would see God's power on grand display and yet continue to rebel, refusing to bow, refusing to obey. He would not fear the Lord. After the seventh plague of hail had rained down fire and destruction from Heaven, killing slaves, livestock, and every crop in the fields, Pharaoh confessed his sin. What seems to resemble repentance, wasn't genuine. He was only sorry for the consequences of sin. As the Apostle Paul would describe it, this was worldly sorrow, not Godly grief (2 Corinthians 7:10). Moses tells Pharaoh, "as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God" (Exodus 9:30). Everyone in Egypt who "feared the word of the Lord" (Exodus 9:20) found shelter inside for themselves, their slaves, and their animals. Pharaoh hated the fall out of his sin, but he didn't fear God. He would not bow before the true ruler of the universe.

Prior to the Exodus account, in Genesis, the phrase "fear of God" seems to be an abbreviated way of communicating belief in God (Jehovah/Yahweh), a commitment to His righteous standards, and rejection of underhanded, evil practices (Genesis 20:11; 42:18). Even following the Exodus, as Moses' father-in-law counsels his weary son-in-law to delegate some leadership responsibility, he advises him to find "men who fear God" (Exodus 18:21).

But events at the base of Mount Sinai would forever give new and deeper meaning to the phrase "the fear of the Lord." For the most part, Israel had been exempt from the plagues of Egypt. God was without question with Moses. They had witnessed the parting of the Red Sea and Yahweh's (Hebrew name for God) provision of water and food in the desert. However, when they reached the base of Mount Sinai, God was going to "introduce" Himself.

After days of purifying themselves, the Scripture records:

> "On the morning of the third day there were *thunders* and *lightnings* and a *thick cloud* on the mountain *a very loud trumpet blast,* so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was *wrapped in smoke* because the Lord had descended on it in *fire.* The *smoke of it went up* like the smoke of a kiln, and *the whole mountain trembled greatly.* And as *the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder,* Moses spoke, and God answered him in *thunder.* The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain." (Italics added) (Exodus 19:16-20)



This is absolutely terrifying. The only image I can put together in my head is when I was a child and saw *"The Wizard of Oz."* As each of Dorothy's friends stood before the Wizard, I remember the feeling of fear in my own heart ratcheting up. The Lion finally running away and jumping through the glass window to escape from the object of his fear seems to sum up, I'm certain, how the Israelites must have felt. Yet at Mt. Sinai, this wasn't smoke, mirrors, and a showman behind a curtain. This was the sovereign God of the universe descending before their eyes onto a mountain. Smoke, fire, mountain quaking, deafening trumpet-like sound, thunder…what they heard and saw



was absolutely terrifying. Their response is nothing short of WE ARE ALL GOING TO DIE! (Paraphrase of Exodus 20:19.)

In the narrative of Exodus, Moses returns with the Ten Commandments and tells the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin” (Exodus 20:20). God told the people not to be afraid of their enemies or the surrounding pagan nations (Exodus 15:16), but to fear Him! Practically, if they feared those nations around them, they would compromise and begin worshipping their false deities. If they feared the Lord, who was clearly worth fearing, they would be kept from sin and obey His commandments.

When God gave the Law which, in a sense, put pen to paper on what sin was, the fear of the Lord would be foundational in Exodus. In Leviticus, fearing the Lord who had made that mountain shake, would mean caring for those who were physically disabled (Leviticus 19:14), honoring the elderly (Leviticus 19:32), being fair in business (Leviticus 25:17), freely welcoming into your home someone who has met financial struggles (Leviticus 25:36), and respecting a fellow community member working off a debt (Leviticus 25:43). Those were crucial parts of a well-functioning society that was rooted in a basic “fear of the Lord.”

In both Moses’ and Joshua’s departing words, these great leaders of Israel commanded the people to “fear the Lord.” Doing so was synonymous with obeying His law and loving Him. Professor Bruce Waltke writes, “The unified psychological poles of fear and love come prominently to the fore in the surprisingly uniform way Deuteronomy treats ‘love for the Lord’ and ‘fear of the Lord’ as synonyms.”[10] Moses made fearing the Lord a matter of the heart. He asks a question and then provides the answer.



> "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord which I am commanding you today for your good...You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by His name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen." (Deuteronomy 10:12-13; 20-21)



Throughout Deuteronomy, the words "hear" and "fear" keep coming up. Hear the departing leader's words and fear the consequences of ignoring them. Hear the Lord and fear the Lord. Not only is "the fear of the Lord" a major theme in Moses's last will and testament but hearing the Lord and fearing the Lord is part of Joshua, Samuel, and David's final recorded words (Joshua 24:14; 1 Samuel 12:14, 24; 2 Samuel 23:3).

Without question, "the fear of the Lord" is a major theme throughout the Old Testament. However, far from being just a repeated theme, the "fear of the Lord" is the central theme in the book of Proverbs. In the prologue of Proverbs (1:1-7), Solomon writes, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Over twenty times the writers of Proverbs will define the fear of the Lord and encourage the listeners and readers to not simply just understand what this concept means, but to actually FEAR THE LORD.

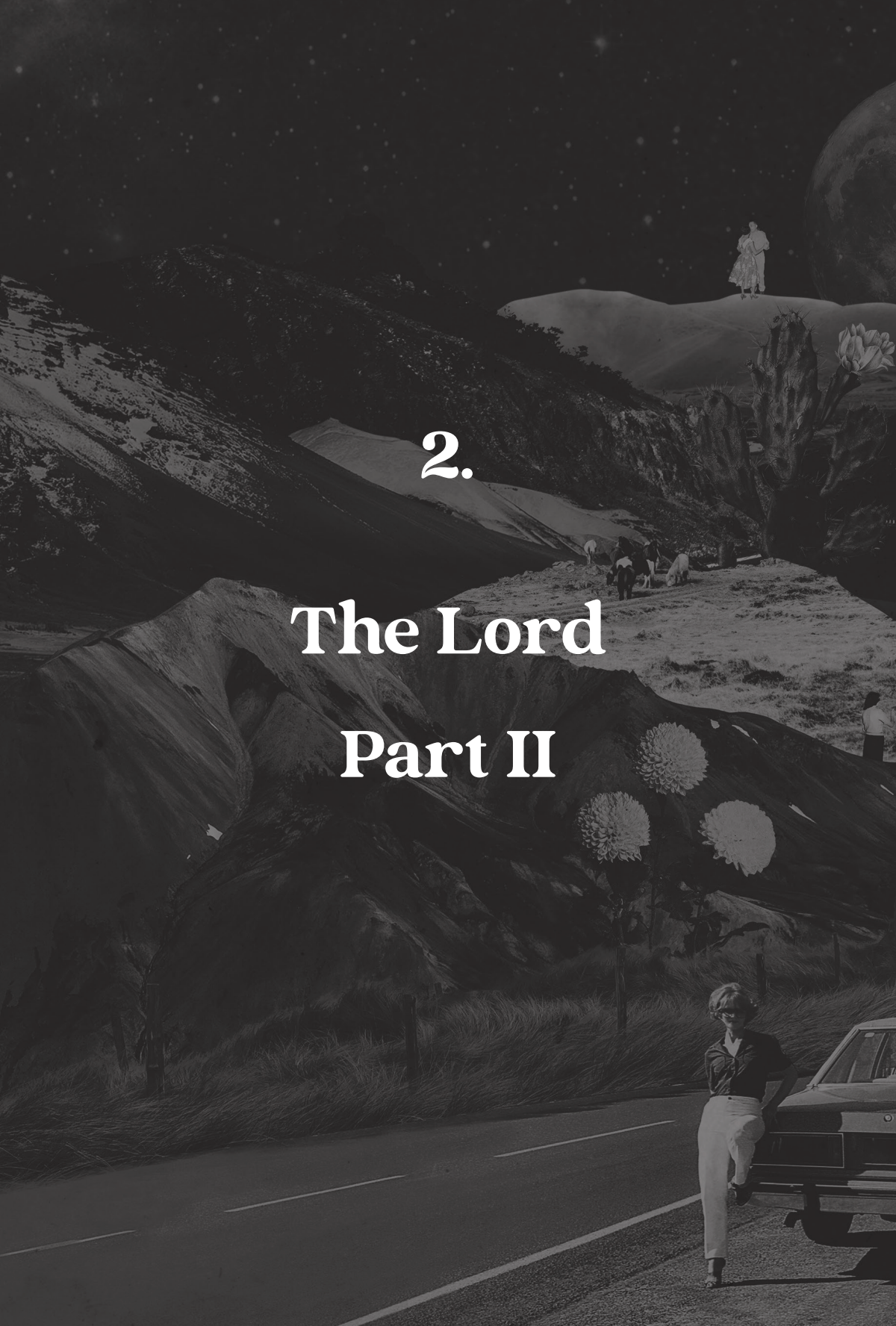
The fear of the Lord and more generally, the Lord, becomes the unifying force in the book. "Proverbs remains the model of curriculum for humanity to learn how to live under God and before humankind."[11] Jehovah (another Hebrew name for God), the Lord, is the divine key to unlocking and deciphering that "curriculum." The Lord is the

centerpiece, the object, if you will, that all our attention is to be drawn to.

In the literal center of Proverbs, as Professor Paul Koptak points out, is "[t]he greatest concentration of…" what he calls "…Yahweh Proverbs…"[12] The middle of a book seems like an odd place to start, but we find there a concise and powerful summary of all that has been stated about the character of the Lord in the previous chapters (1-15) and all that will be stated in the remaining chapters in the book (17-31).[13] Without wading into numerology and all the nonsense related to that, we find Jehovah at the center of Proverbs. He is the center, source, beginning, and end of wisdom.

This leads to two major questions that we need to answer on our way to wisdom. The first question is, who is the Lord? And second, why is He to be feared? Ironically, Pharaoh asked the questions first, but he didn't like the answers. We could, of course, examine the whole of Scripture for the answers to our questions, but I want to keep our focus on Proverbs as we build towards a fuller and more wondrous understanding of this incredible book and the God who gave it to us. With our bags packed and that destination in mind, let's begin down the road searching for these answers. The amazing reality is that the Lord is the beginning and end of the journey and our travel companion along the way.





2.

The Lord
Part II

Who is the Lord declared to be in Proverbs?

Begin by reading Proverbs 16:1-7.

THE LORD IS SOVEREIGN

> **"The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." (Proverbs 16:1)**[14]

In his commentary on Proverbs chapter 16, Matthew Henry points to the incredible illustration of the prophet-for-hire Balaam. He writes, "God easily can, and often does, cross men's purposes, and break their measures. It was a curse that was prepared in Balaam's heart, but the answer of the tongue was a blessing."[15] Balaam set out to curse God's people, but a blessing proceeded from his mouth. Balak, the king who had hired Balaam was astonished, certainly confused, and likely angry. "What have you done to me?" Balak asks, "I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have done nothing but bless them" (Numbers 23:11).



Down to the very words we speak, God is in complete control. It seems that this first Proverb, in a declaration of the character of God, is meant not to just demonstrate God's power of speech, but to use our words as an illustration of His divine right of control. The Scripture makes a connection between the heart and mouth.[16] Derek Kidner expanding the principle to actions, writes, "The meaning of the proverb is probably akin to that of verse 9, but with an emphasis on the fact that for all his freedom to plan, man only, in the event, advances God's designs."[17] The mystery is that we have free will to speak words, but God in His sovereignty has the "last" word.

> "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." (Proverbs 16:9)

> "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." (Proverbs 16:33)

> "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." (Proverbs 19:21)

> "No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord." (Proverbs 21:30-31)

Kidner, in *"A Subject-Study on God and Man"* writes, "It is noteworthy that Proverbs, for all its emphasis on common sense, exalts faith above capacity…and for all its advocacy of prudence it refuses prudence the last word. Planning, proper as it is – planning is subject to God's Yes or No…equipment guarantees nothing…and caution can be fatal in a way that faith cannot ('…they that trust in Yahweh shall be safe, 29:25')."[18]

> "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

> "Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord." (Proverbs 16:20)

James, the half-brother of Jesus, teaches the balance between plans and the Lord's will. He writes that we are permitted by God to make plans, but we ought to stamp each of those plans with the phrase "Lord willing" (James 4:13-17). That phrase is a submission that our hearts have made plans, but it's ultimately up to the Lord what happens. One author wrote, "Somehow human initiative and divine purposes work together in a way that does not diminish either."[19] In our family we started using this phrase, "Lord willing" as a teaching moment. It came out of frustration with the kids constantly wanting to

know plans for the day, the week, and so on. We make plans, like all families, but we try to submit those plans to the Lord and model that submission for our kids by "stamping" all plans with "Lord willing."

THE LORD IS THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

> **"All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit." (Proverbs 16:2)**

"Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies."[20] It is my go-to song lyric when I know something is unhealthy to eat or I don't want to face reality. I've become an expert at maintaining my reality distortion field. Collectively, we are all quite adept at the art of self-deception. In one of the most helpful books Jen and I have ever read entitled *"From Bondage to Bonding: Escaping Codependency, Embracing Biblical Love,"* author Nancy Groom writes, "Denial prevents repentance and resists grace."[21] Unless the Lord reveals truth to us, we will continue to live in a false reality. We will lie about our true motives. We will conceal our true feelings. We will hide our struggles with sin. We will pretend. We will play the part we are called on to play in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Jesus called this hypocrisy. We become an actor in a production. Every day becomes lights, camera, action. And all the while we can be self-deceived and our ways "are pure in [our] own eyes." I recently read and have shared the following quote, now more times than I can remember. Professor and author Chuck DeGroat writes that we have a:

> "quadruple life" …there is the public self we present to the world, the private self we share selectively with others, the blind self that is clear to others but which remains hidden to us, and the undiscovered self which, like the shadow, contains unseen and unconscious aspects of ourselves.[22]

Not only are we extremely susceptible to self-deception but we have layers of “impression management” as Groom calls it.[23] The lies we tell ourselves have been stacked up on other lies that rest on more lies that sit securely upon a foundation of lies. To steal the line from the movie *“Elf,”* “You sit on a throne of lies.” We all do. Proverbs repeatedly reveals the Lord as the all-knowing, all-seeing judge. In contrast, we are thoroughly convinced of our own brilliance. (Romans 12:16 - “Never be wise in your own sight.”)

> “For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths.” (Proverbs 5:21)

> “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.” (Proverbs 12:15)

> “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” (Proverbs 14:12)

> “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the children of man!” (Proverbs 15:11)

> “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” (Proverbs 16:25)

> “The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts.” (Proverbs 17:3)

> “The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts.” (Proverbs 20:27)

> “Every way of man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.” (Proverbs 21:2)

Twice in the book of Judges, as the people of God ride the roller coaster of rebellion, slavery, repentance, and freedom…only to repeat that cycle perpetually throughout the book, the summary of their morality was "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

There is also the danger of self-doubt. We can be clean before the Lord, right in our chief motives, and sincere in our desire to honor the Lord. Yet because of a lack of healthy self-respect and self-worth, we question, doubt, and are often frozen. It quickly becomes paralysis by self-analysis.[24]



From our perspective things seem pure or perverse, either way, we desperately need the "righteous judge" (2 Timothy 4:8) to confirm or deny that reality through the Word of God. We are in dire need of the Lord's righteous and revealing scale. The writer of Hebrews says:

> "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12-13)

We need the just scales of the Righteous Judge. We need His pure, holy, and thorough review of our heart and deepest motives. David, Solomon's father, prayed:

> "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

THE LORD IS THE RULER OF KINGS

> **"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." (Proverbs 16:3)**

There's a beautiful symmetry to Proverbs 16:1-15.[25] The first 9 verses are the "Yahweh sayings" that are followed by the "King Sayings." The "Yahweh sayings and the royal sayings overlap in what seems to be an intentional design. The only saying that does not name Yahweh in 16:1-9 is about righteousness and justice (16:8), and the only saying that does not name the king is 16:10-15 is a Yahweh saying about honest scales (16:11), a symbol of the king's righteousness (16:12) and justice (16:10)."[26] When compared, Koptak points out several parallels. "Yahweh establishes human plans (16:3, 9) even as the king's throne is established through righteousness (16:12)."[27] The Lord and His sovereign power, proceeds in the text and in practicality, the power of kings and all human rulers. Multiple times in Proverbs the issue of justice and just weights are presented.

> "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him…a false witness who breathes out lies." (Proverbs 6:16, 19)

> "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight." (Proverbs 11:1)

> "Those of a crooked heart are an abomination to the Lord." (Proverbs 11:20)

> "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight." (Proverbs 12:22)

> “A just balance and scales are the Lord’s; all the weights in the bag are his work.” (Proverbs 16:11)

> “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.” (Proverbs 17:15)

> “Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord.” (Proverbs 20:10)

> “Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord, and false scales are not good.” (Proverbs 20:23)



> “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.” (Proverbs 21:3)

> “Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely.” (Proverbs 28:5)

Kings and all rulers are established by God (Romans 13) and ultimately report to God. Through a nightmarish series of events, King Nebuchadnezzar learned that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Daniel 4:17, 32). When kings, rulers, presidents, or any government official is deceitful, bribed to show favoritism, or fails to uphold God’s standard of justice, that becomes an abomination to the Lord. Meaning, that lack of “righteousness, justice, and equity” (Proverbs 1:3) is deeply offensive to the Ruler of Kings.

> “Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice.” (Proverbs 29:26)

When a ruler fails to give justice, there is a higher court and a higher authority that he or she must answer to. Paul warns in Colossians 4:1, “Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in Heaven.” Several times in Romans chapter 13, every government official for all-time is called “God’s servant” (Romans 13:4). In the film *“Count of Monte Cristo”* starring Jim Caviziel, inscribed on the stone wall of his prison cell is the phrase, “God will give me justice.” In one scene when he is being beaten on the anniversary of his arrival, his tormentor jokes, “God is never in France this time of year.” When justice seems to have been forgotten, forfeited, or foiled (there’s a preacher’s alliteration for you), we can confidently know that the righteous Ruler of Kings will grant us justice. While we wait, we continue “entrusting ourselves to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 3:23).

THE LORD IS CREATOR

> **“The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.” (Proverbs 16:4)**

Proverbs presents the Lord as creator of everything. Yahweh creates and imparts to everything its divine purpose. Ultimately He will bring everything to an end in judgment, the wicked and the righteous. This is a declaration of the Lord as “the Alpha and the Omega…who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). Alpha and Omega meaning “the first and the last” (Revelation 1:17), the beginning and the end. As we will see in later chapters, specifically on Wisdom, the Lord is the beginning and the end, the source and the culmination of wisdom. He is the Creator of all things and all people. Proverbs makes no arguments about the creation, it simply assumes a submission to the account given in Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

Moses, the writer of Genesis, had his own thundering sermon about and from God the Creator. At the burning bush when Moses questioned his speaking abilities, God responded “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11)

> “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens.” (Proverbs 3:19)
>
> “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.” (Proverbs 8:22)
>
> “Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker.” (Proverbs 17:5)
>
> “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both.” (Proverbs 20:12)
>
> “The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all.” (Proverbs 22:2)
>
> “The poor man and the oppressor meet together; the Lord gives light to the eyes of both.” (Proverbs 29:13)
>
> “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4)



God, according to the whole of Scripture, but more specifically to Proverbs, spoke the earth and all that exists within and around it into existence, He places people and nations in their position within the socio-economic scale, and even down to the ability for individuals to hear and see, the Lord is the creator and the source.[28] Paul writes in Romans:

> "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?" (Romans 8:20-21)

We are clay. The creation account of Genesis is clear, "The Lord God formed the man from the dust from the ground" (Genesis 2:7). I love the honest humility of David in Psalm 103, where he writes that God "knows our frame; He remembers we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). God formed us and assigned us with a divine purpose. Jehovah is the beginning (Alpha) and He will ultimately bring the end (Omega). Derek Kidner states it so clearly, "there are ultimately no loose ends in God's world: everything will be put to some use and matched with its proper fate."[29]

Included within the creative and purpose assigning power of the Lord is the ultimate resolution of evil. He will bring an end to evil as the Avenger. (In this next section, I will attempt to avoid all *"Marvel"* references)

THE LORD IS THE AVENGER

> **"Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord, be assured, he will not go unpunished." (Proverbs 16:4)**

We often wonder if anyone is "keeping score?" Does someone see all of the rampant evil and injustice in the world? In verse 2 of chapter 16, God is weighing and accounting for what's happening in the heart. In verse 4, not only is the Lord the creator and assigner of the purpose of the righteous, but the wicked (vessels of dishonor in Romans 9) are included in the sovereign, inescapable purposes of the Lord.

He will as the Omega, the end, bring a final judgment, reckoning, and wrath upon the evil. "Be assured," the Scripture promises, evil will NEVER go unpunished. The language of verse 5, is "…literally 'hand to hand'…used to signify something that is guaranteed, as in a confirming handshake…"[30] Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases verse 5 as saying, "God can't stomach arrogance or pretense; believe me, He'll put those upstarts in their place."[31] We will look extensively at the evil of pride and the virtue of humility in later chapters, but one quote from C.S. Lewis sums up God's "issue" with pride. Lewis succinctly describes pride as "…the complete anti-God state of mind."[32] Those with arrogant, wicked hearts have set themselves, their endeavors, and their kingdoms against the Lord. It's like getting in a fight with a freight train. Proverbs chapter 16 and the previous chapters have cemented the truth that the Lord sees the true condition of the heart of mankind. When the heart is consumed with pride, here comes the boom. He is coming like a whirlwind to tear down the house. Among many other passages, Proverbs 10:25 states this divine law very clearly. Solomon writes, "When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever." It's difficult not to hear the words of Jesus at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. A storm (tempest) is coming, and destruction will follow.



> "Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught." (Proverbs 3:25-26)

> "The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous." (Proverbs 3:33)

> "The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry." (Proverbs 10:3)

“The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless but destruction to evildoers.” (Proverbs 10:29)

“Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished.” (Proverbs 11:21)

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” (Proverbs 15:3)

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves him who pursues righteousness.” (Proverbs 15:8-9)

“The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow’s boundaries.” (Proverbs 15:25)

“The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.” (Proverbs 15:29)

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.” (Proverbs 18:10)

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.” (Proverbs 19:17)

“Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.” (Proverbs 20:22)

“Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.” (Proverbs 22:22-23)

> "The mouth of forbidden women is a deep pit; he with whom the Lord is angry will fall into it." (Proverbs 22:14)

> "Do not say, 'I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done.'" (Proverbs 24:29)

The Lord as the Sovereign Righteous Judge who rules over the kingdoms of men has created all that we see as a testimony to His glory and splendor. Paul writes, "His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. *So they are without excuse"* (Romans 1:20, italics added). What can be known about God is clearly testified in the creation, so those who reject the Lord and refuse to fear Him will ultimately stand before the Avenger with no excuse. The Lord jealously claims, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19, Deuteronomy 32:35). In an early part of the book of Proverbs, Solomon warns those who reject the Lord and refuse to listen to Him. At the end, God "will laugh at [their] calamity" (1:26). That calamity is like a storm, a whirlwind, distress, and anguish. This is a summary of the fool (rejects God and His counsel) and the fool's end (the judgment of God). Matthew Henry wrote:



> "Let him know that though he admires himself, and others caress him, yet he is an abomination to the Lord. The great God despises him; the Holy God detests him…the power of sinners cannot secure them against God, though they strengthen themselves with both hands. Though they may strengthen one another with their confederacies and combinations, joining forces against God, they shall not escape His righteous judgment."[33]

Rest assured, evil will not go unpunished. Simply stated, God shook on it. The deal is done.

THE LORD IS SAVIOR

> **"By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil." (Proverbs 16:6)**

A mighty contrast is made, however. As powerful and frightening as the destruction of the house of the proud is, God's mighty avenging power serves both as a warning to the haughty and a promise of rescue to the weak, the vulnerable, the poor, the widow, the humble, the meek and the offspring of the righteous. "The contrast of punished pride is sin atoned for (literally, 'removed by exchange')."[34]

> "Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered." (Proverbs 11:21)

In the Gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders approach Jesus and demand a sign to confirm whether He is genuinely from God or a fraud. Jesus had, of course, given many signs, but they rejected the miracles and Jesus as Messiah. So Jesus, using and validating the story of the prophet Jonah, tells them they will be given a sign. In cryptic, poetic language, Jesus reveals that the greatest sign is still to come: His Resurrection from the dead. Jesus rebukes the religious leaders, telling them that the pagan men of "Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it" (Matthew 12:41). That city, Jesus explains, repented at the preaching of Jonah, then Jesus says, "something greater than Jonah is here" (verse 41). Then Jesus says the queen of Sheba (queen of the South) who visited Solomon will also condemn them on the day of judgment, because "something greater than Solomon [was] there…" standing in front

of them. The religious leaders claimed to be wise, but they were, in fact, fools. In their foolishness, they rejected the Messiah, the greater Jonah, and the greater Solomon who stood before them. The one who would judge the living and the dead, the very incarnate wisdom of God, the one who would atone for sins was in their midst, but they remained blind to the Savior.

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a simple, yet profoundly clear story, sometimes called a parable.

> "A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" (Matthew 21:28-31)



It is a basic story with a really easy to answer question. Clearly, the first son, who initially rebelled against his father, but later changed his tune is the one who did the will of the father. The second son, who showed great reverence in words to his father by calling him sir, actually dishonored his father. This son disobeyed and, in a sense, lied to the father and ignored the father's will. When the religious leaders respond with the correct answer, Jesus says:

> "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him." (Matthew 21:31-32)

Jesus is calling the religious leaders fools, who refused the voice of wisdom crying out in the wilderness. They refused to see, submit,

and believe. They were prideful, haughty fools. Yet those who humbly embraced the love and message of Jesus were saved.

> "Whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord…" (Proverbs 8:35) (Wisdom is personified and speaking)

> "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it." (Proverbs 10:22)

Here is the Gospel, the Good News of God's love and faithfulness in atoning for sin. It appears as foolishness to the world but is the wisdom of God. Paul writes, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:21-22). The wisdom of God is that He provided an atoning sacrifice, a payment for sin. He sent His only Son to die on Calvary's cross and pay the penalty for sinners. It is through this act and through this act alone that a person can be saved. To the prideful religious hearts of the Jewish leaders, this was too much to take. It was too much to get over. To the prideful philosophical minds of the Gentiles, it was just nonsense to think that a god would provide salvation to people and not just demand some sort of allegiance, sacrifice, and behavior in exchange for favor and possibly salvation.

Yet this is the whole message of Scripture, including Proverbs. God in His great love has provided a way of escape and is faithful to complete that work and that triumphant rescue of sinners. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). The Good News is that if we will repent of our sin and believe in the

work of Christ, we will be saved. This is the declaration in Proverbs chapter 16 of God as Savior, pointing us to Jesus' substitutionary atoning work on behalf of sinners that brings glory to the Father.

THE LORD IS PEACE

> **"When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Proverbs 16:7)**

Here we are, officially in the middle of the book of Proverbs. Here the Lord is declared as a reward of those who please Him. The prize given by the Lord is peace with even the fiercest of enemies. Now, most authors are quick to point out that following after the Lord does not eliminate all persecution, trials, and adversaries. Quite the opposite is true. Jesus' warning is abundantly clear, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). But the proverb found here, that could be paraphrased as "Peace with God, peace with others,"[35] is nonetheless true.



In Genesis chapter 26, Isaac found himself at odds with a Philistine king named Abimelech. Isaac had lied to the king about his wife Rebekah. He had told everyone that she was his sister. Isaac, like his father Abraham, had married a beautiful woman and was afraid he would be murdered by another man who desired his wife. When the King discovered the truth, Isaac's character was called into question. Isaac was told to leave the Philistine land. As Isaac departed, water rights became a source of serious contention between Isaac's people and the Philistine herdsman. While living in the lands ruled by the Philistines, Isaac had become rich and powerful, to the point where even the King acknowledged, "you are much mightier than we" (Genesis 26:16). The Philistine King, a key advisor to the King, and the commander of the Philistine army came to him to make what amounted to a peace treaty. Isaac's departure

from the Philistine town of Gerar had been less than cordial, so this proposed agreement seems to shock him. Confused, Isaac asks, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” His enemy’s response is a fulfillment of God’s covenant promise. “We see plainly,” they replied, “that the Lord has been with you” (Genesis 26:27-28). These pagan idol worshippers recognized that God was with Isaac. This man was the recipient of Jehovah’s covenant. The agreement God had made with Isaac’s father Abraham was, “I will bless those who bless you” (Genesis 12:3). Practically you can see Abimelech’s motivation. Isaac was powerful, rich, and divine power seemed to be blessing him. In all likelihood, the Philistine King wanted the overflow of blessing from this man. He knew Isaac was “blessed of the Lord” and he wanted some for himself (Genesis 26:29).

Isaac left the Philistine people, entered into a covenant with God, built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 26:23-25). The literal direction of his life pleased the Lord. And God, in response, made a pagan king chase his enemy down, not for harm, but for peace.

> “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” (Proverbs 3:17) (The “her” is wisdom personified.)

> “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him.”
> (Proverbs 24:17-18)

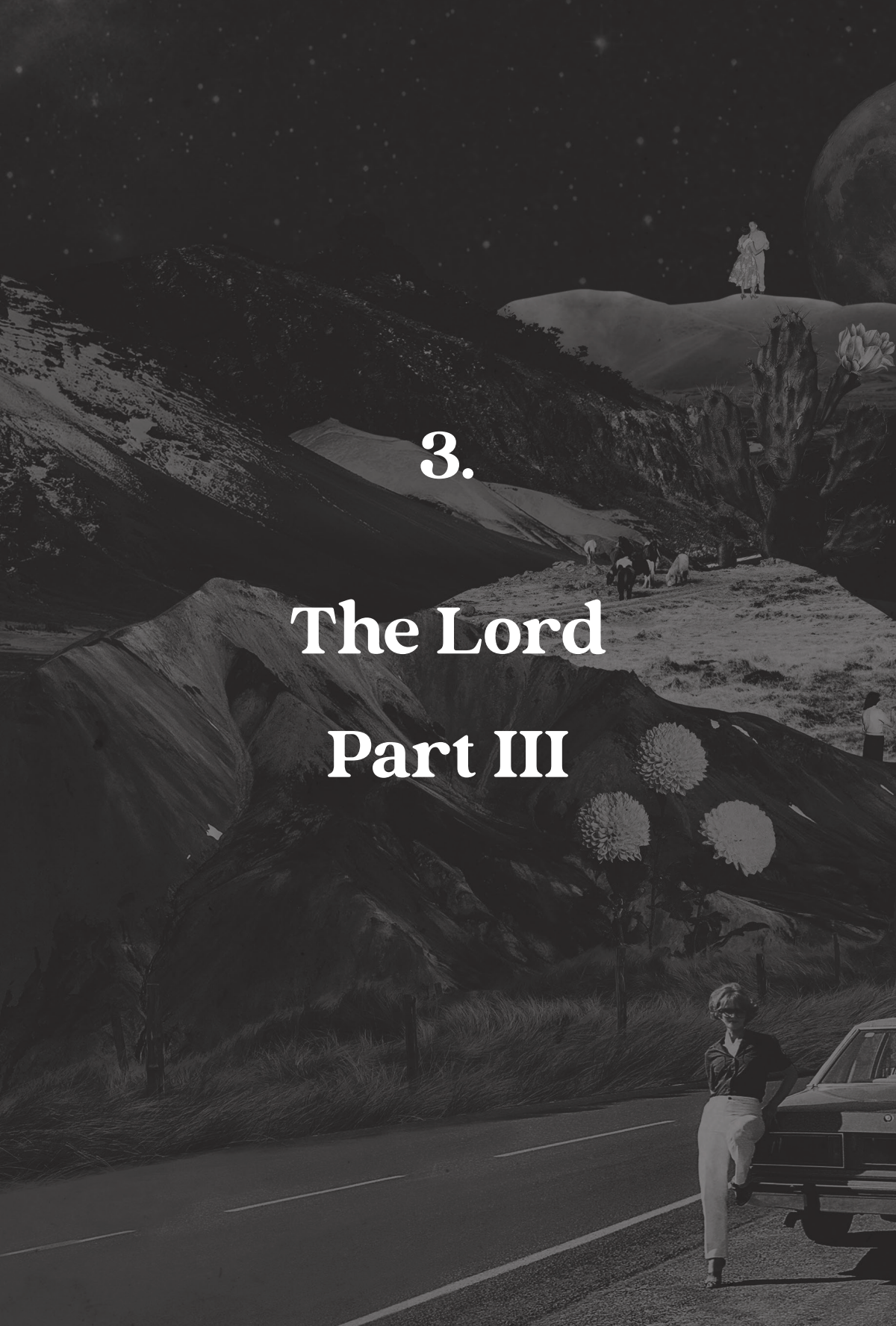
> “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.”
> (Proverbs 25:21-22)

The Scripture has much to say about peace. “We have peace with God,” Paul writes, “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Throughout Scripture, the Lord is called “the God of peace.” We have a peace with God, an internal peace (Philippians 4:7), and through divine intervention based upon His pleasure with our ways, the Lord will bring us peace even with our enemies.

In Christian’s journey in *“Pilgrim’s Progress,”* he finds refuge and rest in a “stately palace” called “Beautiful.” In Bunyan’s allegory, this place of refuge is a picture of the church. The hosts of the home, Charity, Piety, Prudence, and Discretion, Bunyan writes, “put the pilgrim in a large upper chamber, where the windows opened toward the sunrise…the name of the chamber was Peace.”[36] God through a variety of means gives His obedient servants great peace.



Proverbs, and more specifically the first seven verses of chapter 16, declare the Lord to be Sovereign, the Righteous Judge, Ruler of Kings, Creator, Avenger, Savior, and our Peace. Now that we have seen who the Lord is, let’s turn to the second question. Why is the Lord to be feared?



3.

The Lord
Part III

Why is the Lord to be feared?

The summary of God's character in Proverbs chapter 16 is preceded by the proverb "The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor" (Proverbs 15:33). The Message likens the "Fear-of-God" to "a school in skilled living."[37] We have seen the glorious character of God testified by the writers of Proverbs. And yet the very notion of fearing God has completely fallen out of favor. To the ancients, fearing God and more specifically their god, goddess, or gods, was just part of the deal. Human history is littered with accounts of human sacrifice to appease an angry deity, pleas to bring rain to end a drought, and a variety of acts designed to put the divine in a better mood. Fearing a deity was common.



However, with our more modern sensibilities, the concept of fearing God seems dated, cold, intimidating, patriarchal, and just downright wrong. We long for a god who is understandable, pliable, willing to negotiate, and even turn a blind eye to certain trespasses and sins. Actually, we don't even like the idea of sin. So we prefer a god who is whatever we so choose him or her to be in that moment. Yet "the fear of the Lord" is exactly the theme and foundational idea of Proverbs. Fearing the Lord is the "beginning." We can't even get started without this most basic understanding. What does it mean to fear the Lord? Well, in an attempt to soften this, we undermine the simple word to mean deep respect or admiration. But the word is FEAR! It's really simple and really clear. It is actual fear, terror. In each account of a person seeing or standing before God, there is no doubt as to what they are feeling.

> "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." (Exodus 3:6)

"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped." (Joshua 5:14)

"When I saw it, I fell on my face." (Ezekiel 1:28)

"So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground." (Daniel 10:8-9)

"And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" (Mark 4:41)

"And falling to the ground…" (Acts 9:4) (This was Paul's Damascus Road conversion)

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17)

In my personal favorite account, found in Isaiah chapter 6, the prophet is given a glimpse of the glorified God of the universe. His response is not initially one of encouragement or comfort, but terror. "Woe is me," Isaiah records, "For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). What has happened to "the fear of the Lord?" Even to Christians, God has become our buddy, our faithful confidant, "the man upstairs," and someone we should keep in touch with once in a while, especially in crisis. What I think has happened is we have conflated and confused the "fear not" passages of the Bible as negating, softening, and even

eliminating the whole Old Testament idea of fearing of the Lord. It's almost like we are relieved that Jesus came so we don't have to deal with that grouchy God in the Old Testament.

In the early parts of the Gospel story, angels are busy delivering news to unsuspecting recipients. Joseph is told "do not fear" to marry his betrothed, Mary. Yes, she is pregnant, but it's from the Lord. Mary is told, "Do not be afraid," because her pregnancy is a blessing from the Lord and she will carry the Messiah. When the birth takes place, a majestic host of angels are dispatched to declare the news to some unknown shepherds. The angelic messenger begins with "Fear Not" (Luke 2:10). In the Old Testament, when the Lord commissions Joshua, He says, "Do not be frightened" (Joshua 1:9). The Psalmist writes, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6, Quoted in Hebrews 13:6). The Apostle Paul is told by the Lord, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent" (Acts 18:9). Proverbs says, "The fear of man lays a snare…" (29:25). A benefit of wisdom is fearlessness in any circumstances. Solomon writes, "If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the Lord will be your confidence" (Proverbs 3:24-26).



In each of those cases, God's people are commanded not to fear angels, prophecies, circumstances, enemy armies, or the persecution of man. Even when it's the Lord telling someone not to fear, He never says, "Hey, don't fear me." It's actually the opposite. Jesus declared, "have no fear of them…do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:26, 28).

Here are a couple of working definitions of "the fear of the Lord."

> "…a worshipping submission (fear) to the God of the covenant."[38]

> "The fear of the Lord is openness to him, eagerness to please him, humility to be instructed by him (Proverbs 15:33).[39] The fear of the Lord is a willingness to turn from evil and change (Job 28:28). The fear of the Lord is surrender to his will (Genesis 22:12). The fear of the Lord is one way we love him (Deuteronomy 6:2, 5). The fear of Christ is meekly fitting in with one another (Ephesians 5:21, literally translated). The fear of the Lord is when we realize, 'I am not the measure of all things, I am being measured.' That reverence toward God, perhaps surprisingly, builds our confidence and flows out as a 'fountain of life' into everyone and everything we care about (Proverbs 14:26, 27). It takes us to that place of maturity where no one has to follow us around with a tedious list of do's and don'ts, constantly telling us what to do. We are motivated from deep within. We know what is right, and it is what we love, because it is of God."[40]

We are commanded to fear the Lord, precisely because of what Proverbs reveals about Him. He is the Sovereign Ruler of Kings, the Righteous Judge, Creator, Avenger, Savior, and without Him we can have no peace. The more that we study Proverbs and the Scripture as a whole, the more clearly the genuine character of God comes into view. At the same time that we learn more about Jehovah the more that we fear Him, and the more that we fear Him, the more of Himself He graciously reveals to us. Fearing the Lord leads to wisdom and knowledge.

> "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7)

"Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord…" (Proverbs 1:29)

"…then you will understand the fear of the Lord." (Proverbs 2:5)

"For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6)

"Be not wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord, and turn away from evil." (Proverbs 3:7)



"The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil." (Proverbs 8:13)

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." (Proverbs 9:10)

"The fear of the Lord prolongs life." (Proverbs 10:27)

"Whoever walks in uprightness fears the Lord." (Proverbs 14:2)

"In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge." (Proverbs 14:26)

"The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death." (Proverbs 14:27)

"Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it." (Proverbs 15:16)

"The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor." (Proverbs 15:33)

"The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm." (Proverbs 19:23)

"The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." (Proverbs 22:4)

"Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day." (Proverbs 23:17)

"My son, fear the Lord and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise." (Proverbs 24:21)

"Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always." (Proverbs 28:14)

"The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." (Proverbs 29:25)

"Lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:9) (Passage asking for not wealth or poverty, because either way, I'd defame the Lord.)

"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." (Proverbs 31:30)

Even the Psalmist and the suffering servant Job declare that "the fear of the Lord" is the beginning and source of wisdom.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding." (Psalm 111:10)

> "And he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28)

In the wisdom writing of Ecclesiastes, Solomon as the Preacher/Proclaimer makes "the fear of the Lord" a central theme.

> "I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him." (Ecclesiastes 3:14)

> "God is the one you must fear." (Ecclesiastes 5:7)

> "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before Him." (Ecclesiastes 8:12)

> "The end of the matter; all that has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13)



Years ago, I sat with a couple for marriage counseling. Now I need to admit, I am a bad counselor. I like to listen just long enough to figure out the problem, find a solution, and then implement a couple of action items. I'm a fixer, so long, multi-meeting, meandering, unproductive counseling sessions are my least favorite part of ministry. No joke. I can think of lots of pretty annoying and tough things I'd rather do than counseling. But anyway, there I was counseling a couple that I genuinely cared about. I knew from previous conversations that their young marriage and blended family had its share of challenges. What transpired in my office that day is one of the most haunting events in my ministry. As the specifics of their marital challenges

came into clear view, I asked a question that I had never before or since asked. I honestly can only attribute the prompting and courage to ask the question to the Holy Spirit. I looked at this couple who were clearly hurting, frustrated, and angry. I asked, “Do you fear the Lord?” The response that day still sends shivers down my spine. “Not really,” was the answer given. What happened to this couple over the next few weeks and months was an absolute nightmare for them, their children, and their extended family.

“The fear of the Lord,” as Kidner defines it, is “a worshipping submission.” It is bowing down before the Sovereign Creator of the universe, recognizing He, and He alone, is wise. He is the source and fountain of wisdom. A true fear of His judgment is what keeps our hearts clean and our feet on the narrow road that leads to life (Matthew 7:14). The beginning of our journey, the start of a wise, safe, and successful trip, begins with the Lord.

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

I have loved you from the first moment I saw two lines on that little stick. I may have questioned the Lord a time or two, but my love for you has always been fierce. Raising you to be Jesus-loving, God-fearing children of the Lord has been my number one goal. I have prayed for you all to know and profess Jesus as your Savior. The Lord answered that prayer. From my little ones learning the books of the Bible, to my older ones taking their biblical worldview into our lost and broken world, I love to watch you all grow in your walk.



As always, there are a few things you need to remember. Like Solomon said, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck." My verbiage - Hey listen up, pay attention and don't forget all of those things we've been trying to teach you over the years. They are a prize to be had, cherish them, not everyone gets wisdom and instruction from their parents. I know sometimes it may seem annoying when Dad and I give instruction. You may get tired of hearing it, you might feel like we don't trust you, and that we want to torture you, but we take this job of being your parents as a privilege. The most important task that the Lord has commissioned us with.

Proverbs 16:3, "Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established." You have been making plans

since you were little to be bakers, pilots, ballerinas, opera singers, gardeners, Batman, doctors, archeologists, history teachers, artists, designers, and detectives. I have been telling you over the years... I don't care what you do in life as long as you know the Lord and serve Him always, do what He has called you to do and nothing else. If you do anything else you will be miserable.

Proverbs 16:4, "The Lord has made everything for its purpose." The Lord is our Creator. He created you and He created me. Nothing fills my soul more than sitting outside on a warm sunny day soaking up the sun, working out in the garden, or with the cows. To feel the sun on my skin, the warm breeze blowing. I feel the closest to the Lord when I am experiencing His creation. Smelling the fresh mountain air, watching the stars twinkle at night. Even in the winter when a fresh blanket of snow is on the ground, bundling up and listening to how the snow insulates the Earth's sounds. I stand in awe. In the quiet, His creation speaks to His Majesty. Don't be so busy in life that you miss the Lord in all that He has created. Stop and smell the roses if you will, He made those too.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What facet of the character of God is most amazing to you?

What part of God's character is most personal to you?

What part of God's character do you struggle to believe is true?

What are you afraid of?

A quote that is often referenced in many commentaries when talking about God is from C.S. Lewis's, *"Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe."* As four siblings find their way in the enchanted world of Narnia, they hear about Aslan. They hear that he's "a lion – the lion, the great Lion." Susan is terrified at this idea and asks if he is safe. Mr. Beaver responds, "Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King."[41] Why is a lion such a fitting visual for the Lord?



What does it mean to fear the Lord?

Has the Lord ever had to "put the fear of God" back into you?



4.

Father

I grew up hearing about the legend of Bill Glass. Bill was a college football superstar and NFL pro-bowler in the late ‘50s and ‘60s. He played twelve years in the NFL before retiring and becoming an evangelist. He founded Bill Glass Ministries in the early ‘70s, focused primarily on prison ministry, at a time where there wasn’t a single national prison ministry in existence. Bill passed away in December of 2021. Without question, Bill had a significant Kingdom impact. The ministry he founded continues to do some amazing work. I actually had dinner one time with Bill. I had always heard that he was a huge man and when I met him, he didn’t disappoint. In my mind, I remember him filling the entire side of the booth where we ate. His head was huge. If I close my eyes I can still see him sitting there eating.



Bill, in his book detailing the launch of his prison ministry, tells an incredible story that illustrates much of his approach to incarcerated men.

> The inmate’s name was Steve. He was about forty, although he looked fifteen years older. His face was scarred. His leathery skin rippled with muscles and tattoos. He had so many tattoos that he had tattoos on top of his tattoos. I couldn’t help but think that something had to be terribly wrong in his life because he had been punishing himself with all those tattoos. This is a man who had spent most of his life looking at the world through bars. He had spent most of his life watching his back. He spent most of his life making sure never to show any emotion, because emotion is a sign of weakness in prison. Weak inmates become dead inmates…Steve was very much alive…But he was weeping. He couldn’t help himself. This man looked so frightening, he could rob a bank without having to draw a gun. If you saw him walking down the street, you’d duck into a store until

> you were sure he passed by. But he was crying in front of everyone. Why? Because in his heart, he understood what had happened: He'd lost. "Mr. Glass," he said. "I know what you mean. I never got 'The Blessing.'" I wasn't surprised. Not everyone who has a Father Problem ends up in jail, but almost everyone in jail has a Father Problem.[42]

The blessing that Steve references in this story is a powerful message that Glass has preached countless times. "The Blessing" "deals with fathers and sons, and how so many sons never received 'The Blessing' of their fathers. It's about the importance of fathers and sons, how the relationship isn't just one of discipline but also of love and acceptance. It's the older man giving the younger man a hug. It's the older man telling the young man that he is valuable to him, no matter what."[43]

In Proverbs, we find the blessing of a son by a father. The student is blessed by the teacher. The phrase "my son" is repeatedly found in the extended prologue of Proverbs, which goes from chapter 1, verse 8 through the end of chapter 10. Regardless of whether that is a biological father speaking to his biological son or a father-figure speaking to his adopted son, it remains an important moment, nonetheless. The Apostle Paul's relationship to the young pastor at Ephesus named Timothy would be a biblical example of the father and son relationship without the biological connection (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 1 Corinthians 4:17). In chapter 4, we even find Solomon reflecting on the training he received from his own father. "When I was a son with my father," he writes, "he taught me" (Proverbs 4:3-4). This great King received royal instruction in the ways of wisdom from his father, who is now passing the generational torch of wisdom and instruction to his young son. He was truly blessed. This is "The Blessing."

But what if your story is more like Steve's and less like the son of Solomon? "Today, more than 70 percent of African American children live in fatherless homes; so too do about 45 percent of white and Latino children. Those statistics represent a social disaster."[44] What if those cold statistics are your story? What if you've been wounded by your father? Abandoned? Abused? Manipulated? Molested? Scarred? Unloved? Maybe it wasn't your "real" dad who did these things, but still a man who called himself your father. As a pastor, I have seen the father wound leave men and women emotionally and spiritually crippled. I have cried with friends who can't understand why their father doesn't want anything to do with them. The day I started this chapter, I sat with a man as he wrestled with the reality that his father had likely murdered his mother. Jen and I have counseled stories of physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, and verbal abuse by a father to their own children. Rather than feeling blessed, they feel abandoned, betrayed, and even embarrassed by their fathers. Children are supposed to give their parents gray hair, not the other way around. Even reading Proverbs you may feel the ache of your own fatherlessness or reading as a father your own shortcomings and failures.



In Proverbs, we come to the ideal picture of a father and son. We overhear and, by God's grace, are given access to their heartfelt, private conversations. This may prompt you to jealousy or even to skip this chapter because of what someone has, and you don't. Thankfully in this conversation, the book of Proverbs is bigger, more amazing, and truly divine. In Christ, it is our Father speaking to us, His sons and daughters! God, our gracious, divine Dad is sitting us down for instruction. Maybe, as you read Proverbs you need to envision yourself sitting on your eternal Father's lap with His big, strong arms safely, warmly holding you. Maybe you need to read this book of wisdom, imagining going with Him for a long walk, a run, a hike, or enjoying a picnic. You may need to imagine getting

in the car with Abba Father (Romans 8:15) and taking the epic road trip you've dreamed of, listening to His stories and wisdom along the way. Maybe you need to know your true Father is in the stands cheering you on, shouting, "I believe in you."[45] Hear his words of blessing, instruction, and love. Feel His embrace and His words, "You are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'" (Psalm 139:14). This is our Heavenly Father saying "I love you. I sent my only Son to die for you. I have chosen you. I have adopted you. You are safe." These are the words of our Father, Creator, and King. Let the healing begin and let your Father instruct you.

"Hear, my son, your father's instruction." (Proverbs 1:8)

"Hear, O sons, a father's instruction." (Proverbs 4:1)

"Listen to your father who gave you life." (Proverbs 23:22)

Maybe you are a father. This chapter is about the crucial, irreplaceable role that you have. Let me say that more clearly: YOU CANNOT BE REPLACED! Not by teachers, coaches, mentors, friends, pastors… NOBODY! Your presence and your words of instruction and blessing matter. One of my favorite authors, Meg Meeker, makes this point profoundly clear. In her book *"Hero: Being the strong father your children need,"* she writes, "let me challenge you with something you need to remember: as a father, your words have an enormous, disproportionate impact on your family. You may not feel it, but your wife and children do because you are the inevitable leader of your family. To your kids, you are never just an angry, sad, or frustrated guy, you're their dad. Every word you say has the power to wound or heal, crush or inspire."[46] Meeker writes a little earlier in the book, "In the long term, no one can take your place in your son's imagination or your daughter's heart."[47] The power that a father singularly holds is unfathomable. "You know that everything you say as a father matters, that it is magnified tenfold in the ears of your children."[48]

In Proverbs, you and I are instructed by the Father and simultaneously shown how to be a father. The ultimate challenge is that you and I would be fathers who reflect the character of the Heavenly Father, with the end goal of transferring our kid's discipline and dependence to the Lord. Every godly, Christian father wants his sons and daughters to grow to know, love, serve, and fear the Lord. Our role as fathers in the home is to emulate the forever Father. When we misrepresent the Heavenly Father, we must quickly correct course, knowing that the impact of our sin will skew the still forming opinion our child has on the nature and character of God. Course correcting is repentance. Joel Belz once told my friend, Jimmy Dodd, "If I had to do it all over again, I would repent more…in front of my children."[49] That tenderness emulates our heavenly Father and sets a powerful example.



In Proverbs 3:11-12, Solomon writes, "My Son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him who he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights." We see four aspects of the Heavenly Father that He wants earthly, temporary fathers to show to their children: discipline, reproof, love, and delight.

A GODLY FATHER DISCIPLINES AND REPROVES

The Hebrew words that are translated discipline and reproof by both the English Standard Version and New American Standard Bible or more traditionally by the King James Version (sometimes referred to as the Authorized) as chastening and correction, are extremely similar. "'Discipline' (musar) basically refers to instruction, especially the sense of correction and training. The word is used for God's discipline in Deuteronomy 11:2; Isaiah 26:16; and Psalm 50:17. Some of the Proverbs use it for corporal punishment (Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13). When paired with 'wisdom,' discipline means submitting to instruction in order to reach the goal of wisdom."[50]

Discipline includes the rod of correction, but there's much more to it. Training isn't just spanking or punishment, although I wish more fathers were willing to lovingly spank their children. The word translated reproof seems to be more about correction (KJV) when things have gone wrong or when the training given wasn't obeyed.[51] In the New Testament, the word translated from the Greek as reproof in 2 Timothy 4:2, "carries the idea of rebuking in order to convict of misbehavior or false doctrine."[52] Reproof corrects behavior that has gone bad and, very often, the wrong thinking that goes along with it. The father in Proverbs is teaching and training his son how to behave and how to think. When that son gets out of line, so to speak, a gentle or firm reminder, depending on the circumstance, is what the father does. Discipline is disciple making. It's training in the way of the Lord.

> "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

A father in reflection of the Lord, trains, teaches and uses a child's mistakes as a moment of corrective instruction. These are the teaching moments that every father must seize. Don't miss these moments of crucial training. Think about it like a sports team. Every team has practices and games. Coaching happens both in practice and in games. Practice is the preparation for an opposing team and a game is when that practice is put into, well, practice. Throughout the game a coach may say, "This is what we prepared for…do you see what they are doing…we ran drills for this…we planned for this." Parenting and coaching, in this instance, are so similar, especially from the point of view in Proverbs. The family is the place of practice and preparation. Sadly, many kids are never prepared by their fathers for the world or the challenges of walking in holiness to the Lord. When game day comes it's a brutal defeat. They never practiced or planned for the schemes of their opponent (Ephesians 6:11).

Solomon is instructing his son in the safety of the home. He's in practice. He is imparting to his son wisdom from his experience. Of course, the son can join the ranks of the fools and refuse to hear his father's counsel. In that case, the father is clean, although he will certainly be grieved by his son's foolishness. The parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 is partly an illustration of a grieved father and the plight of a foolish son.

"A father of a fool has no joy." (Proverbs 17:21)

"A foolish son is a grief to his father." (Proverbs 17:25)

"A foolish son is ruin to his father." (Proverbs 19:13)

"He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach." (Proverbs 19:26)



"If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness." (Proverbs 20:20)

"A companion of gluttons shames his father." (Proverbs 28:7)

"Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, 'That is no transgression,' is a companion to a man who destroys." (Proverbs 28:24)

"There are those who curse their fathers." (Proverbs 30:11)

"The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures." (Proverbs 30:17)

However, statistics show that fathers aren't having these conversations or seizing these teaching moments. They have delegated the discipline and/or reproof of their children to a third party. In 1 Samuel, a tragic story is given of a parent who instructed his sons but failed to follow through with correction. Eli was the high priest, chosen by God to lead His people in faithful worship. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas were wicked, manipulative spiritual leaders. They abused their power for money and sexual gratification. Eli confronted them but wouldn't drop the hammer. In response to this unchecked wickedness in the house of God, the Lord confronted Eli through a prophet. One phrase is particularly chilling. The prophet, speaking for God, says, you, Eli, "…honor your sons above ME" (1 Samuel 2:29, emphasis mine). Eli refused to reprove his sons and brought about judgment and an end to his entire family tree in one day (1 Samuel 2-4). The high priest chose peace in his family over peace with God. Our discipline and reproof to our sons and daughters is the decisive key to their victory. So why don't more fathers step up? This thought probes to a much deeper and more troubling question. The foundation of discipline is love. Do fathers actually love their children?

A GODLY FATHER LOVES HIS CHILDREN

Throughout the entire book of Proverbs, the importance of discipline is given. The entire setting of the book in the first verses is "instruction" (Proverbs 1:2-3). Discipline is evidence of love.[53] These two ideas cannot be divorced from one another. A loving father disciplines and instructs his sons and daughters. A father who trains and instructs demonstrates with those actions a real, genuine love for his kids.

> "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." (Proverbs 13:24)

> "Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death." (Proverbs 19:18)
>
> "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him." (Proverbs 22:15)
>
> "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol." (Proverbs 23:13-14)
>
> "Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart." (Proverbs 29:17)



Do you love your kids? Do you discipline, instruct, and reprove? Many fathers have just embraced laziness, apathy, and, like Eli, "peace" in the home. We have surrendered our leadership and ultimately our children. With zero insults to any generation, we have raised sons and daughters who have chosen, without hesitation, the path of the fool. Fathers love their hobbies, jobs, self, and even their sin more than their kids. It is the truth and it's fundamentally why we don't discipline, and we forfeit the joy of delighting in our kids as they grow. When I tell people I have three teenage kids living at home right now, they are simply unable to hide their faces of pity. For most people that sounds like a nightmare, because Fathers don't and won't instruct and discipline consistently. Fathers who fail to discipline set their children up for catastrophe. Discipline as we see in the above verse includes the rod, but it's more than that. Discipline is training, instruction, and reproof (correction when mistakes are made). This leads to the fruit of the long, hard labor of being a father - the privilege of delighting in your kids.

A GODLY FATHER DELIGHTS IN HIS CHILDREN

In one of the funniest (and at times slightly inappropriate) books I've ever read entitled *"Dad is Fat,"* comedian Jim Gaffigan writes about his adventures and misadventures as a father. While reflecting on his young children growing up, he writes:

> I am a little godlike to my children. This is what I'm going to miss the most. Even though they don't view me as the tyrant I'd hope to be to them, I'm all-powerful: I'm their creator and provider. They love me and kind of fear me. They want to be in my arms when they are scared. They want my forgiveness after they've done something wrong – "Daddy, are you happy with me?" They want to be with me. I know this won't last. The expectations have been set too high. It's only a matter of time before they are totally disappointed when I fall off that lofty pedestal and they realize I'm just a giant kid myself.

The book is an extremely amusing look at fatherhood. Gaffigan has five children. He likens having five children to drowning and then somebody handing you a baby. I know the feeling. Throughout the book, you really do get a sense of someone who delights in their children, and through the jokes, you delight in your own children a little more as well. Delighting is the trophy for a job well done. It is the harvest after months (years and decades) of labor, sleepless nights, seemingly endless discipline, and repetition. "No one is born wise or without the need for discipline."[54] So, we train, teach, instruct, counsel, impart wisdom, only to repeat those things and lessons over and over again. Delighting is the celebration that a son or daughter has chosen the path of wisdom and shunned the road to ruin.

> "The Proverbs of Solomon, a wise son makes a glad father." (Proverbs 10:1)

> "A wise son makes a glad father." (Proverbs 15:20)
>
> "My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right." (Proverbs 23:15-16)
>
> "The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and mother be glad." (Proverbs 23:24-25)
>
> "He who loves wisdom makes his father glad." (Proverbs 29:3)



After quoting Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews says:

> "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:7-11)

Discipline proves the legitimacy of a parent, establishes respect, instills grit, promotes good behavior, and drives a child toward holiness. Yes, it's painful, but the long-term effects for both father and son are peace! The writer of Hebrews assumes that an earthly father will lovingly discipline his son because he wants the best

for his children. Again, the father is called to reflect the Father. We want our sons and daughters to understand loving discipline and have confidence that we are dependable. Our goal is that they will then embrace God's discipline and authority in their lives and live in complete dependence on Him. "I have no greater joy," John writes, "than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 1:4).

As I write this portion of the chapter, it comes with great sorrow, grief, and conviction. I have so often been a terrible reflection of my true Father. I have selfishly chosen work, hobbies, pleasure, and sin rather than embrace the sacred responsibility of fatherhood. I must repent and continue repenting when I abandon my post. We must repent and return to the wisdom of the Father so that we may learn how to be the fathers we are called to be.

A FAMILY TREE OF FOOLS

"…the son of Adam, the son of God." (Luke 3:38)

The first son, Adam rebelled. He had walked with God the Father, been instructed, warned, given the gift of creation, entrusted with stewardship of the garden, and blessed with a perfect partner. All of this, and he still chose the destructive path of the fool. Because of his sin, "…in Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Death has been the constant and great dread of all the sons of Adam (Hebrews 2:15). Adam led humanity in rebellion against our good and gracious Father, choosing another father in the process. Adam changed the family tree. We "are of [our] father the devil, and [our] will is to do [our] father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (Slight paraphrase of Jesus' words in John 8:44.) Our human father, Adam, chose rebellion. Our spiritual father, Satan, chose rebellion.

And like good members of this sinful mob family, we unashamedly rebel too. We choose foolishness over our creator…our true Father.

A WISE SON

> "Behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" (Matthew 3:17)

> "A voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" (Matthew 17:5)



The second Adam, who was actually the first, heeded the wisdom and instruction of the Father. Trained, according to Hebrews 5:8, through the things that he suffered, Jesus was the beloved son of God, who pleased his Father and the Father audibly declared this over and over again. A wise son pleases the Father. Jesus is the wise son of Proverbs, whereas Adam and all men outside of Christ are the foolish sons who bring destruction and shame. Through Christ we are welcomed as sons and daughters of the King, bowing down in reverent, fearful submission, we are now wise sons and daughters who bring great joy to our Heavenly, eternal Father. We cease to be part of the Family Tree of Fools and become adopted into the family of God. We become wise sons and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Satan ceases to be our demanding, cruel, and abusive father, and God becomes our faithful, loving, and compassionate Dad. We become eternal objects of His steadfast love (2 Samuel 7:14… repeated in Psalm 89:32-33). We are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:18). This is the delight of the Father over His sons, because of His son Jesus. He disciplines, chastises,[55] instructs, corrects, reproves, loves, and delights over us, His children! In the grand and eternal sense, delighting is actually the everlasting reflection of the Heavenly Father, both on His son Jesus and His sons and daughters that were adopted through Christ's work. Paul writes:

> “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have recieved the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Romans 8:15-17)

Reading that passage, you can’t help but see a delighting Father and His children delighting in Him.

CLAIRE, BELLE, MAV, RUBY, AND MAVIS,

BEING YOUR DAD IS ONE OF THE GREATEST JOYS OF MY LIFE. JESUS SAVING ME AND YOUR MOM BEING MY WIFE ARE THE ONLY TWO JOYS THAT RANK ANY HIGHER. YOU ARE EACH SO GIFTED AND PLEASANT TO BE WITH. I REALLY ENJOY BEING WITH YOU. I LOVE ROAD TRIPS WITH YOU OR THE ZOO OR MUSEUMS OR DISNEY WORLD. I LOVE PLAYING AND DISCOVERING WITH YOU. I LOVE WORKING WITH YOU BECAUSE I'M AMAZED AT WHAT YOU CAN DO! I LOVE TO WATCH GOD'S BEAUTIFUL CREATION SPARKLE IN YOUR EYES. SOMETIMES IN THOSE MOMENTS, MY BODY IS PRESENT, BUT MY BRAIN IS SOMEWHERE ELSE. FORGIVE ME FOR THAT. I WILL WORK HARD FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE ON BEING TRULY PRESENT WITH YOU.



AS I VISUALIZE OVERHEARING THE FATHER IN PROVERBS TALKING WITH HIS SON, I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK OF US. YOU AND ME TALKING AT DINNER OR IN THE CAR OR THE BLUE CHAIR. I REALIZE THERE ARE TIMES WHERE I TRY TO TEACH AT THE MOST INOPPORTUNE MOMENTS. I'M SORRY. GOD WIRED ME TO BE A TEACHER, SO WHEN I SEE A LESSON TO BE LEARNED, EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE WORLD JUST KIND OF STOPS. IN THOSE MOMENTS, MY SINCERE HOPE FOR EACH OF YOU IS THAT YOU WOULD KNOW, LOVE, AND SERVE JESUS ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE. I HAVE PRAYED OVER YOU, WITH YOU, AND FOR YOU, COUNTLESS TIMES, THAT YOU WOULD HEAR AND OBEY THE VOICE OF THE LORD. I HAVE HAD TO WRESTLE WITH THE DESIRE FOR YOU TO BE SUCCESSFUL BY THE WORLD'S STANDARDS. AT TIMES I HAVE PUSHED TOO HARD AND THE LORD (OFTEN THROUGH YOUR MOTHER) HAS HAD TO BRING ME BACK TO WHAT REALLY MATTERS. I DON'T CARE WHAT CAREER OR ACADEMIC PATH YOU TAKE, AS LONG AS YOU SERVE JESUS. I HONESTLY COULD NOT HAVE SAID THAT TEN YEARS AGO. I

HAVE ALWAYS BEEN EXTREMELY AMBITIOUS AND THAT HAS IN MANY WAYS EXTENDED TO HOW I HAVE BEEN A FATHER. MY EGO AND SHOWMANSHIP HAVE BEEN HARD TO NAVIGATE AND AT TIMES HURTFUL. I KNOW THAT I CAN BE DEMANDING AND TEMPERAMENTAL. I HAVE FAILED TO REFLECT THE HEAVENLY FATHER. HE IS PATIENT, GENTLE, AND KIND. FORGIVE ME FOR MISSING THE MARK SO OFTEN.

LORD WILLING, WHEN YOU BECOME MOTHERS AND A FATHER, YOU WILL REALIZE THAT IT'S HARD NOT TO JUST FEEL LIKE A MISERABLE FAILURE. EVEN IF YOUR KIDS "TURN OUT OK," YOU STILL CAN'T SHAKE THE MISTAKES. THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE, YOU WILL MAKE MISTAKES. YOU WILL FAIL. DURING THOSE TIMES EMBRACE THE LORD'S CORRECTION. HIS DISCIPLINE DURING THOSE FAILURES WILL BECOME A GOLDMINE OF WISDOM FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. WE HAVE ALREADY CONFESSED A LOT OF OUR MISTAKES WITH YOU AND SHARED A LOT OF THESE LESSONS. WE HOPE THAT OTHER PEOPLE CAN GAIN SOME WISDOM FROM THIS BOOK, BUT YOUR MOM AND I WANTED TO TACKLE THIS PROJECT, PRIMARILY FOR EACH OF YOU. WE WANT TO TEACH YOU TO FEAR THE LORD AND FLEE FROM EVIL. WE WANT YOU TO SEARCH FOR WISDOM. WE WANT YOU TO HAVE JOY-FILLED AND PEACEFUL LIVES. WE'VE LEARNED OVER AND OVER THAT THOSE THINGS ARE ONLY POSSIBLE WITH THE LORD. GIRLS, FIND AND MARRY MEN WHO REFLECT THE HEAVENLY FATHER. MAV, REFLECT THE FATHER. RUN AFTER WISDOM SO THAT IN YEARS TO COME YOU CAN BE A DAD WHO BREAKS GENERATIONAL CHAINS AND RAISES SONS AND DAUGHTERS WHO LOVE AND SERVE JESUS. I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE HOW THE LORD USES YOU. I LOVE EACH OF YOU.

SINCERELY,
YOUR GLAD FATHER

"I HAVE NO GREATER JOY THAN TO HEAR THAT MY CHILDREN ARE WALKING IN THE TRUTH." (3 JOHN 1:4)



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Did you get “The Blessing” from your father? If not, did you get it from someone else?

What were some significant talks or moments you had with your Dad?

What’s the best fatherly advice you’ve heard?

What’s the best fatherly advice you’ve passed along?

What are some father wounds that you have?

How do those wounds impact your view, approach, and perspective of God?

As a believer, how has God disciplined and reproved you? How did you accept that?





5.

Mother

> "In the words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him." (Proverbs 31:1)

Whew. Being a mother is exhausting. It is the most thankless, tiring, underpaid, dirty, stressful job you will ever find. When I (Jen) get to Heaven one day, I want to ask the Lord how many diapers I have changed. Sometimes when I have to fill out forms that ask for my occupation, I can get a little snarky and I list out things like, doctor, nurse, teacher, chef, veterinarian, scheduler, cosmetologist, chauffeur, maid, janitor, dairy farmer, gardener, professional grocery shopper, pig farmer, interrogator, director of finances, referee, dishwasher, laundry folder…you get my drift. Or should I say "Dreft." Haha, that's a laundry joke. I'm just over here cracking myself up. When I looked online for what moms should get paid it was like $184,820 for a fair market salary (and we know that everything we read on the internet is true). I'm a preacher's wife, so I like to round up. It's safe to say every mom in your life should be making close to $190,000 a year. Fellas don't be upset. I know you work hard and juggle a lot too. I mean your job is to emulate Jesus, so there's that. And just because this is a "mother" chapter doesn't mean you get to skip out! Lord willing it will give you a better understanding of your wife and maybe even your own mother…so keep reading! And another disclaimer…even if you don't have biological children of your own, keep reading. I know many women who don't, but they help me mother my own kids and do a fantastic job at it. I wouldn't survive without them.



One of the many things that stresses me out is teaching my kids. My oldest is 17, she will leave me soon. (How unfair by the way, they get to the age where I've poured my life and soul into them, they are productive members of society and then they leave! Who came up with that plan?!) I ask myself all of the time, have I taught them enough? Have I taught them the right things? What if they forget?

What if I fail? Annnnd that's when my anxiety kicks in. You can hear my thoughts spiraling.

Let's look at Proverbs chapter 31 together. Some of us will be familiar with verses 10-31, the Virtuous Woman chapter. But I want to focus on verses 1-9. You have a mother wanting the very best for her son. He is the king after all. He has a very important job. I think we can all agree that we want the very best for our children, no matter what their roles will be in the world. In typical mom fashion, she sounds to me like she starts out this chapter by scolding him, "What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?" (Proverbs 31:2). Any kid knows if mom says to you three times, "What the heck are you doing?" They are in trouble, no matter their age.

So, who is this king? King Lemuel. According to the *"Expositors Bible Commentary,"* "Nothing is known about King Lemuel…Jewish legend identifies Lemuel as Solomon and the advice as from Bathsheba from a time when Solomon indulged in magic with his Egyptian wife." (That certainly would have me hollering at my son with a few "What the hecks!") When I study, I like to learn who is writing and why they are writing. This one blew my mind. Is Bathsheba possibly writing all of these wise words to her son? The lady who was bathing on a rooftop, slept with the king, and had a child with him. (I always wondered if she was in on the plot to kill her husband.) Man, the grace of God is good. Whether or not she is the mother here, what are the things we can learn from her and teach our own kids?

"Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings" (Proverbs 31:3). In my words, don't waste your time and energy on lust, on pornography, on the affection and attention of the opposite sex. It destroys. (Be prepared for a rant.) We live in an overly sexualized culture. I went to a football game last night

and I was appalled at little girls (under 10) shaking and moving their bodies like scandalous strippers working for a buck, while their parents just stand there in the bleachers. You can't drive down the highway without seeing inappropriate signs; sex sells everything. Half the time I'm trying to figure out what they are actually trying to sell. Ohhhh a showerhead. I get it. It's ridiculous. We hand our kids iPhones, tablets, computers, and gaming systems that we won't monitor. Why? Because that's just more work. It's easier if it just keeps them busy, then we don't have to worry about them. Proverbs 29:15 says, "A child left to himself brings shame to his mother." We are living in a world where our children are left to their own devices (literally, pun intended) to raise themselves. They are addicted to screens, addicted to pornography, addicted to self, and addicted to social media. And we don't want to talk about it. We want to stick our heads in the sand and pretend it's not our kid. We think we're the exception. The mother in Proverbs is talking about it, we should be talking about it. She warns us and says it will DESTROY! It is DESTROYING! How many moms are vicariously living through their daughters? Welp, my body doesn't look like that anymore, so you might as well flaunt it while you have it. Or how many are pushing their sons to pursue girls? (Well, at least we know he's straight then!) We are either pushing our CHILDREN to maturity way before we should be or maybe we aren't pushing it at all and we're literally just standing by and allowing it. No wonder they are depressed and suicidal. You just let him have a long relationship that they weren't emotionally ready to handle, and when they break up, much like a divorce they can't handle it. No crap?! People that get divorced in their 30s, 40s, 50s can't handle it either. But let's let our kids whose brains aren't even fully developed yet, pretend and play house. It's fine. Where's the harm in it? Let's just sit on the sidelines and let all of this happen to our children. The next generation.



Instead, we as mothers need to put down our own devices, maybe not be obsessed with going to the gym, how we look, or working. Look at our kids in the face and say, "You are fearfully and wonderfully made. The Lord put you together EXACTLY like He wanted you. You don't need to change yourself to draw the attention of the opposite sex. (My heart is racing, I'm out of breath and I'm just typing this!) Don't waste your time and energy on this." It's like we just gave up and quit fighting for our kids. Or we are fighting for the wrong things. Everyone around right now is fighting about masks in school. What about fighting Satan attacking your children? Are you fighting to grow virtuous women? Are you fighting to grow mighty men for the Lord? Do we think this stuff just happens? Let me remind you, a child left to himself will bring shame to you, mom.

Second, she warns, "It is not for Kings, O Lemuel. It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted" (Proverbs 31:4-5). I'm not here to debate whether you should drink or not, so save the eye rolls. What I take from this passage is that there are things that we let get in the way of our responsibilities. This mom was teaching her son that drinking would get in the way of making good decisions for his people. She says, "Honey, this isn't for you. Kings should not crave or be addicted to strong drinks. It clouds your head, gives you bad judgment, and your job is 24/7. At any point, you could be called upon." Does this sound familiar? Being a mom, you are on call 24/7. And don't believe the lie that it ends in 18 years. This lesson made me think. A lot. I prayed for the Lord to reveal to me, how do I take this weird chunk of Scripture before the famous Proverbs chapter 31 bit, that not a whole lot of people have a ton to say about, and make it applicable to moms? And then it hit me…thank the Lord…distractions. She's telling Lemuel this will distract you from your work, your God-given calling. Ouch. We live in a world full of distractions. If we are not distracted, we're bored and

that doesn't take long. We fill every single moment of every single day with noise of some kind. We can't even sit at a traffic light without checking our phones, texts, and email all in 30 seconds of waiting for the light to turn green. We mindlessly scroll while we wait in line at the grocery store, while we sit at the doctor's office, while we should be conversing with our spouses. We listen to music because we don't like the silence. If you're really spiritual, you fill the silence with sermons. We fill our schedules to the brim because it makes us feel validated. We make sure our Instagram and Facebook posts are updated. We binge-watch hours of Netflix. We're busy, we're distracted, and we're supposed to be mothering. We are short with our kids. We are annoyed when they need us. We give the world our best and our kids the worst. What is distracting you from being the mother God called you to be to your kids? Sometimes I think those distractions can even be good things that we are trying to give our kids. I love to cook and bake from scratch. I love real food to feed my kids. I love to can and eat fresh peaches in the winter. I even milk a stinking cow for my lactose-intolerant kid (I do love my cows though). All of this I do in the name of my kids. I know they love and appreciate it all, (my oldest says, I take my "momming" very seriously) but there are times where I know I should just go play dolls, throw a ball, play hide and seek, or take them on a date to Wendy's. Gasp! They would rather just have me, my eyes locked on theirs. It's not even a "would rather," it's a need. Our kids need us. There's no replacement for you, Mom. God gave you your child, whether it's one or ten of them. He gave them to you. He said you are the best fit for him or her. Maybe they are a bit challenging, busy, emotional, but God paired the two of you up. It was no accident. He said, with me, you can do this! The Lord is your #1 cheerleader. What has the Lord called us to be as mothers? I like to look at Titus chapter 3 for this one (we will tackle Proverbs 31:10-31 later of course). It says that godly women are to be holy, chaste, not a gossip, kind, self-controlled, and a teacher. I love that it lists teacher. I wouldn't say I am a teacher by nature. But I know that



it is my God-given responsibility to teach my children the ways of the Lord. How do we do that? I take every opportunity that comes my way to point my kids to the Lord, well I try anyway. Sometimes that comes in the form of a serious conversation, sometimes that comes in the form of a curious question, sometimes that is me initiating prayer with them. The things I wish I was better at with them are Bible reading and Scripture memorization. How are you imparting to the next generation the things of the Lord?

Third, she says, “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9). Whenever my kids go to camp, I write them a letter and shove it into their bag packed full of all of their camp things, hoping they will find it before that bag becomes too scurvy. One of the things I always try to convey to them is to make sure they speak up for someone if they see an injustice happening. A lot of my kids are pleasers (like me) and it’s just easier to not speak up, draw attention to yourself, or cause conflict. One of our many jobs as moms is to teach our kids to speak up. Especially for those who can’t speak for themselves. I remember when Josh and I were first married, his brother Isaiah was still in high school. He worked with the special needs class. One day some punk kid was picking on and making fun of his special needs buddy. Needless to say, Isaiah punched the kid and he got suspended. I remember we were all so proud of him. He protected someone who couldn’t protect themselves. Are you teaching your kids to do this? It’s ultimately teaching them to see other people and to serve other people. Which they aren’t going to learn if you aren’t modeling it. When is the last time you served someone? When is the last time your kids saw you serve someone? Or you at least told them a story about you serving someone? We live in a sea of people daily, look for opportunities. My favorite is the grocery store. My kids get tired of hearing all of mom’s weird grocery shopping trips. We all have those dumb, limitless

self-check-out lanes …I swear I am getting a full-on workout when I use those! Have you ever thought about staying and bagging the groceries of whoever is behind you? You should see their faces. Or the little lady in the motorized cart in your aisle, reach the things she needs, so she doesn't have to get up. How about thanking the guys who are stocking the shelves? We need our kids to see that serving people doesn't just happen on big overseas mission trips but in our daily lives.

One of the concepts in Scripture that haunts me is Judges 2:10, "And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel." How terrifying to think that if I don't take the responsibility to teach my children the ways of the Lord that they may have no idea who He is. Josh and I see that happen often in the church. You have parents that grew up in the church, maybe they felt like they spent too much time there as a kid. And that may be the case, but they swing in the total opposite direction and their kids are growing up godless. It's heartbreaking. Remember what Proverbs 1:8-9 says, "Hear my son, your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck." In order for your kids to have those garlands and pendants, you better get to teaching.



Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby and Mavis,

Being your mom has been one of the coolest things I've gotten to do. I loved when you were all little babies and smooching your chubby cheeks. I still smooch them, they're not nearly as chubby, and Maverick grimaces every time I try. But what have I told you? I will be smooching them until I die, so you better get used to it. You're all almost bigger than me now, I never thought I would survive five babies in ten years with a four-year break. It's only because of the Lord I still have my sanity, although I may not after this book!

I hope and pray that I have been a godly mother for you. I take my job seriously and I hope that you have felt that over the years. The Lord is your number one cheerleader in life. I am your number two. I know the Lord will be calling you to do some amazing things in the future. You are all beyond capable. I get a front-row seat in watching the Lord develop you, mold you, and shape you into what He wants you to be.

Be adventurous. Do fast, crazy fun things. Just tell me about it when you are done so I don't worry about you. We have gotten to do some amazing trips as a family. I pray as you grow that you won't stop exploring the Lord's creation. Belle, get to Paris, Claire, hike the Appalachian Trail, Maverick, go gator hunting. Ruby and Mavis, you're still little but I'm sure you'll have some wild place you want

to travel to also. Remember when we went out west and hiked the Rocky's, when we went rafting down the Green River, when we went spelunking in Tennessee, or stopped in a nature preserve in Georgia and I thought your Dad may get eaten by an alligator! These are all things we did to show you how amazing the Lord is and how walking with the Lord is the ultimate adventure.

Be wise. Pray for wisdom daily. We live in a world that doesn't fear the Lord. You will need lots of wisdom from the Lord to survive in this crazy.



Be leaders. In a world of followers, be leaders. Lead others to the Lord.

Maverick, stay away from Floozies. Search for a Proverbs 31 woman.

Girls, find men, God-fearing men, that will point you to Jesus.

I love you all, more than you will ever understand.

Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Do you hide from tough conversations with your kids?

Were you a child left to himself?

How did your upbringing shape how you parent?

What distractions do you need to get rid of?

How can you better teach your kids the ways of the Lord?

What do you need to change to be the godly mother you are called to be?

Guys, what can you do to encourage your wife to be a godly mother?





6.

Simple

Mama told me, when I was young,
Come sit beside me my only son.
And listen closely to what I say,
And if you do this it'll help you some sunny day.

Oh, take your time, don't live too fast.
Troubles will come and they will pass.
Go find a woman, and you'll find love,
And don't forget son, there is someone up above.

And be a simple, kind of man,
Oh be something you love and understand.
Baby be a simple kind of man,
Oh won't you do this, if you can.[56]



The lyrics from the song *"Simple Man"* by the band Lynyrd Skynryd tell the story of a mother counseling her son to stay simple. There's some wisdom to this song: remember God, fall in love, don't be greedy, and don't rush through life. It is essentially a humanistic take on the wisdom of Solomon found in Ecclesiastes. Solomon writes:

> "I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil – this is God's gift to man." (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)

The acronym K.I.S.S. – Keep It Simple Stupid - is something I've heard throughout my life in different settings. Proverbs, in contrast, says: "Hey you…don't stay there…move beyond being Simple." In Proverbs 1:22, the voice of Wisdom cries out, "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?" Simple means naïve, gullible, or even seducible. The image presented in Proverbs is a young man or woman standing at the beginning of life with two distinct paths laid

out before them. The Simple, described by Waltke, are "overgrown, gullible youths" who "have crossed the threshold of the age of accountability and should have made a decisive commitment to the wisdom of the book before now."[57] These Simpletons, the citizens of Simple-town, "yearn with passionate desire to remain uncommitted and open to alluring sin."[58] Proverbs also introduces Scoffer and Fool (we'll examine these two characters in later chapters). Like Pinocchio's schoolmate, Candlewick, these two entice Simple to ignore Wisdom and join their gang. Scoffer literally loves his scoffing, while Fool repulses at the sound and sight of Wisdom.

"The scoffer and the fool are headed for disaster. But, the 'simple' – they are the under committed, they don't really know what they're living for, they tend to go with the flow and conform – the simple still have a chance. They might respond to Lady Wisdom."[59] The Simple are still at the starting line. They are at square one. Simple has a choice. We have a choice. The Simple can choose the path of the fool or follow the beckoning voice of Wisdom. A young fool doesn't know what He doesn't know, whereas the Wise knows what He doesn't know.[60] The wise recognize that wisdom is a path, a pursuit, even a treasure hunt. Proverbs is a father (teacher) standing at the beginning of the journey with his son (student) explaining that there are two paths, two directions, and two ways to live life. The father pleads with his son to leave Simple-town and begin, step by step, traveling down the road of wisdom and avoiding the alluring product that Fool and Scoffer promise. In the background of Proverbs, you can hear Fool actively rejecting the voice of wisdom, while Scoffer, more aggressively, mocks and ridicules both wisdom and those who follow her voice. Simple must quickly start down the path because Fool and Scoffer are in hot pursuit. Scoffer will tease anyone and everyone on Wisdom's road. For Simple, he must find firm footing on the newly discovered path of wisdom, surrender his heart to wisdom's ways, and fix his eyes on the road ahead, avoiding temptation to take an "easier" way.

Tragically, many men and women attempt to stay simple and uncommitted. Rather than outright rejecting sin, they tolerate and even admire it. I am convinced nobody stays long in Simple-town. Eventually, the excitement and allure of sin takes root, and they leave being Simple, reject the path of wisdom, and drive at breakneck speed down the Freeway of Fools. People can't handle the pressure from the crowd or handle the ridicule of scoffers, who accuse the wise of being prudes. This is the human story going all the way back to Adam and Eve. The chief Scoffer and greatest Fool, Satan, says to Eve, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Eve believed the lie, rejected God and His wisdom, and rushed into rebellion. We have all been doing the same thing ever since. The way of wisdom looks so boring, while Scoffer and Fool convince us that their way is a thrill ride.



We are the simple, standing at a fork in the road. God the Father is inviting us to travel with Him and to Him on the wise way.

GETTING STARTED

Proverbs 4:10-17 describes those two paths.

> "Do not enter the *path of the wicked,* and *do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it* and *pass on.* For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone *stumble.* For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. The *way of the wicked* is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they *stumble.*" (Proverbs 4:14-17, 19 – Italics added for emphasis)

The Way of the Wicked is described as dark, full of stumbling travelers, restless souls, and eventually leading only to the disaster of ultimate darkness. Jesus addressed spiritual darkness in His, ironically, nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader. Jesus tells him, “People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:19-20). Nicodemus was speaking to Jesus in the dark of night, both physically and spiritually. Nicodemus was Simple and Jesus was calling him to leave that life and follow the voice of Wisdom, out of darkness and into the light.

Years ago, a pastor friend of mine invited me to tag along with him and his high school group to an amusement park. Each year around Halloween, Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, opens a variety of “haunted” houses and converts portions of the park to different scary themes. My buddy and I both like roller coasters and haunted houses, so I was pumped to tag along. In hindsight, here we were a couple of grown men excited to walk through these haunted houses being operated by college students making minimum wage. As the evening was coming to a close, nearing midnight if my memory serves me correctly, we grabbed a Starbucks coffee and decided to walk through a medieval, castle themed attraction. While drinking our coffee, we stumbled through this maze of characters jumping out to “scare” a couple of coffee-drinking men. We appreciated and applauded their efforts. When the clock struck midnight, what I can only describe as the Halloween version of Cinderella happened. Instantly the smoke, dim lights, and lasers were overpowered by hundreds of bright lights turning on. The haunted attraction instantly was lit up, the park was closed, and the cast of characters hired to scare us, was now kindly ushering us to the exit. It felt like the last day of school as creepy witches, knights, and other medieval-themed characters raced past us to the dressing rooms. Their shift was over.

What had been "scary," instantly became comical and still is a story my friend and I laugh about. We had been walking in the dark and stumbling around different set pieces until the lights came on.

The Apostle Paul describes the Gospel as "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24), but that wisdom is also "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). In the spiritual, moral darkness that Proverbs calls "the way of the wicked," people are stumbling around. Rejection of God's wisdom is a choice to embrace ignorance. K.I.S.S. is kind of true, but maybe not in its intended way. The Simple, the fool, chooses to keep himself stupid. "Not knowing or understanding the consequences of one's actions is an essential component of sin and folly."[61] While wisdom is looking down the road, the way of the wicked is living in the supposed bliss of ignorance. The Simple is invited by the foolish scoffer to just put the pedal to the metal and hope for the best. Throw caution and *wisdom* to the wind.



> "She does not ponder the path of life." (Proverbs 5:6)
>
> "He does not know that it will cost him his life." (Proverbs 7:23)
>
> "And knows nothing." (Proverbs 9:13)
>
> "But he does not know that the dead are there." (Proverbs 9:18)

The way of the wicked is a dark place but offers no rest. Paul describes it as being "captive to the law of sin" (Romans 7:23). Wickedness is slavery and it's a cruel, heavy burden to carry. Wickedness is a ruthless taskmaster who demands a daily quota of making at least one other stumble before any semblance of a break will be given. It's the old saying, "There is no rest for the wicked." Beyond restlessness,

the fool who travels this dark road finds his sustenance in “the bread of wickedness” and the “wine of violence” (Proverbs 4:17). “The Bible does not hide the fact that one can become as zealous for evil as for good.”[62] The simple looks down the path that is decorated in a devious and deceptive way, designed to conceal crowds of fools as they stumble down the dark, exhausting, and confusing path of wickedness heading straight for disaster. The father in Proverbs isn’t trying to restrict the joy and freedom of his young son, he is trying to secure and protect it. “He is simply explaining that one of these two paths leads into a minefield.”[63]

In Bunyan’s *“Pilgrim’s Progress,”* Christian meets two men, one named Formalist and the other Hypocrisy. They join Christian, not by coming through the narrow gate, symbolic of salvation, but by “tumbling over the wall on the left side of the narrow way.”[64] For a while the three travelers journey together, but they come to the “foot of the Hill Difficulty.”[65] Christian, committed to the way and directions of his Master, begins to make his way up, over, and through Hill Difficulty. While Formalist and Hypocrisy opt for other, much easier paths. Bunyan writes:

> The other two also came to the foot of the hill; but when they saw that the hill was steep and that there were two other ways to go and figuring that on the other side of the hill these two paths would meet up with the one Christian had taken, they decided to take those paths. Now the name of one of those ways was Danger, and the name of the other was Destruction. So, the one took the way called Danger, which led him into a great wood, and the other took the way to Destruction, which led him into a wide field full of dark mountains, where he stumbled and fell and rose no more.

Shall they who wrong begin yet rightly end?
Shall they at all have safety for their friend?
No, no; in headstrong manner they set out,
And headlong will they fall at last, no doubt.[66]

Scripture warns of diverting from the path of God's revealed righteousness and the disastrous consequences that lie ahead.

"…men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways." (Proverbs 2:15)



"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." (Proverbs 12:15)

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12)

"The simple believes everything…a fool is reckless and careless." (Proverbs 14:15-16)

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes." (Proverbs 21:2)

"The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it." (Proverbs 27:12)

"Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit." (Proverbs 28:10)

"Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall." (Proverbs 28:18)

> "Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall, for I will bring disaster upon them, in the year of their punishment, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:12)

In what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of two gates and two paths. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction," Jesus proclaims, "and those who enter by it are many" (Matthew 7:13). The way of the wicked is a wide, easy path that parades people from spiritual darkness into what Jesus calls "outer darkness" (Matthew 25:30). The darkness that the fool chooses to live in becomes eternal. The path of darkness leads to the domain of darkness and eternal death. Jesus commands His listeners, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14). Jesus, like Solomon the wise invites us to walk through the narrow gate and travel the way of the wisdom. "Godly ways give firm going and the best route."[67]

> "Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the *way of wisdom;* I have led you in the *paths of uprightness.* When you *walk*, your *step* will not be hampered, and if you *run,* you will not *stumble.* Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life... But the *path of the righteous* is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day… Ponder the *path* of your feet; then all your *ways* will be sure. Do not *swerve* to the right or to the left; *turn your foot away* from evil." (Proverbs 4:10-13, 18, 26, 27 – Italics added for emphasis)

The path of life or the way of wisdom, described by both Jesus and Solomon is hard, but provides firm footing (Proverbs 3:23). The road

is narrow, but well lit. While those traveling the road to ruin can't find rest, Jesus invites us to this way of rest in Him (Proverbs 3:24; Matthew 11:28). Along the way, evil people will provide many tempting "shortcuts." One writer simply says, "Don't get sidetracked."[68] Traveling this road to the end brings us to the destination of an abundant, fulfilling, and eternal life.

Wisdom is both pondering the path of life and walking in it. Wisdom "keeps one from getting lost. It points out the folly of choosing evil as though it were some path to gain and instead reveals it for what it is, a true loss of life and character."[69] In the introduction of Proverbs, Solomon writes that the purpose of this book is "to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth" (Proverbs 1:4). The narrow path of wisdom is filled with all kinds of twists and turns. To the simple, we often long for immediate results and instant progress. Yet the wise know that "life is a journey, there is no quick fix, and we take it one step at a time with constant, moment-by-moment recommitments to the way of Christ."[70] So, we "follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). This is the daily grind. It is why the Christian life, or in what Proverbs would call the wise life, is compared to elite athletes, farmers, and soldiers.



"The path of the righteous," Proverbs says, "is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" (Proverbs 4:18). In *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* as Christian makes his way through the valley of the shadow of death:

> "The sun was rising, and this was another mercy to Christian; for you must note that though the first part of the Valley of the Shadow of Death was dangerous, this second part, which he had yet to travel, was far more dangerous. From the place where he now stood to the end of the valley, the way was filled with snares, traps, gins, nets, pits, deep holes, and

slopes; had it now been dark, as it was when he came the first part of the way, and had he had a thousand souls, they would have had reason to be cast away."[71]

STAYING ON TRACK

When we start the journey as a simple son or daughter, the light is faint, but as we journey further with the Lord, His glory, His light illuminates our way. He shines His light into the darkness of our hearts. He reveals the schemes of our enemy, cautioning us against the tactics of the Devil. The moment we leave Simple-town we are bombarded with tempting offers to veer off the path of holiness. Those temptations are traps. "How can a young man keep his way pure?" the Psalmist writes, "By guarding it according to your word" (Psalm 119:9). Those offers look, sound, and even feel fun, deserved, and appealing. Yet wisdom warns us to "Stay Out!" How can we stay on the straight and narrow? How can we stay on course? How can we fight our desire to leave the path of life? How can we avoid the freeway of fools and the destruction that's coming? The answer: we must vigilantly guard our hearts, watch our mouths, and protect what we see. Guarding those areas of life, as Solomon writes, is both what keeps us on the path of wisdom and *is* the actual path of wisdom. That is how we guard our way. Solomon continues in chapter 4 verse 20:

> "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you." (Proverbs 4:20-25)

GUARD YOUR HEART

The heart is central, for from it springs life or as the New Living Translation phrases it, the heart "determines the course of your life" (Proverbs 4:23). In Solomon's warnings about the adulterous, forbidden woman, he warns his son "not [to] desire her beauty in your heart" (Proverbs 6:25). The heart is tricky, deceptive terrain. The prophet Jeremiah warns, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick: who can understand it?" Jeremiah asks a challenging question and then gives the answer. "I the Lord," the Scripture says, "search the heart and test the mind" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). What we allow our hearts to long for, to desire, will become what our eyes are fixed upon. When our gaze becomes transfixed on something, someone, or in a particular direction, our feet are soon to follow. We start skipping down the path of wickedness. James illustrates this point by using the imagery of the life cycle. He writes, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).



Nobody falls or stumbles into sin. We race toward sin, powered by the mighty engine of our own heart's desire.

> "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23)
>
> "Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths." (Proverbs 7:25)
>
> "…and the Lord tests hearts." (Proverbs 17:3)
>
> "Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way." (Proverbs 23:19)

> "As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man." (Proverbs 27:19)

The great 19th-century English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, preaching a sermon from Proverbs, said, "There is no way of being kept from impurity except by giving up the heart to the holy Lord."[72] The scriptural text of the great Prince of Preacher's sermon was Proverbs 23:26, "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways." The father in Proverbs chapter 23 is asking his son to entrust his heart to him. God is that Father. To protect and purify the desires of our heart, we must entrust it to the Lord. David, repentantly prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

What is meant by the heart? Certainly not the organ in our chest, at this exact moment, pumping blood throughout our bodies. "This most commonly stands for 'mind'…, but it can go beyond this to represent the emotions, …the will, …and the whole inner being."[73]

> Mind - "Write them on the tablet of your heart." (Proverbs 3:3)

> Emotions - "The cheerful heart has a continual feast." (Proverbs 15:15)

> Will - "Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the Lord." (Proverbs 11:20)

> Inner Being - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart…" (Proverbs 3:5)

"Give me your heart" is Proverb's version of the Greatest Commandment. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with

all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). The path of wisdom that Simple is invited on begins with handing his heart, soul, and mind into the control and direction of the Lord. Walking that path of obedience is fundamentally a matter of the heart and its desires. Moses, recording the words of God, writes "Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever" (Deuteronomy 5:29).

GUARD YOUR MOUTH



In the "My Son" talk of Proverbs chapter 4, the father tells his son, "Watch your mouth" or "Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?" Those are my paraphrases. I distinctly remember the last time my Mom had me eat soap. Growing up if you had mouth issues, meaning you said a bad word, sassed, or disrespectfully argued, you would be walked to the bathroom, handed a bar of soap, and told to take a bite. I recall being so frustrated by my punishment (I can't remember what I said) that I took a gigantic bite of soap. My gracious mother, shocked by the size of my soap snack, instantly had me spit the soap out.

What comes out of our mouths is indicative of what is happening in our heart. The mouth is essentially the canary in the mine. Miners would have birds as an early detection system of poisonous gases. When wicked things like gossip, slander, crass joking, and curses start coming out of our mouth, it doesn't matter how pure we convince ourselves that our heart is, there is real trouble. Jesus taught us that the mouth is a window into the heart. "What comes out of the mouth," Jesus said, "proceeds from the heart" (Matthew 15:18). Paul's teaching to speak only holy things was not a legalistic commandment, but an understanding that speech always proceeds from the heart. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths," Paul

writes in Ephesians 4:29. It is an admonition to guard our hearts and watch out for our mouths.

GUARD YOUR EYES

The father of Proverbs chapter 4 encourages his son to choose the way of righteousness instead of the way of the wicked. He challenges him to guard his heart, to watch his words, and fix his eyes forward. “Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you” (Proverbs 4:25). King David, Solomon’s father, wrote, “I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless” (Psalm 101:3). The New Living Translation reads, “I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar.” We may have the best of intentions for staying on wisdom’s way, but when our eyes spot something attractive, instantly our sinful hearts, and our flesh engages, then our feet begin racing towards catastrophe. We must fix our eyes on true, holy, and righteous things. The prophet Isaiah writes, “I have set my face like a flint” (Isaiah 50:7). Job, the suffering servant, while in terrible pain, declares, “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1). It’s so simple but needs to be stated. It is really hard to walk in one direction while looking somewhere else. We cannot expect to stay on “the path of righteousness” while our eyes are fixed on the supposed pleasures of this world. We must guard our eyes, fixing them on Christ.

CONCLUSION

In 2 Kings chapter 18, the prophet Elijah is set for a showdown of sorts. He has challenged the prophets of the false god Baal to a test. Elijah and these false prophets will both build altars with sacrifices. They will then pray to their deities and whichever one answers with fire from Heaven will be confirmed as the true God and his prophet(s) as legitimate. Elijah invites the nation of Israel to witness this spectacle.

He begins with a question, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” (2 Kings 18:21). The choice was really simple, was it God or Baal? Elijah, like the leader Joshua before him, was demanding a choice (See Joshua 24:14-15). It was time for a decision. It was time to commit. No more being Simple.

The choice lies before each of us, a decision. It’s time to leave the apathy of Simple-town. We should have made a decision a long time ago, but we have lingered in Simple-town way past our teenage years. What path will we take? Will we journey through the comfortable wide gate with its gentle downhill sloping path to Hell? Or we will walk through the narrow gate of repentance and belief, bowing in “the fear of the Lord” and be saved? Will we then walk the narrow road, the way of wisdom and righteousness? The choice is yours. Nobody can make it for you. Simple one, you must choose.



Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

"How long, Oh Simple ones, will you love being simple?" Wait a minute, did the Bible just call us dumb? Stupid? Ignorant? No. But yes? It's asking us how long we will ignore wisdom. The entire book of Proverbs is urging us to long for wisdom, to stop being ignorant, and to have common sense. We have the choice to stay simple or move forward to wisdom. You are all young, and as Dad said, at the starting line, Which will you choose? Time is ticking...

I remember when I was in high school. I knew about the things of the Lord. But I wanted to live in both lands. The land of the simple and the land of wisdom. I'd sit and listen to sermon after sermon, week after week. But then go about my life the other six days of the week living the simple life. The simple life was easy, I was familiar with it, it didn't require much of me (or so I thought). Wisdom meant I was going to have to commit to the Lord fully and His ways, which also meant a lot needed to change. I had people in my life that urged me to stop ignoring wisdom but I wouldn't yield. I'm thankful for the day that I was sitting in our Waterford auditorium up in the balcony all by myself and it was like the Lord reached down and smacked me upside the head and said, "Hey wake up you Simple One. Today is the day you move on. Today is the day you no longer get to stay in Simple Land. Wisdom is beckoning." And by a miracle of the Lord, I relented. That was the day I started my journey on to wisdom. I had been visiting Folly

and was getting closer and closer to becoming a permanent resident. I was 17 years old and my life was changed forever. Was I saved before and just not living a very fruitful life? I don't know. But what I do know is that the Lord is patient and that I am His. We read in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but everyone to come to repentance." (I couldn't help write a book without getting a verse of Peter's in!) Moving towards wisdom is intimidating. You have people all around you that have been there longer than you have. They will know more than you. It can be scary. But just know what the Lord has called you to, He will be with you every step of the way.



Leaving the land of the simple and choosing Wisdom is more than just information. Our world is full of information and knowledge. Your generation has more information thrown at them than ever before and more degrees that follow their last names. Yet we hear people say, "common sense isn't very common anymore." Where is the breakdown? How can we have so much knowledge yet no common sense? Because common sense comes from the Lord. Proverbs is a book of common sense, a book of wisdom...a practical guide to life. I love every minute of this book because as you guys know, I am a very practical person. Wisdom is having knowledge and knowing what to do with it. I'm sure you remember learning that definition in your kids' class at church. Have you ever met people that are pretty smart but make really bad decisions? They lack wisdom. Lord knows

I've made my fair share of bad decisions and I need all of the wisdom that He will give.

We need wisdom to function in everyday life. When I want to cuss and scream at a person driving 40mph when the speed limit is 55mph and I can't pass them. Wisdom comes and says, that's not the best idea. Calm down crazy lady and reminds me of all you kids in the back seat! Simple says, floor it and pass her in your 2014 minivan with 250,000 miles on it. Or when I want to eat an entire bag of BBQ chips, wisdom comes and says, hey the last time you did that, you regretted your life choices. Simple comes and says, nah it wasn't so bad. We are always given the choice to choose, wisdom or simple.

I hope that you will start today asking the Lord for wisdom. As James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). That way you choose to grow and not stay simple. Growth hurts. It's like when you guys have gone through different growth spurts and have pain in your legs. It's uncomfortable. I usually get you some Motrin and stick you back in bed. But this type of growth you have to choose. With your growth spurts, you have no choice. So in essence you are choosing a little pain, a little discomfort. But in the end, it is totally worth the struggle and uncomfortableness.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

When was a time in your life you got off course? What was it that derailed you?

Describe a time in your life where sin enslaved you and kept you from rest?

As you walk with Christ, what is something that His light (His glory) has revealed for you? About you?

What is your greatest area of temptation?

What are ways that you need to be more vigilant in guarding your heart? Eyes?

What does your mouth say about your heart?

Have you made the choice to leave Simple-town? When?





7.

House of Lady Wisdom

My favorite one-day road trip is to a little town in Michigan called Frankenmuth. I grew up going there and now, spontaneously, I will try to talk my kids and mostly my wife into driving roughly an hour to this quaint little town. My wife is Greek, so she grew up making the hour drive south to Greektown in downtown Detroit and eating at Pegasus. Growing up, my family regularly made the drive north. The town was founded by German immigrants in the 1800s. It's a celebration of their German heritage under the cover of a well-designed tourist trap. There are gift shops, fudge shops, toy stores, waterparks, candy shops, hotels, the world's largest Christmas store called Bronner's, and tons of other stuff. There is lots of stuff! One of my best friends hates it there. He says it's overrated, and he's right. But I have emotional, nostalgic recollections and memories there, so I love it.



One road drives through Frankenmuth and if you've never been there (or if you have), just around the curve from Bronner's and over the bridge, you notice two very large restaurants, extremely close to the road, and right across the street from each other. On the west side of the road is Zehnder's, a beautiful white building that is the original site of the "famous chicken dinners." While across the street is Bavarian Inn, which looks, at least to my uncultured self, more German than Zehnder's. I've eaten at both places more times than I can count. The menus are nearly identical: chicken noodle soup, famous fried chicken, standard Thanksgiving dishes like mashed potatoes, gravy, etc., and then magic noodles. I don't even know if the noodles are German, but they are fabulous. Zehnder's was founded and run by the Zehnder family. According to Judy Zehnder, granddaughter of the founder and I would assume a grandmother herself now, when the family across the street wanted to sell, the Zehnder family decided to buy a second restaurant. So, until the 1980s, the Zehnder family actually owned and operated both restaurants. Today they are owned by cousins.[74]

In Frankenmuth, I've always based the decision of which place to choose, Zehnder's or Bavarian Inn, on how long the wait is and how nostalgic I'm feeling. If one is super busy, the other is right across the street, probably around a hundred feet away. That's how I envision the two houses presented by Solomon in Proverbs: directly across the street from each other and impossible to see one without seeing the other.

The long introduction of the book of Proverbs that begins in chapter one comes to an end in chapter 9. We recognize that included in the introduction is both the "Praise of wisdom"[75] and the warning of choosing the path of the fool. As we read, we come to "the crossroads of Proverbs 9."[76] Beyond this chapter are the real proverbs of Proverbs. But before the proverbs can begin, the reader must choose a direction, a heading. Proverbs is a sort of choose your own adventure book. We can choose the house that Wisdom owns and operates or the frat-house of Folly. Two houses and hostesses each inviting, enticing, and wooing travelers to stop in and stay awhile. In these next two chapters, we are going to look at these two very different houses. Unlike Frankenmuth where the menus, hosts, and setting are pretty similar, these two houses couldn't be more different.

> "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' To him who lacks sense she says, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.'" (Proverbs 9:1-6)

First is the House of Lady Wisdom. Now before we go any further, we need to recognize that Wisdom is a fictional, literary personification.

She isn't real. Don't take this passage of Scripture further than the author intended. Throughout the centuries, many have suffered devastating spiritual consequences as a result. Wisdom is a fictional character created to help us learn truth and grasp challenging lessons. She isn't an angel, Greek goddess, or feminine manifestation of God. Once we settle those fundamental truths, we can enjoy the poetry of Proverbs and truly engage with Lady Wisdom.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH WISDOM



We met Wisdom back in Proverbs chapter 1 but chapter 8 is the more thorough profile of Lady Wisdom. "Now is wisdom's turn to exhibit her attractions – in the open, not lurking in secret."[77] (See Proverbs 7:12 for the contrast with a lurking predator.) Wisdom is stunningly beautiful, but not in a scandalous, sensual way. Sadly, many fools with just a quick glance deem Wisdom boring and forgettable, yet she is a priceless beauty. The imagery of Proverbs chapter 8 has an undercurrent of a love story. It's an invitation to fall in love with Wisdom. She says, "I love those who love me" (Proverbs 8:17). It's a romance, a heartfelt pursuit. Not to be too silly, but it's a heart-pounding, weak in the knees, I can't live a minute without her, I can't wait to see her passionate desire. It's "going out of our usual way"[78] to run into her. I remember when Jen and I fell in love, I would do anything to run into her, going way out of my normal way or routine just to see her. In this romance with Lady Wisdom, authors go as far to even suggest relating to wisdom as a lover,[79] intimate partner,[80] and they paint the picture of taking a romantic walk with her.[81] In the story of Solomon's request for wisdom, he is clearly captivated by the beauty of Wisdom. She outshines the allure of power or money or even long life. His choice of wisdom actually resulted in securing both power and wealth.

"Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding." (Proverbs 3:13)

"She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her." (Proverbs 3:15)

"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her." (Proverbs 4:7-8)

"[Wisdom] is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver." (Proverbs 8:19)

"There is gold and abundance of costly stones, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel." (Proverbs 20:15)

"Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding." (Proverbs 23:23)

Nearly the entirety of chapter 8 is Wisdom's "introduction" and speech in praise of herself. Wisdom declares her value, by explaining that she is from God. She says, "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work…when there were no depths I was brought forth" (Proverbs 8:22, 24). Wisdom was there when the world was made (Proverbs 8:22-29), so she knows how things work. Better said, she knows how things are supposed to work. "The metaphor [possessed me or] 'brought me forth' signifies that Solomon's inspired wisdom comes from God's essential being; it is a revelation that has an organic connection with God's very nature and being, unlike the rest of creation that came into existence outside of him and independent from his being."[82] To reject Wisdom then is to reject the heart and mind of God. To reject Wisdom is to reject the key necessity of life. If God didn't or couldn't create the world apart from Wisdom, how

can we live one second without it?[83] This incredible, priceless beauty invites us to a feast at her house.

WISDOM'S PARTY

The house that Lady Wisdom built is described as having "seven pillars" (Proverbs 9:1) that she hewed. What a woman! The "seven supporting pillars points to an exceptionally large, grand, and stately structure where numerous guests are expected."[84] She is not only a skilled carpenter, contractor, and builder, she's also an exceptional hostess. She has prepared a feast, a party. "She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table" (Proverbs 9:2). She sends out the invitations (Proverbs 8:3) to the simple and to those who lack sense. It's a very public invitation (Proverbs 8:3). There is nothing exclusive about her guest list. She invites everyone. There can be a wait at the House of Wisdom. Just knock on the door and wait patiently. Across the street, Folly offers instant gratification that leads to death. Wisdom offers gratification, after a wait, that leads to life everlasting. In Proverbs 8:34 (NLT), Wisdom gives the beatitude of, "Joyful are those who listen to me, watching for me daily at my gates, waiting for me outside my home!" This isn't a creeper. Remember, this is LOVE! Waiting is a joy, not an annoyance when you are in love.



I was once asked to speak at an event for young adults. Just a quick side note, I'm a terrible guest speaker. And for hipster, young adults, it's a struggle, since I've never been cool a day in my life. I had what I thought was a brilliant illustration for this point of waiting, not just about sex, but waiting on God. So I brought in a grill and started grilling hot dogs and a steak. The idea was that we settle for hot dogs, which cook quickly, rather than waiting patiently for the steak that God is marinating and perfectly preparing for us. The illustration made sense to me, but what didn't work was that I'm also a terrible

cook. So rather than serving to illustrate the appeal of God, most people sitting there either couldn't figure out why I was grilling, or they wanted a hot dog. Actually, I think some of them lost their appetite altogether. You might realize I struggle with illustrations, especially seeing that this is my second food-related illustration in one chapter. Anyway, the point still stands. We don't like to wait; we want what we want now. We demand instant gratification. Wisdom often makes us wait. Ok, let's get back to Wisdom's party.

Some authors see this as a feast to celebrate the completion of Lady Wisdom's home.[85] But this is no stuffy, boring dinner "party." This isn't a church social or lecture. This is a real celebration! There is music and dancing[86] (Luke 15:25). Proverbs 8:31 says of Wisdom, that she is found "rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the children of man." The image of Wisdom at creation, and I would add in her house as well, is the "fullness of joy" and "pleasures forevermore!" (Psalm 16:11). Derek Kidner writes, "Wisdom is the spring of joy, for joy breaks out whenever and wherever the Creator's wisdom is exercised."[87] What a party! However, this is not a meaningless or hollow time; Wisdom is throwing a bash to celebrate God's creation, His goodness, and His character. Wisdom and her guests are worshipping! Like King David dancing before the Lord with reckless abandonment (2 Samuel 6), Wisdom invites us to a limitless feast of meat and wine with the best music ever and the most joyous dancing, all in her exquisite mansion. This sounds, sadly, unchristian to most, but this is the celebration at the House of Wisdom. If you're a Baptist, you might be waiting for the catch or the fine print! There isn't a catch or any fine print to read. Wisdom is throwing a party.

The feast of meat, bread, and wine is Solomon's poetic way of elevating our view of Wisdom's teaching. Her teaching isn't junk food. It is substantial and fit for royalty.

> "Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her."
> (Proverbs 8:10-11)

> "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death." (Proverbs 13:14)

JESUS IS WISDOM



The book of Hebrews begins, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets" (Hebrews 1:1). The "literary personification"[88] or fictional, literary character Wisdom, is one of the "diverse manners" (KJV) or "many ways" God has spoken to us and revealed Himself to mankind. Wisdom personified is the "revelation of God."[89] Wisdom only comes from God. Throughout Scripture and more specifically Proverbs, wisdom serves as a typology, that is to say, something or someone is like or similar to or directs us to someone else. Wisdom is a type of Christ, similar and like Christ, and ultimately points us to Christ. Hebrews chapter 1 continues, "…in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:2-3). The Apostle Paul writes to the philosophically and worldly-wisdom obsessed Corinthian church, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God…And because of him you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). Jesus is the wisdom of God. He is from God. He is the revelation of God in the flesh. "The personifying of wisdom, far from overshooting the literal truth, was a preparation for its full statement, since the agent of creation was no mere activity of God, but the Son, His eternal Word, Wisdom, and Power."[90]

Over the centuries people have wrestled with this feminine typology for Christ. Others have run with this type to turn God into a she or other twisted teachings. No, this isn't transgendered Jesus in Proverbs chapter 8. Again, this isn't a feminine side of God. This is Old Testament wisdom literature. It's poetry. Saying this is the feminine side of Jesus because the New Testament writers see similarities or typology in this passage, takes poetry and typology beyond their purposes. John the Baptist identifies Jesus as "the lamb of God," which is an Old Testament type. John the Baptist isn't saying Jesus was part man and part lamb. Or the Apostle John in Revelation, describing Jesus with the lion of the tribe of Judah, isn't saying Jesus is part lion. If you're keeping track, this line of reasoning could leave us with a Jesus that is part man, part woman, lion, lamb, and so on. Really quickly, things get weird. This nonsense takes the meaning of Proverbs chapter 8 beyond its intended purpose. Nor is Proverbs chapter 8 the creation of Jesus. John 1:1 debunks that heresy, "In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jehovah's Witnesses and others will try to craftily use Proverbs to teach that Jesus was created. Rather than declaring "Christ…the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24), they misuse and abuse the wisdom passage. Instead of embracing Wisdom, they spread doctrinal foolishness. They live and invite others to a religious House of Folly.

JESUS' PARTY

Like Lady Wisdom, Jesus has a house, prepares a feast, sends out invitations, and hosts a celebration. As the Simple, we must decide whether to knock on the door and accept His invitation or walk across the street to Folly's house.

On the night that He would be betrayed, Jesus explained to the disciples "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so,

would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:2). "The picture is…of a father building additional rooms onto his house for his sons and their families, as was often done in Israel."[91] Like Lady Wisdom, Jesus is building a house. And not a small house, "a big, big house."[92] William Barclay writes, "An earthly house becomes overcrowded; an earthly inn must turn away the weary traveler because its accommodation is exhausted. It is not so with our Father's house, for Heaven is as wide as the heart of God, and in Heaven there is room for all."[93] Lady Wisdom's fictional house has seven pillars. The number seven is not used to incite fanciful numeric interpretations. Its main purpose is to serve as a typology of a much grander, eternal home. We, as the children of God, are welcomed into this place of refuge and rest. Proverbs 14:26 promises, "In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge." This is the house of Wisdom, the House of the Lord, that all the faithful through the ages will gather in. Jesus said, "Many will come from the east and west to recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11).



The Father has a spectacular house that Jesus Christ has built for us. Not only is the house incredible, the more poetic side of David celebrated that the Lord has "prepare[d] a feast" and "my cup overflows with blessings" (Psalm 23:5, NLT). And there is plenty of space at the table![94] The meal is two courses. It's called the Lord's Supper. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, about this feast.

> "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body; which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"
> (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Christ invites us to a meal, where the food is his body and blood. This isn't cannibalism. Contrary to what some teach, Jesus isn't giving His literal body and blood for food. In John chapter 4, Jesus likens Himself to "living water" (John 4:10), and then in John 6:51, He calls Himself "the living bread." The teaching is that who Jesus is and what He offers is what our souls truly crave and long for. He is the feast that our souls "hunger and thirst for" (Matthew 5:6). He gives us Himself, because He alone satisfies.

> "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42:1-2)
>
> "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you." (Psalm 63:1)
>
> "For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things." (Psalm 107:9)
>
> "My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times." (Psalm 119:20)
>
> "My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you." (Isaiah 26:9)
>
> "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:1-2)

> "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." (Revelation 22:17)

Typology has its limits and we have to handle Scripture with care, but notice in Proverbs chapter 8, a slaughter (verse 2), mixed wine (verse 2), women crying out (verse 3), fools (verse 4), more bread, and wine, and an invitation to live. That is the cross and the resurrection. Jesus was ruthlessly slaughtered on Golgotha and offered wine mixed with gall (Matthew 27:34). As He carried His cross, Jesus spoke to the faithful women who followed Him. "Daughters of Jerusalem," He said, "do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28). Luke records the fools: the thieves, the religious leaders, and the soldiers, who rejected Christ, the embodied wisdom of God. His body was broken (the bread) and His blood was spilled (the wine). Through it all, the Gospel message rang out: "whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). True life, real living, could only be found through the wisdom of God at the cross.



As with Wisdom, the feast that Jesus offers is Himself and His way of life. We can understand that, as His teaching or as His words. The writers of the New Testament often use the title or phrase "Word of God" interchangeably as either a title of Christ or Scripture (example – Hebrews 4:12). Context helps us understand what they mean. The fact that they use "Word of God" for both Jesus and Scripture is not because they are the exact same thing. The Bible currently sitting in front of me isn't Jesus on my desk, nor is Jesus a living book just walking around. That's a weird image. Apparently, with some whacked interpretation, Jesus can be part man, woman, lion, lamb, bread, wine, and now book. And…he's totally edible? Gross. The reason the writers of the New Testament do this is because both

Jesus and the Scripture are the revelation of God. Some have explained it as "the living Word" and "the written Word." Both are the wisdom and the revelation of God.

> "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts." (Jeremiah 15:16)

> "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." (Psalm 19:7-8)

> "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6)

> "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar." (Proverbs 30:5-6)

In Jesus' defense against the temptations of the devil, the Lord quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. "It is written," Jesus replies, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus was responding to a specific temptation to miraculously satisfy His physical hunger and prove His son-ship. He chose instead the feast of Wisdom rather than fill His stomach with Folly's stolen bread (Proverbs 9:17 and a hint to the next chapter). The words of God were like food, like sustenance to Jesus. They sustained Him. The same is true for us. Christ has laid out a feast unlike any other for us. "The problem for us is, He is willing to tell us hard things. He does not flatter us. He can be blunt…Sometimes His words come with a bite, and we have to swallow hard, but there is not bitter aftertaste."[95] That's the food in God's house.

THE INVITATION

After the house is finished, the feast prepared, and the table has been set, the invitation goes out: "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" (Proverbs 9:4). Jesus tells a parable (story) that is remarkably similar to the beginning of Proverbs chapter 9. Jesus, the master storyteller begins:

> "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" (Luke 14:16-24)



People were invited to a great banquet, but found every excuse possible to avoid going. Like the servants in Jesus' story, Wisdom and her "young women" (Proverbs 9:3) issue their invitations in highly visible places, at crossroads, gates, and the entrance to the city. Only a fool would ignore this invitation. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God laments, "When I spoke to you persistently you did

not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer" (Jeremiah 7:13).

Jesus told that great parable in response to a man who assumed, without any question, that he would be part of the Kingdom of Heaven. The quest for Wisdom and entrance into the House of Wisdom is synonymous with the journey into the Kingdom of God. If you miss everything else in this entire book, do not miss how to be certain that you will live eternally in the Kingdom of Heaven. The host in Jesus' story longs to see his house filled. That is the heart of God. He welcomes into His royal hall all who knock. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). When we lack wisdom, we come to Christ, not knowing everything or really anything, but realizing He knows everything. We petition the divine for wisdom, recognizing Him as the source. We realize He is not just another fountain of wisdom, but He alone is God's wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Each of us must admit "…you can have Him, not by heroic intellectual pursuit but by humbly admitting the truth – you are a fool who needs a Sage."[96] Seeking for wisdom is seeking for God's truth. Jesus is the human embodiment of that truth, the revelation of God.

We must choose to check in at the House of Wisdom. Humbly ask for directions from Wisdom's messengers, quickly and earnestly seek Wisdom's house, and once you get there knock on the door. Just wait patiently, the host's party is worth the wait. "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat" (Matthew 5:6, The Message).

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

Do you remember that one time I brought home a milk cow? Or the time we bought a bull? Your Dad always puts up with my crazy ideas. Girls, free piece of advice...find yourself a man that will help make your outlandish dreams come true. And if not help, at least tolerate. Ha!

One reason we got Penny was so I could continue teaching you about real food. There is nothing like making chocolate milk with her raw milk, or butter. Ooooo don't forget yogurt and coffee creamer. I can't wait to try ice cream when she has another calf. I am always trying to educate you on good eating habits. How many times have we had the talk about good, whole foods compared to "food-like substances!" I bust my butt making sure you get good whole foods, raw milk, homemade bread, foods we grow and can. But occasionally I have to let you try the "food-like substances", like pop tarts, Oreos, McDonald's, Coke, Twinkies, etc... I remember when Dad took Mavis to the gas station and he came home horrified that she didn't know what a Twinkie was. I was rather proud that she didn't. He told her to go grab one, she went to take the entire box! That's when I realized, she doesn't really spend a whole lotta time on the inside of a gas station. He instructed her to grab just one. I love Dad's comparison of the Lord/Wisdom being those good whole foods at a major feast. They are nourishing to your body, they feed you, sustain you and fill you. The Lord nourishes us, feeds us, sustains and fills



us. The world offers us "food-like substances'" It's like the cereal you guys always want to eat on Sunday mornings and then in between gatherings you always complain about how hungry you are. It doesn't fill you. It doesn't sustain you. You're hungry, sugar crashing, and just plain feel like crap. What the world is serving up is, cheap, empty and worthless. They are no substitute for the real thing. There is no substitute for the Lord or for Wisdom in your life. Whenever you leave me, I always remind you to make wise choices. I can't make them for you. Job 32:8-9 says, "But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right." Wisdom is not just for the old, it is for you, for me, it is for all who seek it from the Lord.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What's your favorite day trip?

What's the best hotel, motel, B&B, lodge, etc. that you've ever stayed at?

What made it great?

In your imagination, how do you see the House of Wisdom?

How do you picture Lady Wisdom?

Do you value wisdom? Are there things you value more?

How is Wisdom's party different than you imagined? Are you surprised by Psalm 16:11?

How do you understand Christ as "the wisdom of God?"

Are you regularly eating at Christ's banquet table? Communing with Him and the Church?

Have you been feasting on the bread of the Word of God? Or have you been avoiding bread (the Bible)?

Are you starving for God's truth? See Matthew 5:6.





8.

Folly and Her House of Fools

As Moses came to the end of his life and ministry, he put before the people of God two very clear and distinct choices. They had left Egypt through the amazing, liberating miracles of God but ended up rejecting the Promised Land and wandering through the desert for 40 terrible years. Funeral after funeral of those who rejected God's promise filled decade after decade of this brutal death march. As the children of Israel came nearer to the end of their punishing journey through the desert, they prepared to enter the Promised Land. Moses would not lead the people into this land, so Deuteronomy serves as his final words. It is his last sermon, his final challenge, and his goodbye. This aged and now departing leader realizes that people are going to be tempted on all sides, so standing at the crossroads, he demands that the people choose. "See," Moses says, "I have set before you today life and good, death and evil" (Deuteronomy 30:15). One path, one house was life and good, joy and peace that could be found in obeying the commandments of the Lord. But another path, another house essentially across the street from Wisdom, was foolishness, idolatry, the embrace of pagan cultures, and eventually judgment. Moses calls this house, this way, "death and evil." Through his words and example, Moses longs for the people to "dwell in the house of Wisdom forever" (slight paraphrase of Psalm 23:6). He presented the options; the choice was theirs.



As we journey down the road of life, we have two places to stop in, lay our head, and make our home. Wisdom has a house, where she welcomes all "the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). There the weary traveler finds a great feast prepared, symbolic of life, and a completely beautiful way of thinking and living. However, the teacher of Proverbs also tells of another, very different house. It's a completely foreign way of "living" compared to the *true* life found at Wisdom's house. It's the House of Fools. In the way that Proverbs personifies Wisdom (Proverbs 8-9:6), it does the same for foolishness. Her name is Folly. Like Wisdom, she too has built a house. The imagery is two houses

essentially across the street from each other.[97] They are rivals[98] for the "business" of the simple traveler.

FOLLY

The door at the House of Fools is always opened and standing at that door is Folly "…dressed as a prostitute…" (Proverbs 7:10). She is loud (Proverbs 7:11; 9:13), seductive (Proverbs 9:13), and calls out to the Simple. She welcomes the simple with a kiss. She makes big promises, but her appeal is only to the sinful flesh. This stop on the journey is self-indulgent. She presents herself and her house as harmless, but Proverbs reveals that it leads straight to Hell (Proverbs 2:18-19; 6:32; 7:22-23, 26-27). Towards the close of the classic rock song *"Hotel California,"* the Eagles sing the haunting lyric, *"You can check-out any time you like, but you can never leave."* That is the House of Fools with its sensual hostess.

> "The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' And to him who lacks sense she says, 'Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol." (Proverbs 9:13-18)

The inviting message from Wisdom and Folly are identical, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" Folly is mocking the voice the Wisdom.[99] She's the leader of the group called the Scoffers. By copying the message of wisdom, she sounds safe and sounds wise. But Wisdom is her nemesis,[100] her competitor. Folly, singles out the simple, the fool. Like Satan in 1 Peter 5:8, the enemy is a roaring lion, prowling around looking for someone to devour. She speaks directly "to him who lacks sense" (Proverbs 9:16).

And she's loud (Proverbs 9:13), obnoxious.[101] It's hard to ignore her because she's enticing, seductive (Proverbs 9:13), and provocative. She is appealing to our sinful flesh, which according to Galatians chapter 5 craves, among many things, "…sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality…drunkenness, orgies, and things like these" (Galatians 5:19-21). Folly offers all of these and more. She runs a funhouse…a frat house. Folly's party seems like it will never stop. But she's dumb, a leader of fools, and a fool herself (Proverbs 9:13). Paul Koptak writes, "We can understand why Wisdom does not get as many takers as we might imagine. Wisdom demands a decision to grow, a change of direction, whereas Folly doesn't demand anything."[102] That's because Folly is cheap and easy, sloppily sitting "at the door of her house" (Proverbs 9:14).



"A fool flaunts his folly." (Proverbs 13:16)

"The simple inherit folly." (Proverbs 14:18)

"The folly of fools brings folly." (Proverbs 14:24)

"Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense." (Proverbs 15:21)

"Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly." (Proverbs 17:12)

"Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." (Proverbs 26:4-5)

"Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly." (Proverbs 26:11)

> "Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him." (Proverbs 27:22)

My family and I love *"The Andy Griffith Show,"* particularly Deputy Barney Fife, played by Don Knotts (or Don Con-not-t-t-sss as my youngest daughter says when his name comes on the screen). We own the entire series (we are still DVD people) and have watched every episode, some too many times. Throughout the series a pair of girls keep showing up, they are affectionately called "The Fun Girls." One of the girls has the most hilarious and ridiculous laugh and calls Barney, Bernie. Her friend and partner in crime has a comically low voice and will semi-seductively look at Andy and say, "Hello, Doll." They are always ready for a good time. They distract Andy and Barney from work, from their steady girls, and are constantly causing a public nuisance. They are the embodiment of Folly.

Folly is everywhere. When you try to go "straight on [your] way" (Proverbs 9:15), Folly is close by. This echoes God's loving counsel to Cain in Genesis chapter 4 where God says, "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7). Folly is crouching at and calling from the door. She is beckoning the simple along with young and old fools to stop by for a good time. Not only does Folly copy Wisdom's message, but she copies Wisdom's methods as well. Like Lady Wisdom, Folly "takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by" (Proverbs 9:14-15). She is broadcasting her message from a very visible place, while at the same time mocking Wisdom and her guests/students. The basic message is that if you want to find Folly and party at the House of Fools, you won't have to look very hard. Her house is dark, but the path leading there is well-worn.

FOLLY'S "FEAST"

While Wisdom offers a lavish banquet, Folly in an attempt to compete, offers her guests/students a meal. Sure, both houses offer meals, but after examining the menus there are some big differences. Wisdom offers meat and wine. Folly offers "Stolen water…and bread" (Proverbs 9:17). Compared to the incredible menu at the house of Wisdom, Folly offers only stolen "goods." Folly's "feast" comes with a bitter aftertaste and will make you sick. Hebrews chapter 11 calls it "…the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25).



> "The mouths of fools feed on folly." (Proverbs 15:14)
>
> "Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel." (Proverbs 20:17)
>
> "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20)

In C.S. Lewis's *"Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,"* young Edmund is enticed by the White Witch. "What would you like best to eat?" she asks Edmund. The young boy requests Turkish Delight. She magically fulfills his request and Edmund begins eating. Lewis writes, "Each piece was sweet and light to the very center and Edmund had never tasted anything more delicious. He was quite warm now, and very comfortable." Later on, having eaten several pounds of Turkish Delight, "Edmund was already feeling uncomfortable from having eaten too many sweets, and when he heard that the Lady he had made friends with was a dangerous witch he felt even more uncomfortable. But he still wanted to taste that Turkish Delight again more than he wanted anything else."[103] That taste enslaved Edmund to the White Witch, causing

him to abandon and betray his brother and sisters. The cheap, easy feast that Folly offers does the same. There is a waiting, a patience taught at the house of Wisdom. Folly offers instant gratification at the House of Fools.

> "…therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices." (Proverbs 1:31)

> "For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence." (Proverbs 4:17)

We have so rejected Wisdom and embraced Folly that her bread and water, which is symbolic of her teaching, is our steady, daily diet. We believe the lie that something stolen, tainted by the excitement and temporal thrill of sin, must be far greater and more fun than what is offered at the House of Wisdom. [104]

> "…the folly of fools is deceiving." (Proverbs 14:8)

> "…the instruction of fools is folly." (Proverbs 16:22)

What looks and sounds like a harmless, no-strings-attached offer is really a death trap. It's a dead end. It's the House of the Dead. Once the Simple, lured by the seductive speech, clothing (or lack thereof), and indecent proposal of Folly, crosses the threshold of her house, he becomes a dead man walking. You could call him the walking dead. "He does not know," Proverbs says, "that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol" (Proverbs 9:18). "Folly's playmates die a sugarcoated death before they even know what hit them."[105]

> "The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He *dies* for lack of discipline, and

> because of his great folly he is led astray."
> (Proverbs 5:22-23) (Italics added for emphasis.)

Disaster is imminent for Folly and the House of Fools. It's a morgue, a spiritual cemetery. Yet so often the simple convince themselves that they'll only stay for a while and that they can leave (stop) anytime they want. We convince ourselves that we will be the exception and that we'll escape just in time. But from the moment we enter the house of Folly, we die. Our gifting, passion, laughter, and the person God created us to be begins a slow, painful death. Our sensitivity to God, His truth, and the needs of others is choked to death by sin. We think we are living it up, but we are slowly dying. Tragically, a long line of dead fools thought they could escape too. Folly simply laughs and keeps plying her trade as the bodies of fools stack up. Folly runs a house of horrors.



A COMING STORM

In Mathew chapter 7, Jesus concludes what we call The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Like Moses and personified Wisdom in Proverbs, Jesus calls for a decision. The Lord lays out the distinct choices between wisdom and folly, obedience and disobedience. Like Proverbs chapter 9, He uses the illustration of two houses.

> "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:24-27)

This wasn't so much about the often intangible spiritual idea of building your life on Christ. This was about obedience to His teaching, which is what a life built on Christ really looks like. Jesus says people who hear all these words but walk away unchanged are foolish. They've decided to seek shelter with Folly in her house of fools. Whereas those who hear these words and obey them are given shelter in the House of Wisdom. There is a foolish builder and wise builder, a house of Fools and a house of Wisdom.

The truth for both houses is that a storm is coming. Both will be tested by pounding rain, floods, and whirling wind. The difference between these two houses ultimately came down to the choice of foundation. One was built on sand, while the other was firmly founded on the rock. The storms of life will be faced by everyone. Earlier in the same sermon, Jesus says, "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 9:11, "…time and chance happen to them all." Wind and rain are inevitable. Trials and difficulties are part of every person's life. Proverbs warns, "When the storms of life come, the wicked are whirled away, but the godly have a lasting foundation" (Proverbs 10:25, NLT).

However, the storm that Jesus is speaking of is not simply the difficulties and trials of life. He is warning of the coming storm of God's judgment, the ultimate trial before the supreme Judge. Every house, which is symbolic of every person, must face the storm. In Proverbs chapter 1, God's Word, speaking as Wisdom, gives warning to the foolish and promises to the wise.

> "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. Because

> I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster." (Proverbs 1:22-33)



The House of Fools are those who have rejected the authority of God's Word. They have rejected Christ's sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary and His triumphant resurrection. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1), rejects the existence of sin, and approves rebellion against God's righteous standards (Romans 1:32). Among a long list of characteristics of fallen man, the Apostle Paul writes, "They are…foolish" (Romans 1:29, 31). By rejecting the Gospel, they have embraced the whirlwind of destruction that is God's eternal judgment of Hell. Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "For as were the days of Noah…before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:37-39). All the fools gathered in the house of Folly are being told everything is ok and they'll be just fine. The drunkenness, laughter, and partying continue on, but disaster is looming.

> "The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand." (Proverbs 12:7)

> "The Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming." (Psalm 37:13)

The House of Lady wisdom is the Gospel. It is the eternal hope of listening to the words of Jesus and building our life on the foundation of faithful obedience to His commands. A life built in fearful obedience to Jesus is the house that stands firm in the face of wind, rain, and floods. It is a life of confidence in the eternal promises of the Lord. The feast at the House of Lady Wisdom can be seen as the Fruit of the Spirit, the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the Lord's Supper, where the life of Jesus becomes our food. His teaching becomes our "daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). With great assurance, David wrote, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). The House of Wisdom stands eternally firm and all who dwell there are safe.

Which house do you live in? If you realize at this moment that you live life with Folly in her House of Fools, there is hope! Life may feel hopeless, but God sent Christ on a divine mission to rescue foolish sinners. Paul writes:

> "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. [Sounds like Folly and her house of Fools] But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

> whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:3-7)

God has made a way through the death and resurrection of Jesus for us to escape the death chamber that is Folly's house. You may "live" and have "lived" for a long time with Folly, but Jesus can rescue. "For everyone," the Bible declares, "who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).



Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

No responsibility, freedom to do what you want when you want, to be whoever you want to be that day, reckless and free. It's kind of tiring trying to do right all of the time. Folly, doesn't that sound fun? It sounds fun to me. Lies, lies, lies, more lies from Satan. Like Dad said, Folly looks enticing, she is so inviting. She will make you feel special. Folly reminds me of the part in "Little Mermaid" when Ursula is singing "Poor Unfortunate Souls" and all of those shriveled up souls are sitting at the bottom of the ocean, enslaved to her, held captive, useless. Those mermaids didn't think Ursula was dangerous, after all, she was just helping them get what they thought they wanted. Remember what Proverbs 28:26 says, "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool." In the end, it cost them their life. This isn't something you can play around with. This isn't the ocean where you can just dip your toe in. You dip your toe in and it's going to suck all of you right in. (I can't believe I used a "Little Mermaid" reference; my older ones are going to laugh since I didn't let them watch it when they were little.)

I have to remember to draw my mind back to Scripture any time I may be tempted to choose the path of folly and I pray you will too. "Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day" (Proverbs 23:17). "Be not envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them. (Proverbs 24:1-2). The Lord repeatedly warns us! I think this one may be the most potent for me, "Do not enter the path

of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on" (Proverbs 4:14-15). The path to folly is wicked. Avoid it. Don't go on it. Turn away from it. Could Scripture be any more clear? I imagine someone waving crazily with caution flags saying, NO! NOT THIS WAY! I WOULD TURN BACK IF I WERE YOU! The world is an enticing place. Sometimes I get afraid of the world you are growing up in. The world that at some point you will have to venture out into without me, meeting lots of different types of people along the way. Dad and I wanted to put this book together to help you navigate them. I wish there was a people version of GPS...danger, folly is this way, don't trust them, don't go that way! The Word of God is kind of like that GPS.



Inevitably there are going to be times when you choose the house of folly. "When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord" Proverbs 19:3. My note next to this verse in my Bible says, We are so dumb! When you choose folly, don't blame that on the Lord. Don't blame the consequences that you endure on the Lord. Don't let your heart rage against Him when He has already explicitly warned us. Repent of what you have done, seek forgiveness and choose wisdom. I pray that you are able to discern the ways of folly and the ways of wisdom.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What's the worst hotel, motel, B&B, lodge, etc. that you've ever stayed at? What made it terrible?

We have this brief description of the house of Folly. What do you imagine it to look like?

What part of Folly's presentation lures you?

What does discernment mean?

When standing on the road of life hearing the messages of both wisdom and folly, why is discernment so important?

Ray Ortlund, writes, "In reality we are running back and forth between these two houses all the time."[106]

Why do we bounce back and forth so regularly between Wisdom and Folly?

How can you commit today to avoiding Folly?

How can you commit today to permanently moving into the House of Wisdom?





9.

Scoffer

In a portion of a speech given by Theodore Roosevelt in Paris in 1910, the former President said, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better.” Roosevelt’s speech pits the critic against what has become known as “The Man in the Arena.” While the man in the arena fights, struggles, and “strives valiantly… in a worthy cause,” the critic in the stands really does nothing but offer his self-described brilliant commentary and advice. Sadly, we have become a culture of critics. We critique everything and everyone. Restaurants, businesses, entertainment, political leaders, schools, churches…nothing and no one is beyond the power of a review. We feel entitled that our opinion matters and often demand change based on our opinions. In Proverbs, the critic is called Scoffer. King David, Solomon’s father, warns: stay far away from him and don’t ever find yourself “sit[ting] in the seat of scoffers” (Psalm 1:1). Proverbs 21:24 says, “‘Scoffer’ is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.” Other translations of the Bible in place of Scoffer, use the word “Mocker,”[107] or “Scorner.”[108] The New American Standard translates the verse using multiple names: “‘Proud,’ ‘Arrogant,’ ‘Scoffer,’ are his names, one who acts with insolent pride” (Proverbs 21:24, NASB). Eugene Peterson in The Message uses several names as well to describe Scoffer: “You know their names – Brash, Impudent, Blasphemer – intemperate hotheads, every one” (Proverbs 21:24, The Message). We may even translate the word as Narcissist. Waltke notes, “The proverb does not aim as much to define the mocker as to explain that his fury against God and humanity stems from his exaggerated opinion of his self-importance.”[109]



Scoffer sits smugly in his comfortable seat, convinced of his own superiority, dishing out his opinions like they are gold. Sadly, I have seen this reality play out over and over. Good people set themselves in “the seat of the Scoffer” and begin to see the world and themselves

from this vantage point. I have found out the hard way that the seat of the scoffer is covered in super glue. The longer you sit there, the more painful and more difficult it is to get out. The Scoffer is the Monday Morning, Armchair Quarterback, the employee who criticizes every decision their boss makes, the church member who critiques every sermon, the child who questions every choice a parent makes, or the student who knows more than the seasoned professor or teacher. All of these come from the belief, "I could do it better. I know better." A scoffer believes that he is smarter, stronger, and better than everyone and everything; and if not everyone, just most people and maybe even God. From that overinflated ego, he or she has opinions about every subject known to man. Another name for Scoffer could be Mr. or Ms. Know-it-all. Pride consumes the heart of the Scoffer, blinding him to personal, social, and, ultimately, spiritual realities.

> "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion." (Proverbs 18:2)

> "Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." (Proverbs 26:12)

FORTRESS OF FOOLS

In Folly's Fraternity of Fools, Scoffer is the leader. He's a longtime resident at the House of Folly. He's the big man on campus. Yet for all his supposed brilliance, he's as dumb as a box of rocks. The sad fact is that Scoffer doesn't even realize his own ignorance. He truly thinks he's a genius and that in all of the earth and all of history, he's the one who sees things correctly. He or she lives in an absolute state of stupidity, yet believes they are brilliant. The sin of Pride has truly made Scoffer stupid[110] and blind to that reality. CJ Mahaney, in his book *"Humility: True Greatness,"* writes, "Pride seems to have a strange and sure way of ignoring logic all together…none of us

are immune to the logic-defying, blinding effects of pride."[111] Scoffer delights in his ignorance. Wisdom asks, "How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" (Proverbs 1:22). Scoffer relishes in his or her mockery of wisdom, truth, instruction, correction, and righteousness. "Evil and ignorance come in a package."[112]

Throughout both letters written to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul is consistently combating ignorance in the church that has an appearance of wisdom. Immorality and ignorance definitely were paired together in Corinth. In chapter 10, after writing a deeply personal appeal, Paul takes off the kid gloves. He says, of the supposed wise-men in Corinth, "They are without understanding" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Paul warns that he is viewing his next trip to Corinth as war. He writes, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Paul presents the ignorant, worldly-wise men as hunkered down in a fortress of stupidity. It's the Fortress of Fools (Sorry, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to alliterate). The visual is a walled fortress with high towers. With each of the Old Testament words translated pride or haughty is the idea of something raised, lofty, or soaring. The idea is a "high" opinion. We would use sayings like, "looking down on someone" or "all high and mighty," or "looking down their nose." From that tower, Scoffer feels powerful and above the rest of the world. People are below him and his intelligence. His tower[113] is his pride and nothing more. In fact, Scoffer is proudly displaying his real lack of understanding. He has built a fortress of foolishness and a tower that is proof of his own ignorance. He's completely unaware of how ridiculous he looks. It's actually quite sad. In *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* Bunyan writes about a place called Vanity, which hosts a never-ending fair, appropriately called Vanity Fair. One of the features of this fair was the opportunity to purchase "honors,



promotions, titles."[114] I imagine Scoffer running this particular booth from his lofty seat in his lofty tower. He has given himself the highest honors and for a small price (a nod to Scoffer's superiority) you too can have one to hang on the wall of your office.

From his tower of ignorance and arrogance, Scoffer has also successfully insulated himself from truth, not just God's truth, but truth about himself and the world. Scoffer is barricaded behind walls of foolishness. He is completely unteachable. It's like his whole life has been built to drown out the call of Lady Wisdom. He doesn't listen, because, in his mind, he already knows better.

> "A scoffer does not listen to rebuke." (Proverbs 13:1)

> "A scoffer does not like to be reproved; he will not go to the wise." (Proverbs 15:12)

GOOD LUCK TRYING TO HELP A SCOFFER

Truly loving people will attempt to correct or instruct a Scoffer, but will only receive mockery and abuse in return. Scoffer is unreachable and unteachable, and he likes it that way. In his mind, what would he need to learn from you anyway? He's not all-knowing, but in his mind, he's close…much closer than you. When you lovingly and even humbly try to help a Scoffer, just beware.[115] He sees the entire world through the lens of his pride. C.S. Lewis writes, "Pride is in competition with everyone else's pride."[116] He and his friends will not accept what you have to say.[117] They will hate you. They absolutely reject wisdom, because it confronts and reveals their own inadequacy. If it doesn't confirm their brilliance, they want nothing to do with it or you.

> "Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you." (Proverbs 9:7-8)

"If you have been foolish, exalting yourself."
(Proverbs 30:32)

A Scoffer is self-deceived about their own abilities and brilliance. They also cause immense relational and emotional damage wherever they go. Scoffer is like a tornado, leaving a path of destruction and casualties. Patrick Lencioni compares the unteachable, proud man to a bulldozer. He writes, "Bulldozers are quick destroyers of teams."[118] I would add, they destroy families, businesses, churches, and communities.

"The scoffer is an abomination to mankind." (Proverbs 24:9)

"Scoffers set a city aflame." (Proverbs 29:8)



A Scoffer is drama 24/7 and super high maintenance. Ironically, in moments of need, they refuse to grow into deeper friendships with anyone, they just use people for their own purposes. Pastor Ray Ortlund, writes, "A scoffer is an aggressive, confident, calculating person, outwardly impressive, often successful, but he will slit your throat."[119] Pride, like a cancer, eliminates "the very possibility of love."[120] Solomon gives the only answer for dealing with a Scoffer: "Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarrelling and abuse will cease" (Proverbs 22:10). Like the valve relieving steam or a knob on a pressure cooker, getting a Scoffer off a team, out of a church, or ending a long time, toxic friendship brings peace and calm. Later, we often wonder how we ever endured the drama in the first place. Not only does the Scoffer leave behind relational and emotional wreckage, the Scoffer lives at complete odds with God.

SCOFFER VS. GOD

Scoffer is the enemy of God. Scoffer has set his kingdom, with his protective walls and towers, against the Kingdom of God. Pride "is the

complete anti-God state of mind."[121] Scoffer rejects God's standards, authority, and, in some cases, even his existence. A Scoffer can't allow God to rule, because Scoffer, himself, feels entitled to rule. So Scoffer is not simply opposed to God, he is on a mission to coup God and take over the throne. The original temptation in the garden was "you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). Mahaney, quoting Charles Bridges, defines pride as "contending for supremacy with God."[122] The Scoffer is a proud man who desires glory! Mahaney, later writes, "Pride takes innumerable forms but has only one end: self-glorification. That's the motive and ultimate purpose of pride – to rob God of legitimate glory and to pursue self-glorification…the proud person seeks to glorify himself and not God, thereby attempting in effect to deprive God of something only He is worthy to receive."[123]

Not only is the Scoffer set at odds against God, but God is set against Scoffer. The imbalance of power in this conflict is staggering, but ignorance keeps the Scoffer from seeing this spiritual reality.[124] In Genesis, prideful humanity assembled to build a tower with the purpose of defying God and the goal of making "…a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4). God crushes their rebellion in the same way I could easily knock over a sandcastle. Yet humanity continues to defy God and build our towers. And God keeps knocking them down! Pride is an assault on God. Pride is us playing God. The Scoffer in each of us, "Instead of being grateful for…life, the arrogant lifts himself above the Giver and his image-bearers and considers his successes his own achievements."[125] The Scripture is clear, God stands in violent, hateful opposition to the Scoffer.

> "Toward the scorners he is scornful." (Proverbs 3:34)

> "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes…" (Proverbs 6:16-17)

"Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord." (Proverbs 16:5)

"Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin." (Proverbs 21:4)

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)

"Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and make him low." (Job 40:11, NASB)

"Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure." (Psalm 101:5)

"For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar." (Psalm 138:6)

See also Romans 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:2



Sadly, scoffers can even be Christians. Saved by the grace of God, but filled with twisted, spiritual pride. We become self-reliant and as the ancient historian Tacitus wrote, "The desire for glory clings even to the best men longer than any other passion." When we are the Scoffer, we simply reject the idea of dependence on the divine. We take credit that belongs only to God. When we do that, we touch the glory, and the Bible says there will be a reckoning.

Scoffers will be held accountable. God is patient and longsuffering in His love toward humanity. Eventually, there will be a judgment. God will crush the proud and dismantle brick by brick their prideful kingdoms. Charles Spurgeon writes, “The seat of the scorner may be lofty, but it is very near to the gate of hell; let us flee from it, for it shall soon be empty, and destruction shall swallow up the man who sits therein.”[126]

“If you scoff, you alone will bear it.” (Proverbs 9:12)

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace.” (Proverbs 11:2)

“The Lord tears down the house of the proud.”
(Proverbs 15:25)

“Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.”
(Proverbs 16:5)

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)

“Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and beating for the backs of fools.” (Proverbs 19:29)

“May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts….” (Psalm 12:3)

“Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay the proud what they deserve!” (Psalm 94:2)

“For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up – and it shall be brought low.” (Isaiah 2:12)

"…the scoffer cease…" (Isaiah 29:20)

"He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts." (Luke 1:51)

When God eventually "tears down" the Scoffer's kingdom, it serves as a warning to the Simple. The Simple have yet to commit, so they will do well to take a long, hard look at the destruction of the Scoffer.

"Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence." (Proverbs 19:25)

"When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise." (Proverbs 21:11)



NABAL

In 1 Samuel chapter 25, we find the story of a man named Nabal. His name literally means "fool." Nabal is a scoffer. He's an idiot and doesn't know it. He's an embarrassment to his wife and his employees (servants). Here's a list of how the Scripture describes this fool:

Rich - Verse 2
Harsh - Verse 3
Badly Behaved - Verse 3
Disrespectful of Authority, specifically God's authority - Verse 10
Self-Centered and Selfish - Verse 11
Insulting - Verse 14
Ungrateful - Verse 15
Reckless - Verse 13
Worthless - Verse 17, 25
Unteachable - Verse 17

Fool - Verse 25
Folly is with him - Verse 25
Glutton - Verse 36
Drunk - Verse 36
Hardhearted - Verse 37
God killed him - Verse 37
His death was a relief to his wife, servants, and the new king - Verses 39-42

It's a tragic story with a weird, happy ending. In movie terms, when the credits roll, you don't know exactly how to feel. The Scoffer was dead and the victims of his pride were free. Abigail, Nabal's beautiful wife, would no longer be embarrassed or put in harm's way by her reckless husband. Nabal's servants no longer had to endure his drunken tirades and insults. King David and his men were vindicated by God. I guess we can call it a happy ending for everybody but the Scoffer.

Growing up in Sunday School, I often wanted to see myself in the Bible stories. Even now as adults we can find ourselves doing that same thing. We ask questions like, would I have been David facing off against Goliath? How would I have reacted if I were Daniel thrown into the lion's den? As boys, we think about great heroes like Abraham, Moses, or Gideon. Girls think about the adventures of Esther, Sarah, or Ruth. When we see ourselves in the stories, it's usually as the hero or heroine. Nobody reads the stories and thinks of themselves as the wimp or the bad guy. A few years ago, I was reading 1 Samuel and came to Nabal's story and I didn't like what I saw. I realized I had become a Nabal. I was Nabal in the story, not David. I wasn't the good guy. I was the fool, the idiot. I was the one who embarrassed my wife. Now before you come to my defense or think I'm being too harsh, let me tell you a story.

In 2003, after graduating from college, Jennifer and I moved back to Michigan from Texas. We were both starting in our new jobs in children's ministry. We couldn't have been more excited. We had our dream jobs and we were going to build a brand new house. In the meantime, while our house, just a mile down the road from the church, was being built, we moved into Jen's Dad's lower level. We didn't have any kids, so we didn't need much. Besides, we were working more hours than you can imagine. It was a really exciting time in life. We jumped into our new ministry roles. I was 22 years old and Jen was just 20. Looking back, we were way younger than we realized.



In that first year, we began a program of taking lunch to kids at their schools. It took off. I mean, hundreds of kids. I was having lunch in multiple public schools per week. I was meeting new kids and families. The ministry was exploding. Because it was so busy, I even had a volunteer who coordinated calling the students and parents to arrange the lunches. Early on, the schools changed the rules, moving my lunches from the cafeteria to the library. That was fine. I remember in one school having 30 or 40 kids at a lunch. It was great. Then word came down from the district that we wouldn't be allowed to do this anymore. I can't remember what the thought process was, but I was mad. And honestly, not mad because I couldn't hang out with the kids anymore. I was mad because somebody had the audacity to tell me "no."

So I decided to run for school board. After all, I was 22 almost 23 years old. I knew everything about running a large school system. (Hopefully, you detect the mounds of sarcasm in that statement.) By this time, our house in Waterford was entering its last stages of construction, and Jen and I were expecting our first child. A little girl was due in June 2004. That sounds like a perfect time to enter the political arena. I got the paperwork and filled it out using my Waterford

address still on my driver's license: 5285 Tubbs Road, Waterford, Michigan. I had yard signs printed, brochures made, signed up for the school board debate, put a float in the parade, got endorsements, and bought a red, power tie. I was ready and destined to win. The school board was going to regret telling me what I could and could not do. After all, they worked for me, for us, the citizens. The newspaper began printing stories about my fight with the school district. The conflict quickly morphed into a fight between Faith Baptist Church and the Waterford School District. Early on in the "campaign," I wrote a vicious letter that was printed on church letterhead and sent out to our entire database. The conflict was framed as church vs. state and right vs. wrong.

Then out of nowhere, I received a phone call that the chief of police was withdrawing his endorsement because I was under police investigation. With that phone call, life dramatically changed. I had to hire an attorney, which I couldn't afford, and watch what I had hoped would be a political victory become one of the most embarrassing sagas of my life. Even writing this, I can feel my face getting red, and honestly, it should.

Two detectives from Oakland County came to the church office to interview me. A few days later, I was told to report to the Oakland County Jail on April 12th[127] to turn myself in. From there I would be transported to court. I can still remember taking my tie and belt off at the jail because they weren't allowed in. I answered questions in booking, was fingerprinted, had my mugshot taken, and was going to be put in the bullpen, when a deputy from our church noticed me and sat me in the office. I felt like a 5-year-old in the principal's office, but this wasn't school. This was jail. I was driven by a nice detective over to court and arraigned. I was bound over to the 6th circuit court. I was facing a felony, election law – false swearing. My legal residence wasn't in Waterford, so I had lied. Four days later, Jen

turned 21. On her birthday, I fell 15 feet and broke my left arm. A few days later, I got pneumonia pretty bad and spent three days in the hospital. Waterford Township jerked us around a little with the final certificate of occupancy, but in late May, Jen and I moved into our new house. The day Claire was born, June 9th, my picture was on the front page of the *"Oakland Press."* Five days later, on June 14th, I lost the election, but that didn't seem to matter anymore. I was facing real legal consequences for my mistake. During that time, reporters called and people sifted through our garbage for evidence. All they found was a lot of diapers. The press coverage quickly changed to focus on my impending legal trouble.



On June 22nd, I would appear before Judge Langford-Morris. She seemed reasonable, but intimidating. I was offered a plea deal. I plead guilty to the charges, was put on probation for 13 months, after which, because I was a first-time offender, all charges would be dropped. I was also fined $1000 and sentenced to 30 hours of community service. I remember the judge saying my job qualified as community service. For the next year, I couldn't leave the state without permission from my probation officer. Monthly I would have to check in with my probation officer, pee in a cup, and breathe in a machine at the probation office. I remember one meeting with my probation officer when he asked me, "Why are you here?" He was baffled by the case. Then in late August 2005, I went to court for the last time. All charges were dropped and a heavy burden was lifted off my shoulders. I was 24 years old and now a father to two daughters. Looking back, I realized I caused irreparable damage to the Gospel effort, destroyed relationships, hurt the church, put my family in real danger, and nearly ended my ministry before it really began. I embarrassed Christians in public education. I was harsh, rude, disrespectful, selfish, insulting, reckless, unteachable, foolish, drunk on this strange 15-minutes of fame, and hardhearted. I was Nabal. The truly insane part is that during that season I convinced myself

that I was doing this for God. I was being persecuted. After all, I thought, the school district needed God to rescue it from its godless, evolutionary, humanistic philosophy. What I didn't realize was that I was in a fight with God. The Lord was tearing down my fortress of foolishness. The reality that I was too dumb to see, was that I was a scoffer. It would take me years to learn that. The grief that came in that learning process was nearly unbearable. I wrote letters of apology and worked to make amends, but some damage could never be repaired. To this very day, I have to own that haunting reality.

Almost 15 years later, in late 2018, I went to purchase a gun, but was denied. My background check still showed that I was bound over to circuit court. I called the courthouse with my case number. They apologized and told me it was a clerical error. It has since been corrected. My record is completely clear, but not my conscience. I have the last background check that shows the record of this saga folded inside C.S. Lewis's book *"Mere Christianity,"* specifically in the chapter called *"The Great Sin."* It's a chapter all about pride. I want to forget, but I can't and I know I shouldn't. It would be dangerous to forget. Like the saying, those that forget history are doomed to repeat it, I would prefer not to learn this lesson again.

I tell you this story as a warning. My life still bears the scars of God yanking me out of the "seat of the scoffer." Ray Ortlund writes, "What happens to us if we turn toward Folly? We start down a path from being [simple] to becoming hardened into a 'scoffer' who cannot come back."[128] "A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain" (Proverbs 14:6). I was running down a path, becoming a full, blown, hardened Scoffer. I thank God often that He rescued me. I wish I would have learned that lesson the easy way, but I am thankful nonetheless that I learned it. If you are stuck in the critical, know-it-all chair of the Scoffer, call out to God. He and He alone can pull you out before it's too late. Just know that the Scoffer in each of us dies a hard death; and when we

think that that part of us is dead, that's when Scoffer's resurrection has begun.



Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

Have you ever felt hurt? Mad. Frustrated. Abandoned. Depressed. Anxious. Lonely. Ridiculed. Angry. Skeptical. Hostile. Resentful. Jealous. Insecure. Devastated. Furious. Enraged. Scared. Disrespected. Of course, we all have at one time or another felt these things. Being in full time ministry with your Dad for 20 years now, we have endured our fair share of hurt. Both in the church, together in our marriage and in our families of origin. Hurt is a part of life. Learning how to cope with it in a healthy manner is important. I hope that by the time you leave us that you will be equipped to deal with hurt in healthy ways. But for me, for a long time I didn't have healthy ways to cope. So there were many years when I was hurt, I would build walls up around my heart for protection. Brick by brick. I was so good at this, you'd think I was a professional bricklayer.

I was once meeting with a lady and she described it as a silo. She liked to build walls too. With my love of all things farm, I really loved this illustration. A silo is meant to keep certain things in and other things out. When I looked up the definition of a silo the first one I read was, an underground chamber in which a guided missile is kept ready for firing. When you become a silo, it sure does feel like you have a missile ready to go off at any moment inside of you! You brew and you stew. If anyone comes near your silo, that missile is aimed right at them. Another was to isolate. Man, those both kinda stung. I have found when you come

to this place of hurt, building walls around your heart, it is very easy to make that seat up in your silo that of the scoffer. And like Dad so rightly said, it is covered in super glue and reeeallly hard to get out of. When we get hurt over and over we become the scoffer to protect our hearts. We don't want anyone to get close enough to hurt us again. So we scoff and keep them away.

What does a scoffer do exactly? They criticize everything and everyone. No one is good enough. How many of us have been there? (I want to insert the emoji with the lady raising her hand.) More times than I care to count. You feel like you can do everything better, that you are smarter, more capable, that everyone else is dumb, you sit in your very tall silo looking down at everyone. We say things in our head like why are they even trying that, that's stoopid (that's stupid with two O's). Or why did they get that position, I would have been so much better at that job. Well of course their marriage imploded, at least mine is better than theirs. Have you seen their kids, man they are disasters...I wonder if they even pray? At least I pray for my kids. How ridiculous does all of this sound? How ridiculous do we sound when we speak through or look through the lens of the scoffer.



Don't be a scoffer. The Lord wants us to build each other up. We are each created in the image of God. With all of our unique gifts, faults, and quirks. When we scoff at someone, we are scoffing at the Lord, the Creator. Sheesh, that one hurts. So how do we not become a scoffer? How



does our tush not get glued to that seat? Or better yet, how does it get unglued? We pray. And we pray often for a soft heart. We pray that the Lord would keep our hearts soft, we pray that it doesn't ever happen, or we pray that He would soften our hard hearts. Sometimes you have to deal with the ugly past to soften your heart. I know my heart has been hard in the past. I don't want to go there again, and I don't want you to end up there ever. So begin today to ask the Lord for a soft heart. Because as a wise man once said, you only get one heart. You can't just harden a portion of it. Eventually the hardness takes over.

Forsake not your mother's teaching.

Love,
Mom



QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

Who is the most critical FICTIONAL person you know? Why did you choose them?

Are you quick to give your opinion? If so, why?

Have you ever tried to correct a Scoffer? What happened?

How has pride hurt you? Your family? Church? Community?

Why does God hate pride so much?

Are there aspects of Nabal's personality that you, regrettably, see in yourself?





10.

Humble

Can I give you a piece of advice? Don't write or teach about humility. It's terribly convicting. The previous chapter on the prideful Scoffer was easy. Not in an "I didn't have to study or think about it" type of way. It was easy in the sense that I know that guy. I've met lots of Scoffers and have been one for much of my life. On the other hand, the Humble is somebody I know from a distance. I know him like I know a celebrity or historical figure. I know things or facts about famous people, but I don't really *know* them. In the same way, the Humble man or woman is a stranger or distant relative to me. I take comfort because even C.S. Lewis wrote, "I wish I had got a bit further with humility myself."[129] I suppose that means he was probably further along with humility than even he realized.



I haven't met a lot of humble people, but thankfully, I have met some. Over the years, one in particular, stands out. Larry was the volunteer Children's Pastor at our church. I was hired to lead the children's ministry, so I was basically taking Larry's job. I was 22 years old and from the previous chapter, you know, a pretty cocky kid. I was told to meet with Larry once a week. I remember begrudgingly driving to the Big Boy restaurant where we would meet each week. Honestly, I didn't appreciate that time with Larry. I was told to do it and until I could weasel my way out of it, I would comply. Larry was in his late '50s, maybe early '60s at the time. He was a Vietnam veteran, and as I later found out, a Green Beret. The way Larry talked and interacted with people was the embodiment of meekness. His wife, Brenda, was confined to a wheelchair, but one of the smile-iest ladies I've ever met. They seem to be together all the time, even traveling together, where Larry would push his wife around. He loved and served her as Christ (Ephesians 5:25). Larry and Brenda were constantly visiting the sick, praying with strangers, and leading people to Christ. Larry led a pretty successful business, but you wouldn't really know that from meeting him. He just never really talked about himself. He oozed genuine care and concern for everyone he met. He would warmly

greet and value everyone. He didn't seem to be drawn to what we would call influencers or power-players. He would often befriend the lonely, outcast, and marginalized. As a young man, Larry was the complete opposite of what I wanted to be. I lacked the wisdom to see how deeply the ways of the world had infiltrated my heart, while Larry was living out the Kingdom principles that Jesus laid out in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). It wasn't until years later when our meetings had long since been over, that I started to realize the Christ-like character and patience that Larry had demonstrated for me and to me. A few weeks ago, I talked to Larry on the phone. He has since moved across the country, but he was calling because someone that he had met in the hospital years ago needed a pastoral visit. I could feel and hear his kindness, gentleness, and love through the phone. I want to be like Larry.

Meeting a truly humble person is like meeting an alien. They are so different. The way they speak, listen, and interact with people is an enigma. And it isn't false humility. Because humility is foreign and pride is so familiar, we often have a difficult time discerning between the two. Our hearts, as we've discussed, are deceitful. Pride and humility are complete opposites, but because of the deceptiveness of our own minds, we have a hard time realizing the distinction. Pride can disguise itself as humility, when in fact it's absolute narcissism.[130] And because we are so prideful, truly humble people can be condemned as proud or even self-righteous. We often label humble people as weak or soft. Humility is convicting and confronting to our own pride. "Humility is strong – not bold; quiet – not speechless; sure – not arrogant."[131]

Outside of the Bible, the most influential chapter I've ever read is called *"The Great Sin."* It's in the book *"Mere Christianity"* by C.S. Lewis. He spends most of the chapter, as the title indicates,

addressing the sin of pride. In the final couple of paragraphs, he writes about a humble person. Lewis teaches:

> Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.[132]



A humble person is filled with gratitude and grace, patience, willing to listen to correction, and quietly confident in how God has gifted them. Those characteristics may not sound like humility to you, but that's how the Scripture describes the Humble.

THE HUMBLE ARE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GRACE

A must-have in God's Kingdom is humility. It's a prerequisite. It's the first step to "getting in." Humility is not just a nice add-on. Humility is how we must come to God to receive Gospel grace. In Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom, it is the humble that God blesses – "they will inherit the whole earth" (Matthew 5:5, NLT). Before we can be saved, we must realize we need to be saved. Before we can receive the gift of grace, we must realize that God holds that gift and we can't earn it. Paul told the church at Ephesus, "...by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). Jesus did the work on Calvary, so we don't have any reason to brag (Ephesians 2:9). It's the work of grace that we receive through humbly realizing we need to be saved.

> "To the humble He gives favor." (Proverbs 3:34)

> "God…gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6, Quoting Proverbs 3:34)

> "God…gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5, Quoting Proverbs 3:34)

The Gospel is the beginning of God's humbling work in our lives because it's all from Him. The Cross humbles us and to stay humble we need to return often, in our hearts and minds, to Christ crucified. In that humility, we become truly people filled with gratitude. We are thankful and not entitled.[133] The Humble are thankful for God's grace. Jesus gives an illustration in Luke chapter 17 of masters and servants (slaves). The expectation is that the servants serve. It seems so simple, but Jesus concludes the illustration by making the point, "You also," Jesus says, "when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Luke 17:10). The Humble live lives of gratitude for saving grace and common grace. They recognize their own unworthiness to receive anything good. They also recognize that what they are and all that they have isn't a result of their own efforts, but God's kindness. "It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:19).

When this grace fills our hearts, it begins to transform the way we interact with people. As recipients of God's mercy and grace, we become dispensers of mercy and grace. Our words become filled with grace, building people up, and fitting each situation (Ephesians 4:29).[134] The Humble aren't judgmental. They are looking for ways to encourage. The Humble correct, but each of their words and expressions is baptized in Gospel grace.[135]

THE HUMBLE ARE PATIENT IN GOD'S PLAN

The Proud seize control. The Humble wait patiently. Jesus tells a story in Luke chapter 14 contrasting the temptation for self-promotion and the embarrassment that is sure to follow with the beauty of humility and the honor that follows. Luke writes:

> "Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:7-11). Also, Matthew 23:12; 18:14.



The Humble happily accepts the lower seat. Anchored by grace, he views others as more significant than himself (paraphrase of Philippians 2:3). With that attitude, why would he take the seat of honor that he genuinely believes belongs to someone else? In our culture, it would be like taking the seat reserved for the bride or groom or their parents at a wedding. It would definitely be embarrassing for everyone when someone has to be asked to move – an awkward moment for sure.

The Proud feel entitled to position and power. They actually feel qualified for places of honor and jobs that they aren't ready for. I recently heard Joe Stowell talk about his move from pastoring a

church of 1500 people to becoming president of Moody. He explained that if you aren't surprised when God does something great in your life, something is wrong.[136] The Humble accepts God's assignments regardless of how menial or trivial the world may view them. He is just a servant doing his duty.

> "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." (Proverbs 22:4)

> "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble." (Proverbs 25:6-7)

> "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." (James 4:10)

> "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you." (1 Peter 5:6)

> "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

The secret isn't false or pretentious humility. The Pharisees played that role well. Jesus said that inside, they were full of "self-indulgence" (Matthew 23:25). The Humble graciously accepts any seat at the party. They are honored that God has invited them at all! King David wrote, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psalm 84:10). The promise is that the truly humble will be exalted. That is a summary of "the message of the whole Bible: humility before honor, the cross before the crown."[137]

"The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor." (Proverbs 15:33)

"Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor." (Proverbs 18:12)

"One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor." (Proverbs 29:23)

THE HUMBLE LISTEN TO GOD'S TEACHING AND CORRECTION



"Humility is a choice."[138] So often when we are corrected or in need of instruction, we become defensive. Even if we are completely clueless about how to do something, our pride keeps us from being teachable. It's the classic, "I will not stop and ask for directions." "Who needs instructions, I can figure out how to put this thing together!" The humble person is teachable and correctable. The wisdom of Humility is realizing, "Hey, I don't know everything. As a matter of fact, there's lots of things I don't know." In the book *"How The Mighty Fall"* by Jim Collins, he details how once-great companies collapsed and, in most cases, ceased to exist. In the chapter entitled *"Hubris Born of Success,"* he details how certain leaders believed their own press and that failure was impossible. A specific quote in that chapter makes me laugh and think. Collins writes, "Like inquisitive scientists, the best corporate leaders we've researched remain students of their work, relentlessly asking questions – why, why, why? – and have an incurable compulsion to vacuum the brains of people they meet."[139] The expression "vacuum the brains" always makes me chuckle, but it's true. A humble person is always learning and LISTENING! The Humble person realizes they still have a lot to learn. The Bible says, "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). We can't listen if we are always talking. The way I always heard it was, you have two ears and one mouth –

listen twice as much as you talk. A humble person is truly present in conversations and listens, with the goal of hearing, and then truly understanding what is being said.

First, the humble person listens to God. A longtime ministry partner of Billy Graham said of the great evangelist, "He's one of the few Christian leaders whose attention God can get when he wants it. He's not running so fast or so deeply involved in his own agenda. When God taps him on the shoulder he says, 'Yes, Lord,' rather than 'Just a minute, I have to finish this.' God can quickly get his attention."[140]

Second, the Humble person listens to people, including critics. Rather than being defensive when confronted, a humble person repents and changes course. A Humble person seizes these moments for personal growth and reflection, rather than being defensive. These are the moments where true humility is distinguished from false humility.

> "With those who take advice is wisdom." (Proverbs 13:10)

> "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)

THE HUMBLE ARE CONFIDENT IN GOD'S GIFTS

Pride skews the way we view ourselves, whereas humility helps us see ourselves clearly. As C.S. Lewis notes in *"Mere Christianity,"* it isn't a person who is constantly putting themselves down or announcing their inadequacies that is humble. Sure, the humble are aware of their inabilities, but more so their God-given *abilities.* And because of that awareness, there is a confidence that truly prideful people will mistake for pride. Humility is coupled with confidence, real

grace centered self-esteem and self-love. Those are often concepts that are despised in evangelicalism, but the Bible roots them in the Gospel. The great Old Testament leader Moses actually identifies himself as the humblest man on Earth.

> "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3)

Some scholars believe that Moses' servant Joshua added that in, but others do not. One of my dear friends and Christian heroes, Dan Smither, insists that Moses wrote it.[141] So taking our cues from Dan, Moses was humble and confident enough to correctly assess himself. Moses was confident in his gifting and ability because he knew they were from God. Yahweh had met him at the burning bush and commissioned him. Moses was poised in the face of challenges because of God's promise and presence. That was the source of both his confidence and humility. On humility, Spurgeon taught, "True humility is thinking rightly of thyself, not meanly. When you have found out what you really are, you will be humble, for you are nothing to boast of. To be humble will make you safe. To be humble will make you happy. To be humble will make music in your heart when you go to bed. To be humble here will make you wake up in the likeness of your Master."[142]



> "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!" (Psalm 40:4)

> "For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar." (Psalm 138:6)

If we were to meet a perfectly humble person, honestly, we'd probably avoid them. And if we couldn't avoid them, we'd eventually hate them

and work to see them destroyed. That may seem like a harsh critique to you, but, as humans, we already did it to one guy. His name was Jesus.

When searching for character sketches on humility, I read about pastors, Billy Graham, business leaders, Moses, and just kept coming back to Christ. Jesus was the absolute embodiment of humility. He set an example of humility that we must learn from and follow. The King of kings, Lord of lords, and Creator of the universe was thankful, patient, teachable, gracious, and confident.

In John chapter 13, Jesus does something for the disciples that could be compared to a Big-Foot sighting (pun intended). Taking Luke's record of this same night and event, it seems that on the Jewish holiday of Passover, the disciples were feeling pretty proud. They had entered Jerusalem just days before with Jesus, who they viewed as the coming King and destroyer of Roman tyranny. They seem to be positioning themselves, not just for the best seats at the Passover meal, but for positions within Jesus' coming Kingdom. Luke records, "A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Luke 22:24). I imagine that it is during this debate that Jesus quietly stepped away from the table. John records:

> "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him…When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you

> understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.'"
> (John 13:2-5, 12-15)

This act of service stunned the disciples. In my mind, Jesus began washing the disciples' feet on the outer circle of this discussion. At the center of this debate and jockeying for position was likely Peter, James, and John. I imagine Jesus quietly washing the disciples' feet, while the debate rages on. As each man is approached and served by Jesus, they become silent, until all twelve are left speechless. Some may have gotten the point right away, while others would simply question what the Lord was doing. When Jesus finished and reclaimed His rightful place of honor, He taught the lesson. Jesus had just performed "a menial task reserved for the lowest of slaves, even Jewish slaves were not required to perform it, only Gentiles."[143] On the scale of humanity, Jesus had humbled Himself to the lowest position. Looking at this from the caste system, there would not have been a lower caste. Jesus sank all the way to the bottom of the socio-economic scale.



Think about it. There sat Judas, who was already plotting to betray Jesus. He had already accepted money from the religious leaders. The devil was already in his heart! And yet Jesus knelt before His betrayer and washed his dirty, smelly feet.

Jesus' example of humility can be found all throughout the Gospels. When feeding the 4,000 in Matthew chapter 15, Jesus gave thanks (Matthew 15:36). Before His public ministry began, Jesus patiently waited for His time (John 2:1-12). One of the most startling verses in the Bible says of Jesus, when He was twelve, that "He went down

with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them" (Luke 2:51). Jesus, the creator of the universe, submitted to Joseph and Mary. He had created His earthly parents and now He would submit to their leadership in His life. From the divine vantage point, Hebrews says, "He was a son, he learned obedience through what He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Throughout Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John we see countless displays of Jesus' grace for sinners, the sick, the poor, social outcasts, and even the dead. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus faces temptations from the devil. We make a mistake if we see those temptations as centering around food, worship, and the kingdoms of the world. Each temptation was about Jesus' sonship. "If you are the Son of God?" Satan asks. Satan was questioning the Lord's identity and attacking His confidence in who He was. Jesus humbly and confidently used the Word of God in response. He knew who He was and is. Jesus had been sent by His Father to earth, to become a man, and pay the penalty for sin on the cross. That is humility.

> "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11)

Even with the Lord Jesus, true humility proceeded honor.

MY CHILDREN,

THIS MIGHT BE A STORY YOU KNOW, BUT I DON'T WANT YOU TO EVER FORGET IT. I WROTE IN THE BLANK SPACE AT THE END OF THE CHAPTER ENTITLED: "INVITING AND PURSUING CORRECTION," "2-6-20: PUNCH IN THE GUT! MY STRUGGLE WITH PRIDE IS SO DEEPLY ROOTED THAT IT'S SCARY!" SADLY, EACH OF YOU KNOWS THIS TO BE SO TRUE. I FINISHED THAT BOOK A FEW DAYS LATER WHILE ON VACATION WITH YOUR MOM. LITTLE DID I REALIZE THAT WHEN I CAME HOME FROM BREAK, WE WOULD BE FACING THE MOST SERIOUS FINANCIAL CRISIS AT CHURCH I HAD EVER LED THROUGH, AND THEN DAYS LATER THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC WOULD PARALYZE THE ENTIRE WORLD. THAT FEBRUARY, JUST DAYS AFTER THAT TIME AWAY, WE LET TEN STAFF GO. I ASKED OUR OPERATIONS PASTOR TO STEP DOWN, AND INFORMED THE BOARD AND STAFF OF OUR DEEP CUTS TO TRY TO GET US BACK ON TRACK. ONLY A COUPLE OF WEEKS LATER ON MARCH 13TH, OUR ELDERS MET AND MADE THE DECISION THAT THE CHURCH, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR HISTORY, WOULD STOP MEETING IN PERSON. COVID-19 HAD COME AND WE WERE PREPARING FOR THE WORST. I MADE A VIDEO ANNOUNCING THE CHANGE. COLLECTIVELY WE HELD OUR BREATH. I WAS TRYING TO LEAD WITH CONFIDENCE. THAT SAME DAY, MAVIS FELL UP THE STAIRS AND BASHED OUT HER TOP THREE FRONT TEETH. YOUR MOM CALLED ME WHILE I WAS IN A MEETING WITH THE ELDERS. I RACED TO EMERGENCY AND THEN TO THE DENTIST. THANKFULLY, AS YOU KNOW, THEY WERE BABY TEETH.



WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW IS THAT I WAS A MESS. MY BLOOD PRESSURE WENT OUT OF CONTROL. I TOLD THE ELDERS THAT I DIDN'T KNOW IF THE CHURCH WOULD SURVIVE THIS SEASON. MY INTERNAL PESSIMIST BEAT OUT THE OPTIMIST. I BEGAN

ASSESSING THE SITUATION. WE WERE ALREADY IN DEEP FINANCIAL TROUBLE AND NOW THE CHURCH WASN'T GOING TO MEET IN PERSON. WE WEREN'T GOING TO PASS AN OFFERING BUCKET. WE WEREN'T GOING TO BE ABLE TO SEE PEOPLE FACE-TO-FACE AND EXPLAIN THE SITUATION AND DECISIONS. IT WASN'T DIFFICULT TO SEE THE DILEMMA. FOR NEARLY TWO MONTHS, I PREACHED TO AN EMPTY AUDITORIUM. HUNDREDS OF EMPTY SEATS JUST STARING BACK AT ME.

AT EASTER, WHICH IS OUR BIGGEST SINGLE SUNDAY OF THE YEAR, IN EVERY SINGLE BUILDING, LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF SEATS WERE EMPTY. NOT A SOUL IN THE BUILDING EXCEPT THE PREACHER, A TECH GUY OR TWO, AND A SMALL GROUP OF SINGERS AND MUSICIANS.

ON MOTHER'S DAY, TYPICALLY THE SECOND BIGGEST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR, STILL NOBODY. TO ADD TO THE MISERY AND FRUSTRATION, I WOKE UP WITH A SHARP PAIN IN MY SIDE. I CHOSE NOT TO EAT, THINKING IT MIGHT JUST PUT ME IN THE BATHROOM AND KEEP ME FROM PREACHING. I PREACHED THE 9 AM BROADCAST AND THEN LAY IN PAIN ON THE EMPTY FRONT ROW. BY GOD'S GRACE, I MADE IT THROUGH THE 11 AM AND THEN DROVE HOME. I STILL DIDN'T FEEL LIKE EATING. I ASSUMED I HAD FOOD POISONING FROM THE FISH TACOS I ATE THE NIGHT BEFORE, SO I STARTED TAKING DIFFERENT THINGS. CHARCOAL, GATORADE, PEPTO-BISMOL, AND OTHER CONCOCTIONS FROM YOUR MOM. EVERY TIME I WOULD VIOLENTLY VOMIT WITHIN SECONDS OF SWALLOWING. YOUR MOM'S VOODOO ALMOST KILLED ME. I EVENTUALLY FELL ASLEEP ON THE BATHROOM FLOOR ON A PILLOW THAT INDY, OUR GREAT-DANE MASTIFF USED. I DIDN'T CARE. I FELT LIKE DEATH. FINALLY, I DECIDED I COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE. I CALLED BRAD, WHOSE DAD IS A DOCTOR. HIS DAD GRACIOUSLY

CALLED AND ENCOURAGED ME TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL. YOUR MOTHER DROPPED ME OFF AT THE DOOR. I WAS SO OUT OF IT, I DIDN'T EVEN KISS HER GOODBYE. I STUMBLED IN AND EVENTUALLY WAS TOLD THAT MY APPENDIX WAS IN BAD SHAPE AND I NEEDED SURGERY. THE NEXT MORNING, THEY OPERATED. I'VE FELT FINE EVER SINCE, BUT I STILL HAVEN'T GONE BACK FOR THOSE FISH TACOS.

LATER THAT SUMMER, YOUR MOM STARTED HAVING HEART ISSUES. I DROVE WELL OVER 100-MPH GETTING HER TO THE HOSPITAL. I THOUGHT SHE MIGHT BE DYING.

WE PUT OUR DOGS JED AND INDY DOWN.

MOM'S COUSIN CHELSEA AND BABY MAELYN DIED DAYS APART.

THE CAR BROKE DOWN.

BACTERIA WAS FOUND IN OUR WATER.

AND JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, GRAM WENT TO HEAVEN.
OH, AND THAT COVID THING TOO.

2020 WAS ONE HECK OF A YEAR. WE COULD HAVE WRITTEN A REAL DEPRESSING COUNTRY SONG...IT PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN A HIT.

I NEED YOU TO KNOW, THOUGH, THAT SOMETHING HAPPENED IN THE MADNESS OF THOSE MONTHS. I FELT COMPLETELY HELPLESS. I COULDN'T DEPEND ON MYSELF OR OUR TEAM OR OUR TALENTS. YOUR MOM HAS BEEN MY GO-TO FOR 20 YEARS AND SHE WASN'T DOING WELL. THE LORD ON A PASTORAL (PROFESSIONAL) AND PERSONAL LEVEL KEPT BRINGING ME BACK, OVER AND OVER

AGAIN, TO COMPLETE RELIANCE ON HIM. PRIDE IN NUMBERS, LOCATIONS, THE STAGE, MY FAMILY, AND ALL THE OTHER TRAPPINGS WERE SWEPT AWAY ALMOST IN AN INSTANT. IT IS A SEASON OF LIFE THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET. AND HONESTLY, IT WAS REALLY SPECIAL. IT WAS TRULY "THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES."[144] HUMILITY IS ALL ABOUT DEPENDENCE. IT IS "RENOUNCING ONE'S OWN PERSONAL SUFFICIENCY" AND COMMITTING ONESELF TO THE LORD.[145]

"BEFORE I WAS AFFLICTED I WENT ASTRAY, BUT NOW I KEEP YOUR WORD." (PSALM 119:67)

"IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I WAS AFFLICTED, THAT I MIGHT LEARN YOUR STATUTES." (PSALM 119:71)

I WAS RECENTLY ASKED, "WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THE 30-YEAR-OLD YOU?[146] MY RESPONSE, "YOU DON'T KNOW NEARLY AS MUCH AS YOU THINK YOU DO. YOU'RE NOT SMART ENOUGH OR STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE IT TO THE FINISH LINE. YOU MUST FULLY DEPEND ON THE LORD." MY SWEET CHILDREN, YOU MUST FULLY RELY ON THE LORD. WHEN YOU HUMBLE YOURSELF, YOU WILL FIND GREAT CONFIDENCE. YOU ARE EACH SO GIFTED, BUT REMEMBER THOSE ABILITIES ARE GIFTS. BE THANKFUL. BE TEACHABLE. BE CORRECTABLE. DON'T BE SO HARD HEADED AND STUBBORN THAT YOU CAN'T OR WON'T LEARN. BE GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL, AS GOD HAS BEEN SO GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL TO EACH OF US. CHOOSE HUMILITY, IT'S THE PATH TO "TRUE GREATNESS."[147]

I LOVE YOU.

DAD

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Who is the humblest person you've ever met?

Read Luke 18:9-14.

Are you a thankful or entitled person?

Have you ever had a time in your life where you were waiting on God? Were you patient? Pushy?

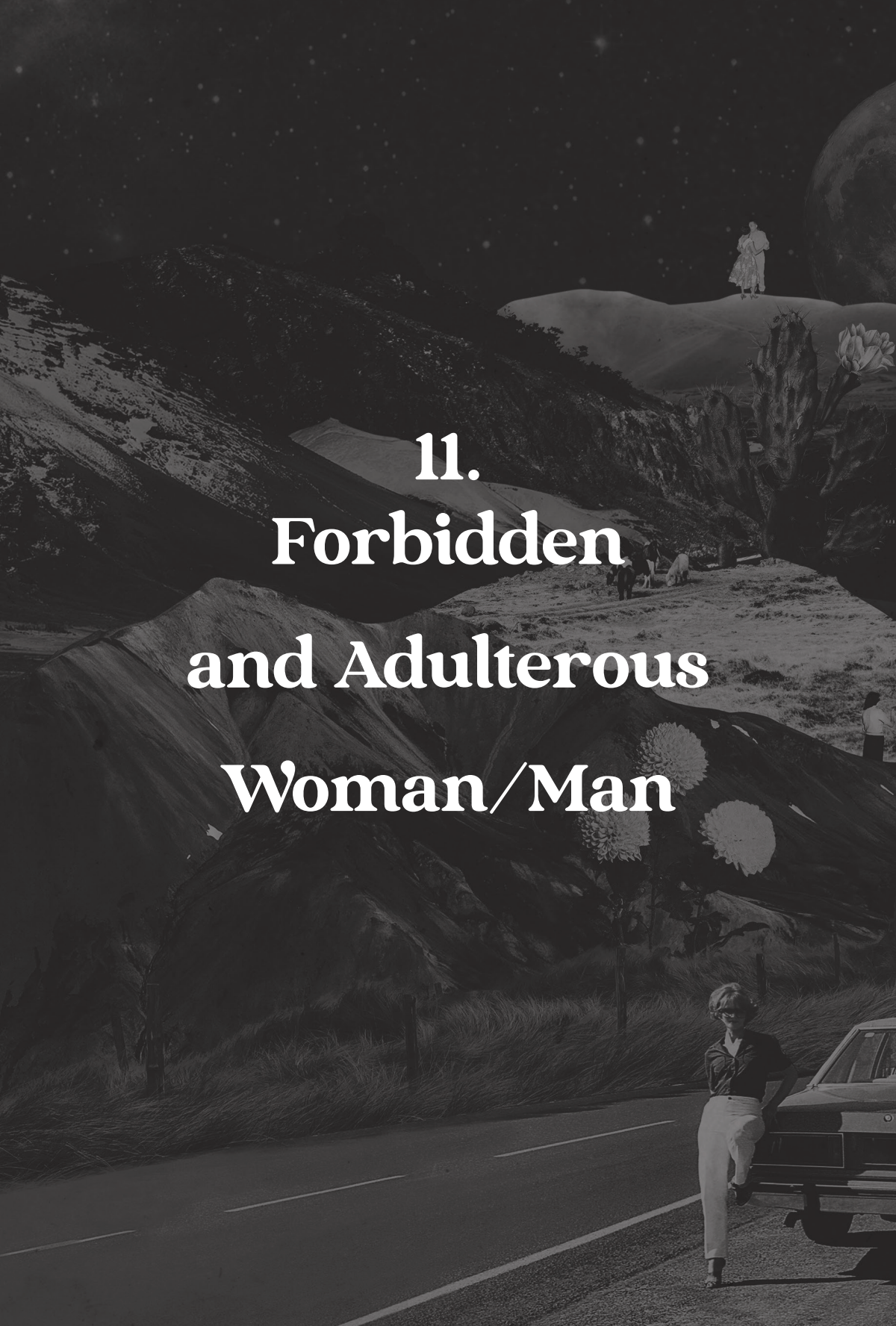
Are you a defensive person? Correctable? Teachable?

What are the ways God has gifted you? What are you great at?

Do you find it easy or hard to be dependent on God? On others?

What part of Jesus' example of humility are you most inspired by? Convicted by?





11. Forbidden and Adulterous Woman/Man

Driving down the highway of life or the actual highway, one thing becomes clear: sex sells. Billboards, TV and internet ads, magazines, and other forms of advertisement regularly use sensual images, music, and voices to announce their products. Some ads are so ridiculous you can be left wondering what they are even trying to sell other than sex. What God has created, sin has perverted. What God called good, the enemy has twisted. Sex is created by God, but in today's culture, you wouldn't know that. The world encourages all forms of sexual freedom. For the most part, any restriction is viewed as too traditional, restrictive, and even bigoted, unkind, and unloving. Intolerant is the theme word for insults and trump card for winning arguments. Meanwhile, the church as a general rule has gone silent. We've adopted the '80s Anti-Drug campaign slogan, "Just say No." We've intentionally or unintentionally demonized sex with an overemphasis on "purity culture." Preaching abstinence prior to marriage is biblical, but that isn't the whole story. In the wisdom of Proverbs, specifically chapter 5, the sage gives a balanced view of the beauty of sex in the proper context and the dangers of sex in the wrong context.



Proverbs chapter 5 is Solomon, the father and teacher, sitting with his son/student, and having "THE TALK." Here comes "the birds and the bees." Now the best advice I've ever received about "the talk" is that it isn't *the* talk in a singular sense. It is a series of talks.[148] That was such a relief and that is what we see in Proverbs. The wise warnings about sex begin back in chapter 2 and return in the conversation of chapter 5, then the end of chapter 6, and all of chapter 7. It isn't just a talk in Proverbs, it is TALKS! There are hundreds of good books written about the different aspects of sex. This is one chapter, so we are limited on the subjects we can address. See the appendix for a list of books and chapters that we've found helpful and instructive in the area of marriage and sex.

The writings about sexual sin in Proverbs center around one character. She is called “The Forbidden Woman.” Keep in mind, the setting of Proverbs is a father instructing his son, so the wise warnings are approached from that male vantage point. The illustrations and the warnings can feel like the Scripture is demeaning or beating up on women. It is not meant to feel that way. We, the reader of Proverbs, are overhearing a father/son conversation. The principles taught can easily be transferred to a mother/daughter conversation, where the dangers of smooth-talking Adulterous Men are the villains. A few weeks ago, I visited my go-to used bookstore. I don’t buy books every single time I visit (Jen would debate this point), but I often do. I love books and the kind owner of the store knows this. The owner will set aside books for me that I’ve expressed interest in. I recently came home with a book entitled *“Lists of Note: An Eclectic Collection Deserving of a Wider Audience.”* At first, I had no idea why I would even want this book, but the owner of the store just knew I’d like this one. It turns out, the book is super interesting. After having Jen pull out a few inappropriate pages, I began reading some lists that the book contains. It’s an odd book containing lists from Einstein, MLK, Isaac Newton, Leonardo Da Vinci, Harry Houdini, and more modern folks, ranging from writers to filmmakers, scientists to musicians. One particular list has made me laugh a few times. List number six is from the “Anti-Flirt Club,” established in the 1920s in Washington D.C. Before the #MeToo movement, this was a club established to try to combat flirtation and out-right sexual harassment or in the worst cases sexual assault. The list is the rules given to their club members. There are 10 of them.

1. Don’t flirt - those who flirt in haste oft repent in leisure.
2. Don’t accept rides from flirting motorists - they don’t all invite you in to save you a walk.
3. Don’t use your eyes for ogling - they were made for worthier purposes.

4. Don't go with men you don't know - they may be married, and you may be in for a hair-pulling match.
5. Don't wink - a flutter of one eye may cause a tear in the other.
6. Don't smile at flirtatious strangers - save them for people you know.
7. Don't annex all the men you can get - by flirting with many you may lose out on the one.
8. Don't fall for the slick, dandified cake eater - the unpolished gold of a real man is worth more than the gloss of a lounge lizard.
9. Don't let elderly men with an eye to flirtation pat you on the shoulder and take a fatherly interest in you. Those are usually the kind who want to forget they are fathers.
10. Don't ignore the man you are sure of while you flirt with another. When you return to the first one you may find him gone.[149]



The list is humorous and truthful; it's almost a retelling of Proverbs from a female perspective. The point is that the wisdom of Proverbs, with a little bit of work, is extremely applicable to both men and women. The Forbidden Woman and Man both exist. Forbidden or foreign or sometimes translated strange simply means: Not yours. That's what adultery is: taking what doesn't belong to you. It's sexual thievery. Some authors have seen foreign as non-Jewish, but really I think the foreign means foreign from the ways or path of wisdom. Adultery is a willful abandoning of the path of wisdom. It's diving into the disaster of Folly. In this book, we've already looked at the character Folly, but it's important to note that in Proverbs, Folly and the Forbidden, Adulterous Woman are closely connected. They serve as a reflection, summary, and parallel of each other. Folly is the leader of Fools and the array of their foolishness. The teaching on the Forbidden, Adulterous Woman focuses singularly on sex.

Proverbs chapter 5, most of 6, and all of 7 are wise warnings about her target, trap, and tricks. These combine to make a deadly poison. To stay true to the cultural context and the original, authorial intent of Proverbs, we will keep these warnings in the father-son, male-teacher to male-student framework.

THE TARGET

While instructing his son, Solomon tells a haunting story. He says:

> "For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice, and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness." (Proverbs 7:6-9)

This young man goes out looking for trouble. He's not sure he'll find any on that particular evening, but he knows a loose woman who is known for her promiscuous living. Solomon says that he knows what street she lives on, what house is hers, and he just-so-happens to be passing by there at twilight.

> "He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself." (Proverbs 6:32)

He pretends that he is out for just an evening walk, but that isn't the case. In his mind, he's just "window shopping" for something sensual and sexual. What he doesn't realize is that as he's casually perusing, a predator has identified him as her prey. Proverbs 7:12 says, "She lies in wait." The forbidden and adulterous women are not only lying in wait in person but, in our culture, online. Tragically online platforms have become the "corner" where the forbidden becomes acceptable

and many marriages, lives, and families have been destroyed. The young man in Proverbs chapter 7 goes for a stroll, in our time, the Simple just go for a scroll. Social media has been the death of many marriages. It's foolish to believe that you are not a target. We actually have a sex industry. It's gross to contemplate, but true. Prostitution, trafficking, pornography, and strip clubs are part of an industry that is targeting YOU, not to mention your marriage and your children. It is a multi-billion-dollar business. YOU ARE A TARGET! And the list of people destroyed through sexual sin is sky-high.

> "…for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng." (Proverbs 7:26)



Lyrics from *"House of the Rising Sun"* by the Animals express the idea of a targeted trap really well. Released in 1964 as the sexual revolution in America was taking off, the opening words are: *"There is a house way down in New Orleans, they call the Rising Sun. And it's been the ruin of many a poor boy, and God, I know, I'm one…"* I wasn't allowed to listen to that song growing up, and I suppose for good reason. It's about a brothel, a whorehouse, or more classically a house of ill-repute. And I can't use that phrase without thinking of poor Mrs. Patmore in *"Downton Abbey"* when her Bed and Breakfast becomes a topic for tabloid scandal. Places like "The Rising Sun" are targeted attacks. The Forbidden, Adulterous Woman of Proverbs, like Folly, calls out to young and old *lusty* fools. The Simple "is aimless, his temptress is not."[150] The target is chosen, and a specific trap is uniquely designed with the intention of capturing and killing the prey.

THE TRAP

The older I get the more spiders seem to bother me. I don't quite have full-on arachnophobia, but I recognize that they are kind of creepy. The study of the Black Widow spider is particularly disturbing.[151] The

female Black Widow spider lives longer and is significantly larger than the males. When the males come to mate, if he "is not fast enough when leaving the web…he is captured and eaten."[152] To kill their prey "the spider sinks its fangs into the prey to kill it and liquefy its internal organs. The resulting half-digested mush is then sucked out and eaten by the spider."[153] Yummy. The spider only consumes the insides of its mummified victims, leaving behind and suspended in her web, her trap, the hollow remains of her prey. The Black Widow spider is an appropriate illustration for the Forbidden, Adulterous woman. She sets an alluring trap, destroys her prey by hollowing them out, and moves on to the next customer…victim. The trap includes how she talks, what she offers, and how she looks.

A trap is alluring and enticing. It's also hidden and concealed. The talk of a Forbidden, Adulterous woman or man is like the camouflage, concealing the snare.

> "Her speech is smoother than oil." (Proverbs 5:3)

> "…to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress." (Proverbs 6:24)

> "She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home." (Proverbs 7:11)

> "With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him." (Proverbs 7:21)

> "And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters." (Ecclesiastes 7:26)

With that seductive talk, she presents her offer. She offers an all-night party of food and sex. She even conceals the trap by decorating it with "religious motivation"[154] and religious wording. She flatters him, giving the impression that he is the man she has been longing and looking for.

> "She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him, 'I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you. I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love.'" (Proverbs 7:13-18)



At our little hobby farm, we live trap different nuisance animals. Different pests require different enticements. It might be a can of tuna-fish, peanut butter, dog food, etc. The smell and enticement of those things make that little varmint see right past the danger of the trap. The Forbidden and Adulterous person, not only conceals the trap, but distracts from the possibility of noticing the trap. First, she offers him food. By saying that she has made her sacrifices, "in that culture her statement would have been understood to mean, 'I have food at home from my sacrifices.'"[155] Normally food that would have been intended as a community celebration, has been twisted to be a party just for two. C.S. Lewis, in the clever and instructive book *"The Screwtape Letters"* writes, "Mere excess in food is much less valuable than delicacy. Its chief use is as a kind of artillery preparation for attacks on chastity."[156] This young man doesn't know it, but that feast that seems like a romantic dinner before a night of guilt free sex is a prelude to death. In Proverbs, she has prepared herself and her bed for this specific young man. She offers herself to him. He can't resist.

> "All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare." (Proverbs 7:22-23)

> "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him…feet that make haste to run to evil." (Proverbs 6:16, 18)

> "The mouth of forbidden women is a deep pit; he with whom the Lord is angry will fall into it." (Proverbs 22:14)

> "For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress is a narrow well. She lies in wait like a robber and increases the traitors among mankind." (Proverbs 23:27-28)

Yes, she started the day with a religious sacrifice and vow, and, in a twist of irony, ends the day with an empty vow and another sacrifice. This time a sacrifice will be the young, simple fool (Proverbs 7:7). He is her next victim.[157]

The way she speaks, what she offers, and how she dresses are all part of the trap. She is dressed in an enticing and scandalous way. What she is or is not wearing, is like a cheap, flashing neon sign signaling her intentions.[158] She is the sexual aggressor and the laziness of this simple youth in Proverbs chapter 7 is overwhelmed. Her body is on open display, but her heart and the truth are locked up deep inside.[159] She is "the huntress…dressed…to kill."[160] She bats her eyes and puckers up her lips. It's all a show! It's a trap. Pornography is the prime example of this. Everything physically is displayed, nothing of substance, truth, love, or real intimacy can be found there. Pornography is an emotional, social, spiritual, psychological, and physiological trap set by the Forbidden and Adulterous Man or Woman.

> "For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey." (Proverbs 5:3)
>
> "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes." (Proverbs 6:25)
>
> "And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart." (Proverbs 7:10)
>
> "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." (Proverbs 11:22)



The Forbidden, Adulterous Man or Woman sets a deceptive trap, and it has certainly been the ruin of many people.

THE TRICKS

In Proverbs, not only does the Forbidden, Adulterous Woman set a trap, but she pulls a ruthless bait and switch. She promises secrecy in her seduction and cleverly conceals the cost of one night with her. Like Folly, she advertises this all as free, but it's far from being cheap.

She promises a discreet affair. "No one will know," or "It'll just be our little secret," she says. She offers guarantees. Often affairs and the betrayal of a spouse are justified with, "What they don't know won't hurt them." The Forbidden, Adulterous woman promises protection from her husband. She says: "For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home" (Proverbs 7:19-20).

The Forbidden, Adulterous woman promises secrecy, but in the end, the man who goes after her will say, "I am at the brink of utter ruin

in the assembled congregation" (Proverbs 5:14). What he thought would stay secret has become public knowledge. I once heard a story from a friend that a prominent man in his church died. The church celebrated and mourned the loss of this pillar of the faith. A few days later the widow called my friend and asked him to come over. My friend went to the house to help this grieving woman. She needed his help with cleaning some things out. Specifically, what she needed help cleaning out was her husband's extensive collection of pornography. I vividly recall my friend saying that he filled multiple garbage bags up and put them by the road to be taken to the dump. Even after death, that man's sexual sin became known in "the assembled congregation." His widow would continue to carry that embarrassment.

Paul Koptak's commentary on Proverbs, which has been extremely helpful in my study of Proverbs, was published in 2003. Ironically (and tragically), he ends his teaching on Proverbs chapter 6 with a quote from Bill Hybels, the former and now disgraced founder of Willow Creek Church. Hybels retired from ministry in 2018 in part because of accusations about sexual misconduct dating back decades. Ravi Zacharias, a revered apologist, died in 2020 and was celebrated for his Gospel work, until the truth about his manipulation, adultery, financial impropriety, and abuse of all kinds came out. The list of the fallen continues to grow. Sexual sin promises to be discreet. It's the ad, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." Scripture says the complete opposite! God says, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). Jesus warned, "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops" (Luke 12:2-3). Retirement, death, changing careers, or moving across the country doesn't nullify God's warning about sexual sin. What is done in secret will ALWAYS come out. Don't be

deceived by the traps and tricks of the Forbidden and Adulterous person.

There is always a high cost to sexual sin. Just a little rhyme to maybe help remember this point: the FORBIDDEN will always keep the cost HIDDEN. It's like the fine print of a contract or the litany of warnings at the end of certain commercials where the person talks so fast you have no idea what is actually being communicated. The traps and tricks that the Forbidden, Adulterer uses to target you will always conceal or minimize the long-term cost. The wise teacher warns that adultery exacts a terrible, almost unending cost. It's the moral version of a timeshare. You get pitched, you buy, and then realize you're stuck and so are successive generations. That's adultery. It has devastating consequences.



> "…none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life." (Proverbs 2:19)

> "…lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner, and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed." (Proverbs 5:9-11)

> "For the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life." (Proverbs 6:26)

> "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished." (Proverbs 6:27-29)

“He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away. For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts.” (Proverbs 6:33-35)

“He does not know that it will cost him his life.”
(Proverbs 7:23)

“A companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.”
(Proverbs 29:3)

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral…will inherit the kingdom of God.”
(1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

“Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”
(1 Corinthians 6:18)

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality… orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19, 21)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.”
(1 Thessalonians 4:3-5)

> "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." (Hebrews 13:4)

There is a particularly haunting scene at the end of *"The Godfather"* trilogy. Cinematically, the movie falls short of the first and second, but the scene I most remember is from the third. Al Pacino's character has come to the end of his life. The movies detail his descent into a life of crime, cruelty, and misery. While he becomes powerful and rich, the loss of his marriage, daughter, friends, and all joy, come into clear view in the final scene of the trilogy. Corleone has become old and frail. He sits outside of some house in Italy completely alone. The fountain at the center of the picture is dry, seemingly symbolic of his dried-up joy, strength, and power. The shot of the camera just waits as Michael Corleone, sitting in a chair, slumps over and falls face-first into the dirt, dead, and nobody cares. No one comes rushing to his aid. He is completely alone in the world. No love. No tenderness. No family. He is alone in his sin. That scene, for me, provides a sobering visual for the warning in Proverbs chapter 5. Solomon warns that indulging in forbidden, adulterous sin will have dreadful consequences. He cautions, "…and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed, and you say, 'How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof'" (Proverbs 5:11-12).



Paul Koptak, so clearly and brilliantly writes, "When you take what is not yours, you can end up losing what is."[161] The warning against adultery, which in the moment may seem thrilling, sexually exciting, risky, and fun, will be bitter in the end. It leaves a person hollowed out. I have met men in the latter years of their life who played fast and loose with their sexuality who find themselves lonely and depressed. They long for the family they lost and the wife they betrayed. You can see and hear the groan that Proverbs talks about and the sinister,

evil laugh of the Forbidden Adulterer. She laughs at the broken-down, old fool and moves on to her next, often much younger victim. They've all been tricked.

> "This is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I have done no wrong.'" (Proverbs 30:20)

King David, a great hero of the Old Testament, the shepherd turned giant slayer, poet, warrior, musician, and man after God's own heart, committed adultery. He stole another man's wife. She became pregnant, so David had him killed to cover up his sin. Months later, when nobody knew, God knew and sent the prophet Nathan to confront the unrepentant King. David repented and penned what we know as Psalm 51. Nonetheless, there would be a high cost to his sin. Nathan told the broken man, "…the sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:10). The child that Bathsheba had conceived died, one of David's sons raped his half-sister, as a result, murderous conflict would erupt between David's children, his son Absalom would attempt to overthrow David's kingdom and then tragically die, and David would end his life as a weak, impotent, and vengeful man. It's a tragic story and the crucial turning point was adultery. His story serves as a sobering warning and an illustration of the danger of the forbidden.

The central point of the teaching on sexual sin in Proverbs is "How to Avoid" the Forbidden, Adulterous woman. The wise teacher instructs his student to hear his words, love wisdom, and avoid the catastrophe that always accompanies forbidden, adulterous sex.

> "So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to

the departed; none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life." (Proverbs 2:16-19)

Here are three distilled pieces of wisdom from Scripture that will help in avoiding the forbidden, adulterer in your life.

1. Take care of things at home.

"Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love." (Proverbs 5:15-19)



"But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband…Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (1 Corinthians 7:2, 5)

2. Be careful where you go and what you see.

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1)

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise." (Ephesians 5:15)

> "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul." (1 Peter 2:11)

3. When all else fails, RUN!

> "But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house." (Genesis 39:12) (The story of Joseph.)

> "Flee from sexual immorality." (1 Corinthians 6:18)

> "So flee youthful passions." (2 Timothy 2:22)

A quote I found particularly challenging says, "The best advice is useless against strong temptation unless it is thoroughly taken to heart and translated into habits."[162]

CONCLUSION

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *"The Scarlett Letter"* was first published in 1850. It's a story of adultery within an extremely religious community. The adultery is discovered when a married woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child. The woman, in defiance of her Puritan community, refuses to identify the man. In the climax near the end of the book, the town minister Rev. Dimmesdale, reveals that he is the father of the illegitimate child. He has committed adultery. Throughout the book, this truth has haunted him to the point of deep anguish and distress, causing physical damage to his heart, and eventually leading to his death. He publicly, and before God, confesses his sin. During this dramatic revelation, his young daughter, who he had been unable to claim, kisses him. Hawthorne writes, "A spell was broken."[163] That is the Gospel. Psalm 85:10, says, "Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness

and peace kiss each other." That happened at the cross of Calvary. The righteous, spotless Lamb of God sacrificed Himself to offer us peace with God. The kiss, the meeting, to break the spell. The "spell" of guilt, shame, deception, grief, and betrayal can be broken. There is hope. In the warnings to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul adds, "And such were some of you" (1 Corinthians 6:11). The power of the Gospel can bring forgiveness and healing. Jesus died to pay the penalty for adultery, and He rose again, proving that His power can bring dead hearts, marriages, affections, and love back to life. The fictional, adulterous reverend in *"The Scarlett Letter"* sounds a lot like the real-life adulterous King David.



> God knows; and he is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear up on my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant [humiliation] before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever! Praise be his name! His will be done! Farewell! That final word came forth with the minister's expiring breath.[164]

King David wrote:

> "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalm 32:3-5)

Praise God, the spell can be broken.

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

Adultery. This lesson has been burning in my bones to write for a lot of years. And just a heads up...THIS.IS.MY.SOAP. BOX... Like you, my life was burnt by this word. I'm sure if we took a poll the vast majority of the people we know would raise their hands and say that they've been affected by this sin in one way or another. Whether it was their Mom or Dad when they were young, our husband or wife when they were grown, maybe one of their siblings cheated, or maybe they themselves are the adulterer. Either way, we have all felt its pangs. This letter may be very triggering for you. For that I am sorry, I can relate. My hope and prayer is that we will repent and learn from past sins. Glean some wisdom from the Word, teach it to ourselves and implement it with others.

Proverbs has so many warnings against adultery. It's literally the heading of Chapter 5 in my Bible. With so many warnings I know the Lord knew that this would be a problem for His children. So I can't bury my head in the sand and pretend that it won't potentially be a problem for my children. So we talk. A lot. Proverbs 5:1-6 says, "My son, be attentive to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion." (Learn from what I am teaching you, I am trying to help you not create baggage for your life that you will be toting around forever) "For the lips of the forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end, she is

bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander and she does not know it." I don't think this is directed towards just men. Girls, we need to heed this warning just as much as the guys do. What's the warning here? That whoever is the forbidden one, their words are sweet and smooth. They will make you feel special, they will lie to you and make you think things that aren't true. They sound like they will fix all of your problems, like your world would be amazing as long as they are in it. I like the word choice of Forbidden, We all want what we can't have, whatever is out of our reach or different than our normal...man we want it. The Bible warns us and says their end is as bitter as wormwood. What's wormwood? Well, I'm glad you asked. It is a bitter herb that in large doses can be fatal. Is it just me or is it ironic that Scripture compares adultery to something that is fatal?



It's the death of so many things. It's the death of relationships. It's the death of love. It's the death of trust. Just to name a few. "Her feet go down to death." If you chose this path, you chose death. Verse 8 shows us how we are to guard our way. "Keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house." Let's be honest, we can spot people we should be avoiding a mile away, but we like it. We like the attention, we like the words of affirmation, we like the way it makes us feel, so we inch our way closer and closer to their doorstep until we are so close we can't go back. It's the old saying, "sin takes us further than we

want to go, keeps us longer than we want to stay and costs more than we are willing to pay." Proverbs 6:27 says, "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?" We can't play with sexual temptations and not get burnt. Girls, you should never be alone with a man that is not your husband. Guys, you should never be alone with a woman that is not your wife. You shouldn't be texting people of the opposite sex, phone calls or emails. It takes just one small spark to start a roaring fire. We must guard our way. How far are you willing to go out of your way to guard your way? Your Dad and I started over five years ago now really doing the best we can to guard our ways and your ways. Not like we are perfect or anything. Far from it, especially him. I'd like to think I'm a little closer to perfection than he is. It's a joke, people. Tell me we still have some sense of humor in the world?! Any hoot, maybe you can take some of the things we have learned and they will help you as much as they have helped us. We avoid driving on certain roads because of some of the "establishments" that are on them. Does it add drive time and annoyance? For sure. But it's well worth it. While we are driving you know our code, when we say "eyeballs" your eyeballs close or you lock in on the book you are reading. (Yep, we make our kids read in the car.)

Your Dad has worked to quit hugging women at church because we felt like it's not appropriate to cross that physical barrier. And when a hug is inevitable, making it as appropriate as possible, even if that means awkward. I've

told him to become a bad hugger. There are certain men and women in our lives that we know we need to avoid. I know that sounds harsh and you're probably thinking "UGH! GASP! A pastor shouldn't avoid people." I'm sorry but Proverbs 7:12 says, "She is at every corner and she lies in wait." It doesn't specify which corners. Corners at church, corners at work, corners at the grocery store, corners at a football game, corners at the kid's school...he/she is lying in wait.



Keeping our marriage safe and protected is our #1 priority after our relationships with the Lord. We don't have internet at home. We don't have smart TVs; you don't have phones. Claire, you just got your first computer at 17 to do a few college classes on. We have "Covenant Eyes" installed for when you are connected to Wifi for accountability reasons. I realize the internet is a necessary evil in the world we live in. But I have watched and felt the effects of the burns it can leave. According to internetsafety101.org, "Children are accessing pornography via mobile devices." PornHub said its users watched 4.6 billion hours of pornography in 2016 via smartphones and 11% via tablets." I can't even imagine what that number is mid pandemic. Covenant Eyes says, "1 in 5 mobile searches are used for porn." That statistic was from 2015. I'd imagine it's much higher now. According to guardchild.com, "70% of children 7-18 have accidentally encountered porn online, often through a web search while doing homework." I could rattle statistics all day in your direction about how Satan is trying to make this a normal

thing. Grooming us to think this is all fine and monogamy in a relationship the way God created it, is a thing of the past. But what it comes down to is how far are you willing to go out of your way to guard your way.

Which brings us to our next point. Guarding our homes. Proverbs 5:15-19, "Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight, be intoxicated always with her love."

We are supposed to keep ourselves for our spouses. We are not to be scattering ourselves abroad in the streets. Our bodies, our love, it's for our spouses and no one else. I think we all need to be careful with our intentions as we post pictures of ourselves on social media, who is that for? What's the purpose? How are you dressing when you are out? Is it to flaunt your body and draw attention from the opposite sex? We are supposed to be intoxicated with our spouse. Not every Tom, Dick or Mary that passes by. What are you doing to grow in that intoxication of your spouse? I love country music. Dad calls it my sinful music. Haha. But I love all of the sappy songs. It makes me think of him and our story. Makes me think of when we were young and dating. Whew. Ok back to writing, I may have been

daydreaming there for a minute. There is a Tim McGraw song that says,

> "If I never think about her I'll never miss her at all
> Never wonder what she's doing Never give her a call
> Never see her again and I'll be free as a bird
> But the trouble with never is never, never works
> If I never bring her flowers, I'll never see her smile
> If I never try and kiss her, she'll never drive me wild
> And I'll never feel the need to say those 3 little words
> But the trouble with never is never, never works"



You get the gist. We must figure out the ways our spouses feel and receive love. Figure out ways they feel cherished. Feeding that fire to grow together. The Lord created sex. He created it for the context of marriage for us to enjoy. (AND ONLY MARRIAGE, so this is for your future selves) To enjoy each other, to express our love and somehow it brings glory to the Lord. Satan likes to hijack and pervert things the Lord created for good. Has Satan hijacked your sex life? Does your sex life need the redeeming power of Jesus? Because He offers it. He can make it new.

Scripture continues in its warnings. Proverbs 6:25-26 says, "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes. For the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life." I like the NLT version of this verse, "For a prostitute will bring you to poverty but

sleeping with another mans wife will cost you your life." We must guard our desires. If we know Jesus as our Savior we are in a continual epic battle with our flesh. When it rears its ugly head we have to squash it. "The Expositors Bible Commentary" says, "Playing with temptation is only the heart reaching out after sin."

So the Bible warns us and I extend those warnings to you, I only want to see the Lord rain down His blessings of a beautiful, healthy marriage for you all. I pray that you guard your ways, guard your sex life and that it will be an honor to the Lord. Remember, marriage is a picture of the Gospel to the World. That makes marriage the number one enemy of Satan. Guard it. Protect it at all costs. It is a treasure.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How do you feel the church has failed in teaching about sex?

How do you feel the church has succeeded in teaching about sex?

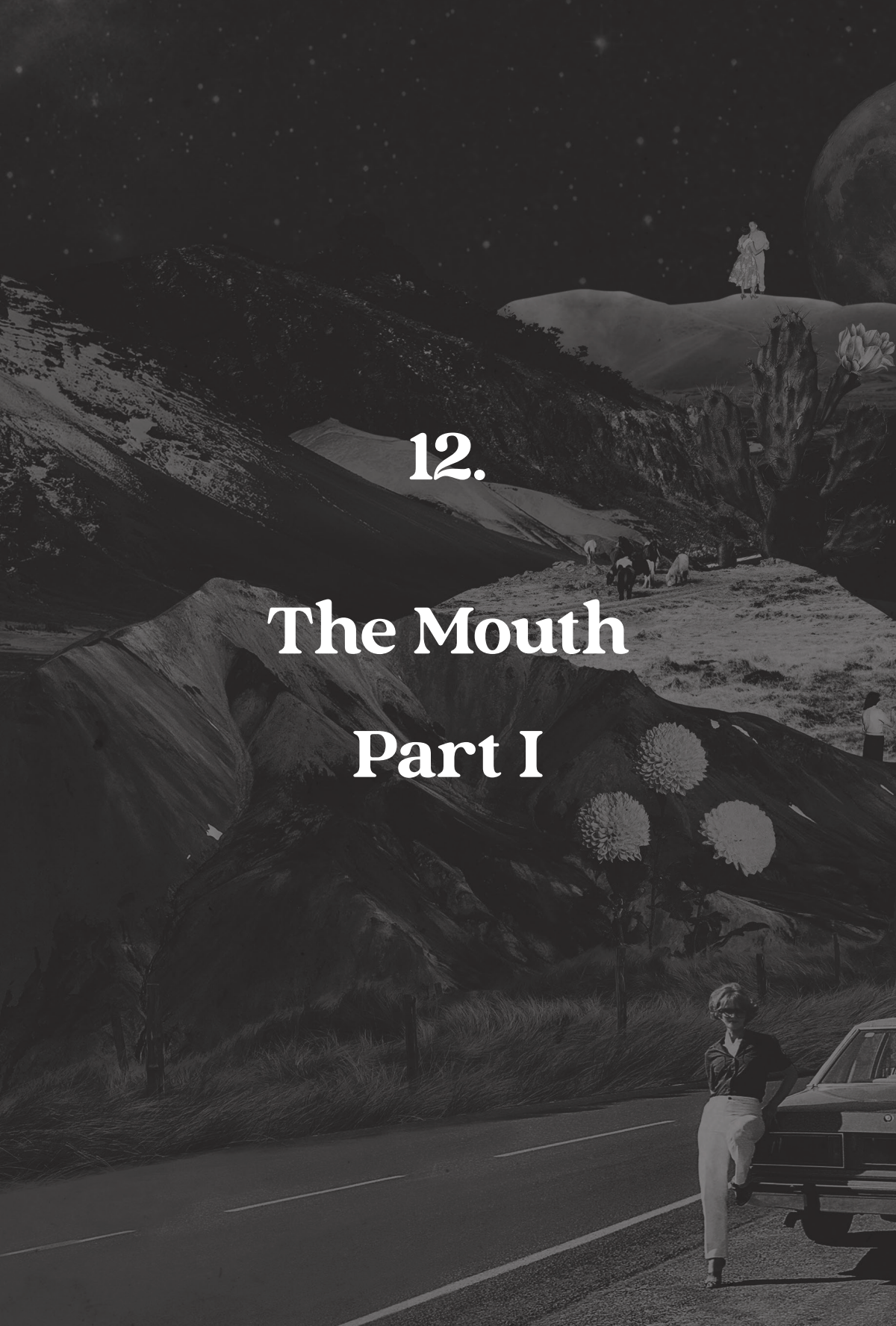
Do you recognize yourself as a target? If so, why? If no, why not?

What are some forbidden traps that you've run into? What was the cost? Wounds?

Have you been tricked? What was the lie you believed?

What accountability in the area of sexual purity do you have in your life?





12.

The Mouth

Part I

LIARS, GOSSIPS, AND THOSE WHO NEVER SHUT-UP

Proverbs chapter 10 is where the real Proverbs actually begin, and up to this point in the book, the wise instructor has praised wisdom and tried to show his son (student) the destruction of foolishness and folly. From this point forward in this book of Wisdom, Proverbs includes dozens, actually near a hundred, references to words, speech, our tongue, mouth, lips, and talk. More than any other single subject aside from the general challenge to choose wisdom, King Solomon and the wisdom of Proverbs addresses extensively the words we use, who we speak to, and the truth of what we say.



Inside the front cover of the Bible I had in elementary school is a little note taped just under my name. I actually remember cutting it out of a workbook I had for school and taping it in my Bible. The note reads, “4. You may get into trouble if you talk too much.” I couldn’t tell you what book it came from or what numbers 1-3 were, but I knew the truth of that statement. I was the kid who never knew when to shut up. My poor teachers, and then college professors, and then my wife. Oh man…it’s still so true. “You will get into trouble if you talk too much.” As an 11-year-old boy, I didn’t realize that that truth was from the Bible.

The amount of verses in Proverbs addressing this subject is a bit overwhelming. In the actual Proverbs of chapters 10-22, the book uses comparison and contrast. So this first chapter on “The Mouth” will start with the negatives and in the second part, we’ll look at the positive uses of the mouth. The sage addresses lying, gossip, flattery, perverse talk, sarcasm, and those who just don’t know when to shut up. Proverbs chapter 10 provides us a rough outline of the rest of the passages from the book.

LIARS

"The mouth of the wicked conceals violence…the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." (Proverbs 10:6, 11)

Haters hate and liars lie. A liar conceals the truth by presenting a false reality either in words or in the very way that they live. A liar "distorts, disfigures, and dissembles, and deforms truth."[165] Lies often are used to cover the truth, because the truth is unflattering, convicting, or damning. The truth makes a person look bad, so they choose dishonesty as a cover-up.

My oldest daughter loves the movie *"School of Rock,"* where Jack Black pretends to be a teacher. The movie is filled with lie after lie after lie, until the quasi-redemptive ending. I can't stand the movie. I don't like lying movies. Of course, I have double standards and give a complete pass to the animated movie *"Mulan,"* but not *"Aladdin."* He doesn't get a pass. I just can't be entertained by lies, mostly because I have been in seasons or situations of my life where I hid the truth. Those stories remind me of my own sins.

Lying begins with what feels like a little fib or "white lie." But there really is no such thing. Lying is lying. Lying very often leads to habitual lying. It becomes easier and liars become "better" liars. They keep a straight face and sometimes even add in some false emotions, anger, sadness, or disgust. When the reality of what they are really feeling isn't anywhere near those emotions. They are deceiving with their actions and their words.

Liars love the control that it gives them over the world and over, what Proverbs calls, their "victims" (Proverbs 26:28). They have no respect, care, or true love for those they are deceiving. This cruel deception can take the form of flattery. Kent Hughes defines flattery

as "saying to a person's face what you would never say behind his or her back."[166] Flattery is giving lying compliments or fake respect. This is the sweet-talker. It's the verbal bait and switch. It's hugging someone while knifing them in the back. Flattery is manipulation. It's a wink and nod to the scheme.[167] It is LYING! In *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* even Christian is warned by his friend Hopeful to steer clear of The Flatterer. Solomon warns that the Adulterous, Forbidden Woman, has speech that "...is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter" (Proverbs 5:3-4). Beware of the liar, who comes in the form of a flatterer or sweet-talker or con, they are patronizing you. They will say whatever they have to just to get what they want. They will promise the world with zero intentions of following through. They have an agenda and will use smooth talk to get what they want. You are disposable. You are a means to an end. And when they get what they've come for, you'll be dropped like a bad habit.



"Whoever winks the eye causes trouble, and a babbling fool will come to ruin." (Proverbs 10:10)

"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil." (Proverbs 12:20)

"A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies." (Proverbs 14:5)

"Whoever winks his eyes plans dishonest things; he who purses his lips brings evil to pass." (Proverbs 16:30)

"The eyes of the Lord keep watch over knowledge, but he overthrows the words of the traitor." (Proverbs 22:12)

"Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an evil heart. Whoever hates disguises himself with

his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart; though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly."
(Proverbs 26:23-26)

"Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I'm only joking!'" (Proverbs 26:18-19) (This could be viewed as cutting, reckless sarcasm.)

"A flattering mouth works ruin." (Proverbs 26:28)

"Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue." (Proverbs 28:23)

"A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet." (Proverbs 29:5)

"May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, 'With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?'" (Psalm 12:3-4)

Liars begin with little, seemingly innocent lies to people around them, but internally they have also begun lying to themselves. Justifications like "What they don't know won't hurt them," "Ignorance is bliss," or my former go-to, "This isn't going to hurt anybody but me." Even the excuses, "Well, I didn't lie. I just didn't say anything" or "I accidentally left that part out," or "I didn't want to hurt them." THOSE ARE LIES! The Bible calls this self-deception.[168] At first, they may know and recognize an untruth. They simply lie to cover up another lie. After a while, they've buried the truth and themselves under a mountain of dishonesty. Over time the mask, the lies, the performance, the

hypocrisy begins to be so second-nature, so natural, that it takes over. Habitual lying soon becomes pathological. The Liar believes his own lies. They've become lost in a labyrinth of lies.

A labyrinth was a maze from Greek mythology.[169] Instead of being a maze on paper, it was a maze in real life. Today we sometimes see these at amusement parks or a corn maze or a mirror maze. I love these things. I still remember as a young boy going through a maze at a festival. At first liars, like those who enter a maze, can quickly choose to turn around. We could even call this repentance. They've told or lived out an untruth. It hasn't gone very far and neither have they, so course correcting and finding their way out is pretty simple. But after a while, liars tend to get lost in their own lies. They forget who they've said what to. They make mistakes, so they cover it with more lies, leading them deeper into the labyrinth of lies. It's really sad. In the Greek legend of the labyrinth, the maze, which housed a horrible monster, was eventually conquered by leaving behind a string that could be followed to get back out. Over time, habitual and then pathological liars lose the string. The truth of who they are and what they've done is buried under years and sometimes decades of falsehoods. In the mythological story, the labyrinth was a prison. Liars build their own prisons with their lies.



Proverbs has much to say about using words and deeds to deceive.

> "Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you." (Proverbs 4:24)

> "A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech." (Proverbs 6:12)

> "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him…a lying tongue…" (Proverbs 6:16-17)

“The mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”
(Proverbs 10:6)

“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” (Proverbs 10:11)

“Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit...Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.” (Proverbs 12:17, 19)

“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.” (Proverbs 12:22)

“A man of crooked heart does not discover good, and one with a dishonest tongue falls into calamity.” (Proverbs 17:20)

“Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool.” (Proverbs 19:1)

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.” (Proverbs 19:5)

“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.” (Proverbs 21:6)

“A false witness will perish.” (Proverbs 21:28)

“Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips.” (Proverbs 24:28)

“A lying tongue hates its victims.” (Proverbs 26:28)

God hates lying. In John chapter 8, Jesus reveals the character of the religious leaders at that time. And not just their character, but their true spiritual condition, heritage, and master is revealed by this TRUTHFUL rebuke from the Lord.

> "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." (John 8:44-47)



Lying is the rejection of truth. Satan has no truth in him and is "the father of lies." Proverbs calls lying lips an abomination. God loathes and detests liars, fakes, and phonies. Eventually, liars will be eternally judged. In Revelation 21:8, the apostle John writes that "…all liars [will have] their portion…in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." It's a horrifying warning.

GOSSIPS (AND THEIR LISTENERS)

> "The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool." (Proverbs 10:18)

I once got so frustrated with our staff that I decided to play the game of telephone in our weekly All-Staff Meeting. In hindsight, it seems a bit juvenile, but thankfully it worked. The staff was sitting in about five or six rows and about ten or so seats across. I quickly wrote five or six generic announcements for events that we've had. The announcements included: who, what, where, when, and why. I

handed the announcements to each person at the end of the row. The rules of the game were that they were only allowed to give the information once to the person to their right. The last person in the row would then go to the whiteboard and write down the information. To this day I've never seen the game of telephone fail to make its point. What people wrote on the board was absolutely hilarious and totally wrong. I read the original announcement as everyone cracked up laughing. My point for the exercise was that we can't rely on announcements in our gatherings to convey all the details. We have to have a multi-pronged approach to getting people correct and timely information.

The point of the exercise could just as easily have been: see how messed up information gets when passed from one person to the next. Imagine if the game was not about some fictional event, but about a person. Sounds cruel, yet many people play this game nearly every day. One of the lessons the simple game of telephone teaches us is that gossip destroys. Slander is deadly. And yet we play around with these things like they are kid's toys, when in reality they are deadly weapons. Gossip is a weapon of mass destruction. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death…[is] in the power of the tongue." Proverbs likens the tongue to a sword (Proverbs 12:18). In the New Testament, James compares it to a wild beast, a source of destructive forest fires, says it's filled with deadly venom, and goes so far to say that the tongue is "set on fire by hell" (James 3:6).

Right up front, let's debunk the excuse, "Well, I just listened…I didn't say anything" or "I just read it…I didn't pass it along" as legitimate defenses. When the Bible talks about gossip, it's talking about those speaking and those listening. Gossip is "innuendos, half-truths, and facts distorted and exaggerated beyond recognition."[170] To use the biblical analogies, gossip is burning somebody down, poisoning their reputation with other people, and cutting them down to size.

In Proverbs chapter 6, nearly half the things God absolutely hates have to do with speech. A liar, "a false witness," and "one who sows discord among brothers" (Proverbs 6:19).

In 2 Thessalonians 3:11 and 1 Timothy 5:13, the Bible calls gossips "busybodies." In 1 Peter 4:15, gossips are called "meddlers." The Greek in 2 Thessalonians is a play on words, "…everywhere doing everything but doing nothing."[171] A busybody knows everything about everybody. It's their job. Rather than providing a valuable service to the community, gossip hurts, divides, and burns. The busybody is always looking for the latest news about family members, neighbors, church members, and even friends. "Did you hear about so and so?" they'll ask. That simple question gets them ever so slightly off the hook of guilt. If you say "yes" then you are partly to blame. Gossip has been around forever. The New Testament writers addressed it 2,000 years ago. Today, we don't even have to write a letter, make a visit, or wait for tomorrow's paper to get the gossip or the latest juicy details. We have 24/7 access to gossip and people to pass our news along to. Now because of technology, our version of "the grapevine"[172] moves much faster. Social media, smartphones, the 24-hour news cycle, and dedicated networks to celebrity gossip, all feed the insatiable desire to be in the know. Twice Proverbs warns:



> "The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body." (Proverbs 18:8)

> "The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body." (Proverbs 26:22)

Gossip penetrates deep into our hearts. Whether we are aware or not, gossip significantly impacts the way we view people, races, nationalities, companies, entire regions of the country, schools, teachers, celebrities, politicians, and pastors. The phrase "Did you

hear…" causes an instant hunger in us to be in the know. Being in the loop feels socially validating and powerful. We know something that others don't. The initial taste is delicious, but eventually, in digestion, gossip is poisonous.

> "…perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord." (Proverbs 6:14)

> "With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor." (Proverbs 11:9)

> "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown. Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent. Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered." (Proverbs 11:11-13)

> "The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood." (Proverbs 12:6)

> "A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire. A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends." (Proverbs 16:27-28)

> "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore, do not associate with a simple babbler." (Proverbs 20:19)

> "An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue." (Proverbs 17:4)

> "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends." (Proverbs 17:9)

We must commit to not being a gossiper or being a conduit for gossip. I have seen gossip destroy churches, families, and friendships. I once saw gossip destroy nearly an entire church staff. Pastors and others called by God to serve Him and His people were consumed. I shudder to look back and see the friendships that were destroyed and the Gospel opportunities that were forfeited. When a busybody comes your way, SHUT IT DOWN. Very practically, Proverbs says, "For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases" (Proverbs 26:20). Don't add to the fire. Borrowing the motto from Smokey the Bear, "Only you can prevent *gossip* fires."

THOSE WHO NEVER SHUT-UP

> "When words are many, transgression is not lacking." (Proverbs 10:19)



I love all types of different music. For many years, I loved early '60s music. In 1960, Joe Jones released a track that still makes me laugh every time I hear it. The song is called *"You Talk Too Much."* If you don't know it, take a minute and listen to it online. After listening, don't be offended. A woman could just as easily have sung that song about a man. The song is about a man telling his girl that she talks too much, that she worries about everything, and gossips about everyone, even people she doesn't know. Proverbs warns about lying and gossip. It also warns about talking too much. One author said, "On average, most people speak about sixteen thousand words a day."[173] I'm sure as a pastor I'm way over that. Actually, I shouldn't blame being a pastor. I just talk too much.

I was leading a funeral service for a dear man in our church. His son-in-law is a pastor and was speaking for a portion of the funeral. He was attempting to keep it short, but it just kept going. Multiple times he acknowledged that his portion was getting a little long. I could

sense the discomfort in the folks sitting as he kept talking. When he finished, I was intending to make a joke, but I inadvertently crushed the guy. As I remember it, I walked toward the center of the stage, I encouraged people to clap as a sign of encouragement, then said, "No judgment from me…I don't know when to shut up either." With those careless words, I proved my point, looked like a bully, and used this grieving man for a laugh. I grew up hearing the saying, "The more you talk, the dumber you sound." Mark Twain said it a little more eloquently. Twain said, "It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt."[174] I had removed all doubt with a careless comment.

In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher Solomon warns about talking too much even to God. It wasn't that Solomon was discouraging prayer, it was what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6, "…they think that they will be heard for their many words" (Matthew 6:7). Solomon calls us back to the fear of the Lord and how that should limit the "wordy-ness" of our petitions before God. He writes:

> "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear." (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7)

Talkers are people that just don't know when to shut up. They are the "Chatty-Cathy" (sorry if your name is Cathy). Using too many words leads them to careless words that then leads to all kinds of other issues. The wise teacher of Proverbs warns about the pain that talking too much can cause, both personally and to others. Think about it in economic terms, specifically the balance of supply and demand. When supply is up, cost/value usually goes down. When supply is down, often cost/value goes up. Keep the supply of your words low and demand will increase. Here are a few brief bios of people who talk way too much. Their words are real cheap…a dime a dozen (or more).[175]

NO-FILTER



This is the guy who says whatever comes to his mind. He lets it all out, not caring how anyone hears or receives his words. His right to free speech is more important than the feelings of his listeners and innocent bystanders. Again, Proverbs compares words to a sword. This person has wounded a lot of people with reckless words. He wields this sword, not caring about the collateral damage of his untamed tongue. The cuss mouth is closely related to no filter. These people aren't safe for kids to be around. They can't stop cussing, belittling people, or talking about crass, inappropriate subjects. They feel entitled to talk a certain way and if you don't like it, they'll tell you to grow up or get lost. "You can't control the way I talk," they'll say. And of course, that's the G-Rated version of what they'll say.

> "He who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." (Proverbs 13:3)
>
> "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts." (Proverbs 12:18)
>
> "Perverted speech I hate." (Proverbs 8:13)

"The mouth of the wicked [know] what is perverse." (Proverbs 10:32)

"The mouth of the wicked pours out evil things." (Proverbs 15:28)

"Evil men…their lips talk of trouble." (Proverbs 24:1-2)

"Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight." (Proverbs 26:2)

"Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place." (Ephesians 5:4)

ALL-TALK

All-Talk is someone who promises, guarantees, and NEVER delivers. Something or someone is always to blame for their failure. These are people who are constantly talking about all the great things they've done (probably all exaggerations, which are lies) and all the great things they are going to do. But they won't. They'll never do anything but talk about doing. They are careless with their words. The naive will be taken in by these big talkers until they get burned in business or another area of life. At the end of their lives, these people can only choose to give excuses and blameshift or conceal the truth about their lives by lying.

"…if you are snared in the words of your mouth, caught in the words of your mouth…" (Proverbs 6:2)[176]

"An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips." (Proverbs 12:13)

"In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty." (Proverbs 14:23)

I LOVE THE SOUND OF MY OWN VOICE…

Before you've finished saying a word, this guy is ready to blow your mind with his next "brilliant" insight. In actuality, he doesn't have a clue. He just talks. This person is convinced that the more they talk the more of an expert they'll somehow magically become. The person who is in love with the sound of their own voice is the first, last, and probably only one to talk. You won't get a word in edgewise. They may give an appearance of listening, but they aren't. They are preparing their next rant, diatribe, argument, or "insight." These people, unlike All-Talk, might actually be successful. And if they are, by the end of your time with them, you'll know ALL about it. And you'll have received mounds of unsolicited advice on every area of your life. I feel like most of these people should just start podcasts, that way we can decide if we even want to listen or limit or just ignore them all together.



"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." (Proverbs 18:13)

"Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him." (Proverbs 29:20)

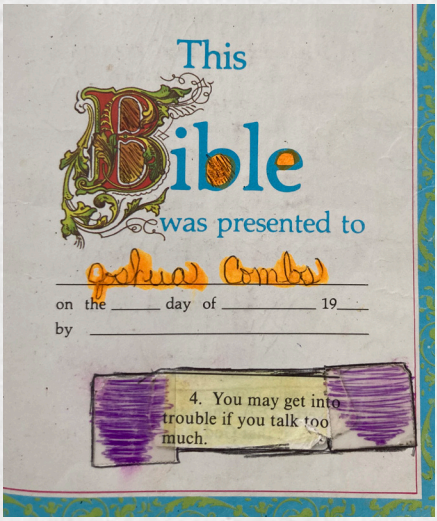
"A babbling fool will come to ruin…the mouth of a fool brings ruin near…the perverse tongue will be cut off." (Proverbs 10:8, 14, 31)

"A fool multiplies words." (Ecclesiastes 10:14)

What comes out of the mouth is a window into "our innermost being."[177] "For out of the abundance of the heart," Jesus said, "the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). We may view words as harmless, insignificant, or no big deal, but God says, "On the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak" (Matthew 12:36). Words have the power of life and death. Words not only can destroy people through lies or gossip or recklessness overuse, words can also destroy the person using them. God is keeping an account of every word we say. The Lord told the chatty religious leaders, "By your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37).

> "A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating. A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul." (Proverbs 18:6-7)

> "By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back." (Proverbs 14:3)



Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

Oooooooooo ain't nothin' I hate more than a liar. If I can't trust your words, I can't trust you. Once that trust is broken, it takes A LOT to build it back. Years and sometimes a lifetime. These are all things I've told you since you were tiny humans. When you were all growing, you all went through the stage of trying out lying. Some of you were better at it than others. I'll let your brains squirm trying to figure out who was the best at it. But if you remember back I would always say, I won't let you be a liar. I would do everything in my power to not let this happen. Once I discovered you had entered this stage, I was on you like white on rice. This wasn't going to happen on my watch.



Now obviously Dad and I had to help guide you and kick your butts, but ultimately I had to pray a ton because I knew only the Lord could change your hearts. He had to change your heart or you would only get better at lying. We need to rely on the Lord to change and renew hearts and minds. Because like Matthew says in chapter 15:18, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person." I feel like lying is such a root sin. If you become an adulterer, well what happened first? You lied. If you become a thief, what happened first? You lied. If you become a cheat, what happened first? You lied. Get my point? I feel like lying is where things begin, whether it is lying to yourself or to other people. I have been on the receiving end of people's lies a lot in life and that causes

hurt and pain that can't be fixed this side of Heaven. So for you, remember, you may be dirt poor and have nothing to your name, people might not be able to say a whole lot about your accomplishments in life but they better be able to say, I can trust their word. Because if they can trust your word and what you say about everyday things in life, then they will be able to trust what you say about Jesus. Isn't that our ultimate goal? Lead others to the Lord. If they can't trust your words about smaller things, how can they trust you about Him?

As I sat here and prayed about what to say to you about liars and lying, all I could think of was, just don't be one. We all lie at some point in life, it is better to own up to it and take responsibility. That is how trust starts to be built again. Maybe you are reading this today and you are a perpetual liar. You can't find your way out of the "Labyrinth of Lies" as Dad so neatly put it. Ask for help. Find someone that will call you out on your crap. Someone that won't let you fudge the truth. Don't wait until you are caught to fess up. Initiate and take ownership for the hurt. The Lord can renew your mind, your heart and offers forgiveness to you. It's yours for the taking.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What's the biggest lie you've ever heard?

How have lies negatively impacted your life?

Have you seen gossip hurt your family? Work? Church? Community?

How has gossip negatively impacted your life? Were you the subject? The speaker? Or the listener?



Even Jesus in John chapter 8 seems to be a victim of gossip. The Pharisees attack the Lord saying, "We were not born of sexual immorality" (John 8:41). Later they mock Jesus' mother, by insulting Jesus' ancestry, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (John 8:48). The rumors surrounding Jesus' birth varied, that He was illegitimate, to His real father was a Roman soldier.

Has your mouth ever gotten you into trouble? Remember, confession is good for the soul.

How have you seen too many words lead to bigger problems?

Is everything awkward silence to you or are times of silence refreshing? Are you comfortable in silence?

(If you're answering these questions in a group setting, be ready for some silence.)



13.

The Mouth

Part II

A few months ago, a buddy of mine texted in a group thread, *"Darkest Hour."* "What a movie." I used to watch as many movies as humanly possible, but over the last few years because of busyness and the Lord's conviction, I've significantly cut back. So I hadn't seen this movie. I knew what it was, so I checked it out on Pluggedin.org (a Christian movie review site) and decided I could watch this movie. Now at our house, we don't have Wi-Fi or cable. So watching a movie means: A) Jen buys it from Amazon on her phone and we wait a day or two for it to be delivered B) We go to a friend's house to watch it, or C) We head to a nearby Redbox and hope they have it. Those options have greatly contributed to lowering the number of new movies we watch. Redbox had the movie and before I returned it, I watched it multiple times.



This movie blew my mind! It's the story of Winston Churchill taking up the role of prime minister in 1940, just as Hitler is invading Europe. Churchill, unlike his predecessor and some in his war cabinet, sees the Nazi threat for what it is. Some of Churchill's cabinet, on the other hand, want to negotiate a peace treaty with Germany. The scenes showing the meetings are riveting. But what stands out in the movie are the speeches. True to actual historical events, in the first few weeks of Churchill's time as PM, he delivered three of the most memorable speeches of the 20th century. On May the 12th, in the House of Commons, he said:

> I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind…You ask, what is our policy? I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us: to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: it is victory, victory at all costs, victory

> in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.[178]

The response to this rousing speech was muted. The prospect of war against the German forces made little sense, especially with the British army currently trapped at Dunkirk. Lord Halifax, who had seriously been considered to be Prime Minister instead of Churchill, pushed for peace talks with Germany. In a tense scene recounting a war council meeting, Halifax challenges Churchill with the real possibility of invasion. He confronts the PM, asking, “What is to stop Heir Hitler then, Winston…WORDS, WORDS, WORDS ALONE?” The line in the movie is almost prophetic, because it would be words that would essentially change the course of history as we know it. A few weeks later, on June 4th, in a speech that provides the climactic end to the movie, Churchill delivered a discourse which may have single handedly mustered the British people and their leaders to war. His speech included the famous, rhythmic lines:

> We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing ground, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.[179]

In the film, Lord Halifax sits stunned by the speech and the raucous response. Somebody leans forward and asks, “What just happened?” Halifax responds, “He mobilized the English language and sent it into battle.” It’s a brilliant line and absolutely true. Words had been weaponized, for the good. Listening to the speech in the movie still brings me to tears. It is inspiring.

During those early weeks as Prime Minister, Churchill lived on the edge of despair. One biographer wrote, “It is impossible to believe that Churchill did not in those next few weeks’ experience moments of almost crushing dismay, that there were not indeed mornings when he did not awake feeling that he must have been mistaken, nearly insane, to have sought such a burden of supreme responsibility at a time when everything seemed more likely than not to go down into the abyss.”[180] From that state of mind and heart, words seemed to rally him and his people to hope.

On June 18th, two weeks after the climactic speech that gave the ending to the film, Churchill gave yet another speech that one author likened to Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.[181] In this defiant address, the famous line “This was their finest hour”[182] was delivered in the face of the impending German attack. Outmatched and outgunned, Churchill superseded even the oratory skills of Adolph Hitler. The British people were inspired and five years later would be victorious. Churchill became a legend.[183] The power of words as real actions and their ability to create real change is demonstrated in some of our own leaders, such as John F. Kennedy in his famous inaugural speech or Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech or President Reagan’s “Mr. Gorbachov, tear down this wall” speech in front of the doomed Berlin Wall. Those words, even decades later, have power. These speeches, among others, demonstrate the power of words to motivate, encourage, comfort, create, destroy, and rally people to a cause.



Speech is one of the characteristics that separates humanity from the rest of creation. Not just the ability to communicate or comprehend, to a certain extent, some animals can do that. We can speak, listen, create, instruct, tell stories, and share jokes. We have hundreds of languages and countless dialects. Humanity is unique among creation. People, unlike the rest of creation, are made in the image

of God. “God created man in his own image,” Genesis says, “in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). We bear or carry the *Imago Dei.* We are image-bearers of our Creator.

One of the early attributes of God that we see in the Bible is speech. Creation begins with the phrase, “And God said…” (Genesis 1:3). Through the Genesis account of creation, that phrase is repeated. Each day of creation begins with “God said” (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, and 24). Through the power of speech, God created the entire universe. He created all the elements of our planet and everything in it with WORDS. The Scripture begins with the declaration of God and woven into the creation account is the power of words.

In the book of James, the half-brother of Jesus affirms the *Imago Dei.* He writes that “people…are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9). The context of that phrase is talk and the power of the tongue. James writes:

> “The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and saltwater? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs?

> Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom." (James 3:5-13)

Outside of the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, we are unable to tame our own tongue. James connects the activity of the tongue with words of wisdom. Our conduct, and more specifically our words, are essential to our Gospel witness. James lovingly confronts us by questioning the consistency of our words. Sweet and bitter words coming from the same mouth. Blessing God and while cursing His creation "ought not be so."



As we looked at in the last chapter, words have immense power. They can be weaponized for wicked, destructive purposes or for good. The sage wisdom of Proverbs warns against the negative effects of words, but also offers the joys and benefits of a word fitly spoken. Ironically it does all of this using words! In the wisdom of Solomon, words have the power to instruct, persuade, and give life; also teaching us that the timing and tone of those words greatly matter and that sometimes silence is best.

INSTRUCTION

An instructor is a teacher. A teacher uses words to impart wisdom and truth. What a joy it is to have or be a teacher. In college, I had a professor who became a friend. Listening to him teach in both formal and informal settings is one of the great honors of my life. I remember asking him how he became so wise. He told me that shortly after he was saved while watching a broadcast of Billy Graham, he began to pray for wisdom. As just a teenager, he began praying daily for wisdom. His prayers had been answered and it showed. His instruction included great words of wisdom and counsel.

"On the lips of him who has understanding wisdom is found." (Proverbs 10:13)

"The lips of the wise will preserve them." (Proverbs 14:3)

"The lips of the wise spread knowledge." (Proverbs 15:7)

"The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook." (Proverbs 18:4)

"There is gold and abundance of costly stones, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel." (Proverbs 20:15)

Part of instruction is correction. It's honesty and genuinely constructive criticism, rather than destructive. I remember that same professor and friend confronting me on sin in my life. I will never forget his honesty, passion, and urgency as we stood in his kitchen. His words cut me deeply, but as a young man, they gave me hope that words could be both truthful and loving.

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend." (Proverbs 27:6)

"Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips." (Proverbs 24:26)

"The word of a man who hears will endure." (Proverbs 21:28)

PERSUASION

At first, the idea of being persuasive or winsome may seem wrong, even unbiblical or unchristian. Yet Proverbs encourages the wise to be persuasive, "judicious," and have "sweetness of speech." Benjamin Franklin said, "Tart words make no friends…a spoonful of

honey will catch more flies than a gallon of vinegar." He borrowed that concept from Solomon.

> "The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness." (Proverbs 16:21)

> "The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." (Proverbs 16:23-24)

> "With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone." (Proverbs 25:15)



We may initially associate persuasive speech with lying or half-truths. Half-truths are still complete lies. That's not what Solomon's instructions are. Being persuasive and not manipulative has a lot to do with timing and tone. Yelling may motivate with fear and intimidation, but it sows the seeds of mistrust and can be abusive. The right word at the right time said in the right way can change the course of a conversation, negotiation, conflict, argument, lesson, or, in Churchill's case, history.

> "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of fools pour out folly." (Proverbs 15:1-2)

> "To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23)

> "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." (Proverbs 25:11)

This is the opposite of “No-Filter” from the previous chapter. Rather than giving thought to the timing and tone of his words, No-Filter just lets it rip. By contrast, a persuasive speaker thinks less about just getting information out there and more about how his listener will best receive the information. A wise person is convincing, because they are reasonable, thoughtful, patient, and first willing to kindly listen to other points of view before speaking. This type of person is rare. They have a winning personality. They aren’t lying nor are they flattering. They are fiercely committed to the truth, but delivering it in the most clear, understandable, and palatable way. Acclaimed author, speaker, and leadership expert John Maxwell addressed this key distinction. He wrote:

> I think of myself as a motivational teacher, not a motivational speaker. What’s the difference between the two? A motivational speaker makes you feel good, but the next day you’re not sure why. A motivational teacher makes you feel good, and the next day you know why and take action. In other words, the first kind of communicator wants you to *feel* good, and the second wants you to *do* good.[184]

Truly persuasive people are people of substance. They give thought to the best setting and time to speak to someone. Paul wrote to the Colossian church, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6). Gracious speech is having your listener in mind. “Seasoned with salt” is NOT salty talk. It’s a phrase that the original Greco-Roman audience would have understood. It’s the idea of being “joyful, even witty, for this is what salty speech meant in classical Greek.”[185] This person will be engaging in conversation, witty, funny, charming, exciting, and legitimately have something to say. That’s the type of person Proverbs and Paul is instructing and challenging us to be, not boring, snobbish, uninteresting, one-dimensional, holier-than-thou conversationalists.

The ultimate goal being that through an engaging, persuasive conversation, our speech can be used to win people to Christ. Sadly, many Christians have abandoned the wisdom of Solomon for the lame, drab, uninspiring churchy talk that lost people find hollow and confusing. This isn't a license to join in evil conversations. The last chapter addressed the foolishness of that kind of talk. Wisdom will lead us to be winsome and persuasive in our speech. I've learned and continue to learn what I call "The Three T's of wise, persuasive speech:" Timing, Tone, and Tact.

> "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." (Colossians 4:5-6)



> "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us." (Titus 2:7-8)

WORDS OF LIFE

Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." That proverb has been translated in the Christianese phrase "speak life." The basic premise, as I understand it, is to speak life-giving words of hope, healing, joy, peace, love, etc. It seems that the verse has been stretched well beyond the breaking point by some well-meaning believers. The tongue and the words that it speaks are powerful, but they are not all-powerful. Our ability to speak words reflects the image of God that we all carry, but it doesn't make us gods or goddesses. Words have limits, both positively and negatively. Words do not create reality. They aren't some divinely given Jedi

mind trick. They do not have the power to call into existence what doesn't exist. That power is reserved for God Almighty. The point of the proverb is to be careful with words. As we've noted, some people are reckless with words. On the extreme flip side, some people think their words have more power than they do. I have personally seen some Christians even afraid of speaking negative truths for fear that the devil and his demons will hear. The point of the proverb isn't to create fear, but wisdom in the way we use words.

Words have the power to give life (keep that in its proper poetic context) and bring renewal. Words can bring comfort and encouragement to those who are in despair. Words can breathe life into someone who has lost hope and is ready to throw in the towel. The right words can renew their commitment. Great coaches inspire their players with a well-timed challenge. Teams that are nearly defeated rally to great victories often on the wings of words. The theme of the proverb is giving life to those who hear you. Do people leave a conversation with you feeling inspired, hopeful, encouraged? Do they leave feeling reminded of the *Imago Dei?* I'm always challenged by Acts chapter 17 where the Apostle Paul could have begun his sermon in Athens with a blistering, truthful rebuke of the pagan idol worship that was on full display. Instead, he began by complimenting their religious dedication and taking them to their connection to the one, true God by giving the creation story. He spoke life. Some, of course, repelled at Paul's message and rejected the Gospel, while others were won to Christ through Paul's kindness and charm.

> "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver."
> (Proverbs 10:20)

> "From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good."
> (Proverbs 12:14)

"The tongue of the wise brings healing." (Proverbs 12:18)

"Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad." (Proverbs 12:25)

"A gentle tongue is a tree of life." (Proverbs 15:4)

"From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits." (Proverbs 18:20-21)

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." (Ephesians 4:29)



SILENCE

Finally, there is the saying we all heard in kindergarten, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."[186] Yet most of us refuse to accept that. We reject silence. We just don't like the idea of "don't say anything at all." In Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes, there is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:7). Sometimes it's best to stay quiet. Don't try to make something up or form a brilliant thought on the spot. It's ok to stay quiet. Pastor and Author Kent Hughes writes, "The true test of a man's spirituality is not his ability to speak, as we are apt to think, but rather his ability to bridle his tongue."[187] We often associate wisdom with words, but wisdom is also knowing when to stay quiet.

"Whoever restrains his lips is prudent." (Proverbs 10:19)

"From the fruit of his mouth a man eats what is good… Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." (Proverbs 13:2-3)

"The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer." (Proverbs 15:28)

"Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent." (Proverbs 17:27-28)

"Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble." (Proverbs 21:23)

"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips." (Proverbs 27:2)

CONCLUSION

Jesus gives us the perfect example of wise speech. He instructed His students (disciples) for three years. He traveled, ate, sailed, celebrated, and mourned with them. All the time teaching them about the Kingdom of God. He used stories that we call parables to simplify super complex, heavenly truths. The writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are filled with sermons, stories, and lessons that Jesus taught. He was their Rabbi, which means teacher. The teaching that the apostles and their students spread to the known world and beyond was just reiterating and explaining all that Jesus had taught them (Matthew 28:20).

The Gospel writers record Jesus' winsome and persuasive words. The Lord called fishermen to leave their nets behind and follow Him

(Matthew 4:18-22). He called tax collectors to leave their lucrative, sinful lifestyles behind and embrace a nomadic life following Him (Matthew 9:9). He changed disciples' names (John 1:42), political parties (Matthew 10:4), and ultimately commissioned these Jewish men to take this message beyond their known borders to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The crazy part is that they did! They changed the world. Not through political power or military might, but through the power of WORDS! The words, the message, the story of Jesus' death and resurrection changed the course of human history. Even if you don't believe in the saving power of Christ's death and triumphant resurrection, the power of the apostle's words reshaped the globe and set the course of human history for the last 2000 years.



Following the resurrection, the Gospel of John records two events where Jesus speaks life to two struggling apostles. In John chapter 20, Jesus appears to Thomas who had been absent from Jesus' first appearance on Easter Sunday. The Lord's first words must have instantly calmed the stormy hearts of the disciples. "Peace be with you," Jesus said. He then invited Thomas to examine His wounds and confirm for himself the truth of the resurrection. "Put your finger here, and see my hands," Jesus said, "and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (John 20:26-27). Those words changed the course of Thomas' life. Later in the very next chapter, Jesus recommissions Peter. Jesus tells him, "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," and "Feed my sheep." But the kicker comes later when Jesus re-invites the discouraged disciple to be a fisher of men. It's an echo of Peter's first calling. Jesus says, "Follow me" (John 21:15-19). Jesus, in those moments with Thomas and Peter, resurrected their faith and following of Him. He gave life to the deadness of their hope. He restored and renewed what sin, betrayal, and faithlessness had killed. Jesus spoke life.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who was a brilliant wordsmith himself, wrote of the coming Christ, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus the Messiah fulfilled this prophecy. In his mock trials, He refused to defend Himself. Matthew records, “He gave [Pilate] no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed” (Matthew 27:14). The Gospels are filled with sermons Jesus gave and conversations that Jesus had with people from all walks of life. Yet when He was accused, mocked, ridiculed, and threatened (1 Peter 2:23). He remained silent. God the Father was his advocate and judge and He was well pleased (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Jesus exemplified wisdom in words.

In Colossians chapter 4, Paul asks for prayer, specifically that “God may open to us a door for the word” (Colossians 4:3). He knew the words of the Gospel had power. He also asked that if and when that door was to open “that I may make [the Gospel] clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:4). Paul knew the words of the Gospel contained life-transforming, eternity-altering power. “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” he wrote the Romans, “for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The words detailing the death of Jesus on the cross to pay the penalty for sin and His victorious resurrection from the dead offering eternal life is power. As that message was shared, person after person began turning from their sins, which is repentance, and following the risen Christ. As Christians, we must remember our words have power and that the word of the Gospel has divine authority to bring eternal life or seal a sinner’s fate in eternal death.

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

In our world of social media, non-stop news, and print... words are cheap. They are a dime a dozen. We need to make sure that the words we are speaking are meaningful, that we don't over use them, and when we do use them, we use them wisely. We don't just talk to talk. Proverbs 13:3 says, "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." You have the opportunity to use your words to build people up or tear people down. This is a daily choice. You live in a house with four other siblings and Dad and me. We have a full house. It's easy to be comfortable with people and just let your mouth run, not caring if those words are arrows piercing someone's heart. I was a terrible sister. I never treated my sister kindly, especially with words. This is something I still repent of to this day, because I know now, that my words were used as arrows. Dad and I have worked hard at trying to teach you to be kind with your words. How many times have you guys argued with each other and we would make you stand and hug it out? Countless!



In the NLT, Proverbs 15:4 says, "Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit." Your words can bring life or death to someone. As we move about our day trying to reflect the light of Jesus, we should constantly be thinking about our words. Are they bringing life or death to the people we are talking to? When you speak to others are you building them up or tearing them down? When you're

in a hurry at the check-out lane is that person going to remember you because you were a tyrant with your words or because you took the time to speak to them, look them in the eye, and speak kind words to them?

When you guys were babies we would take your hands and rub them on our faces and say over and over, gentle, gentle. You were getting into the habit of ripping my glasses off, scratching my face with your nails, or just plain smacking me upside the head. So... gentle, gentle. We would continue to teach you and eventually you would understand. Our words are the same, when we start to use them and wield them we can be quite reckless and so, we must learn to be gentle, gentle. I for one don't want to stand before the Lord and He tells me that I crushed the spirit of another person with my words. Is the Lord convicting you about your speech? Proverbs 16:24, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." Start praying for the Lord to change your speech, to make it sweet as a honeycomb.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Who was your favorite teacher growing up?

What lessons did they teach that stick out to you?

What's the best piece of wisdom and instruction they gave you?

Be honest. When you hear persuasive speech, what's the first thing that comes to mind?

When was a time that you were persuaded by words? Motivated? Inspired?



What does "speak life" mean in Scripture? What should it mean to you?

When was a time that you should have been silent but weren't?

How about a time where you bit your tongue and stayed quiet? How'd you feel after? How'd your tongue feel after?

Francis of Assisi is credited with saying, "Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words." How is this statement fundamentally wrong? How is it kind of right?



14.

Hothead

Several years ago, our church's prison ministry was invited to Lebanon Correctional Institution in Lebanon, Ohio. This particular prison is quite fierce. Not only is the building cold, intimidating, and ginormous, the inmate population there is comprised of some of the most violent men in the prison system. I was told that this facility accounts for 50% of the violence in all of the Ohio prison system. There are around thirty prisons in the system. This one is bad. Lebanon is a level three, just one level below near complete lockdown. Levels are assigned not based primarily on crime, but on behavior or anticipated behavior within the system. For many reasons, I'll never forget that first trip to Lebanon. Just a side note, while there, somebody thought it would be a good idea for us to eat in the prison cafeteria. As much as I care about taking the Gospel to "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40), I don't prefer to eat prison food. It's like high school cafeteria food, but 10,000 times worse. Anyway, as was our plan, we pulled in through the sally port, checked in all of our gear, and made our way into a rugged-looking prison yard. While we pulled in, the prison was completely locked down, so it had an eerie, *"Walking Dead"* type vibe. Through extremely small windows, you could see the faces of incarcerated men, all ages, colors, and all types. The irony of this prison is that it is less than a mile from a huge shopping complex and an even bigger and shinier casino.



In most cases, but especially in Lebanon, we would try to set up our stage and banners with our backs against a wall. In this case, a 15- to 20-foot fence. Often these fences will be lined with razor wire, purposely designed to snag clothing, flesh, and anything else that gets near it. It's brutal looking stuff. Our team quickly set up banners, stage, musical instruments, prepped books to be given out, sorted equipment for our magician, and so forth. With about a 15-foot gap between our trailer and the fence. This space would kind of serve as a backstage and prep area.

The bell sounded, not a school bell, but a prison bell. Like school but really different, hundreds of men began pouring down the steps of the prison and into the yard. We started our program and prayed for dudes to come enjoy a break with us and ultimately hear the Gospel. As our program came to an end, we began conversations with guys who had decided to hang out with us. One guy clearly wanted to talk to me. Honestly, that's always an unnerving thing in prison when some dude really wants to talk to you.

So I struck up a conversation with this guy. To this day, I can't remember his name, but I can remember his story, and where we were standing. I had walked back behind the trailer when this guy approached me to talk. He and I stood, basically, alone, between a fence and trailer with no prison staff in sight – not the ideal spot for a conversation with a potentially annoyed and violent inmate. This man began telling me his story of having a ministry outside of prison and continuing to do ministry while here in prison. In my mind there was a big part of the story missing, "How did you get here?" I wanted to ask. But unless an inmate offers that information or the circumstances are just right, you just don't ask. At the end of the day, it isn't eternally important. We are all sinners and we all need Jesus.

In this conversation, he told me his story. He told me how a man had sexually assaulted his mother. He found out who the perpetrator was, drove to his house, and knocked on the door. When the man answered the door, this guy told me that he just went into black-out-rage and killed the guy. At this point, there are still no corrections officers in sight, so my internal dialogue went like this: "Hey Josh… don't make this guy mad. You can tell he's already a little testy. Don't make him mad. Be nice. Smile, not condescendingly! That could make him mad. Repeat: Don't make him mad." Of course, a thousand other thoughts raced through my brain, but the main idea was: don't make him mad.

Meeting and talking to that guy, you could tell he was an angry man. Angry at the system for imprisoning him, even after he had only avenged his mother. Angry at being kept from "ministry." Angry at being told by an officer, mid-conversation to move our conversation to the front of the trailer and away from the fence. Praise Jesus for that corrections officer. This dude was just angry, temperamental, and just ready to blow up. Rage was in his eyes.

As you read this, you might be asking, how could you possibly get that impression from one short conversation? How could you really know those things? Well, talking to that guy, who I think was named James, was like looking in a this-could-of-been-you type mirror. You see, anger has been my go-to emotion for most of my life. I have caused great emotional and physical pain through losing my temper. I have hurt the cause of Christ and His church. When I write about the Hothead, the sad picture I see in my head is myself. If you struggle with being a hothead, just know that you are not alone. You are not being judged. You are being warned, challenged, and invited to the thorough healing that Jesus offers through the Gospel. But before we find the peace that Jesus gives, we need to "make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."[188] We need to take a good, long, hard look at the Hothead of Proverbs.



When addressing anger, Scripture isn't talking about the person who is righteously angry or irritated from time to time. As we'll discuss later in this chapter, there are legitimate reasons to be angry. Anger is just an emotion. In and of itself, anger isn't bad. When sin and destructive behaviors follow is when anger becomes a problem. In Proverbs,[189] Solomon is writing about the person who is always angry. They are a moment from being red-faced and unleashing the fury that fills their soul. Solomon is describing the person who will often forget why they are so mad, but with just a quick look around, they find another perceived injustice and wrong that can justify their rage. Regardless

of the situation, the weather, good news, the presence of friends and family, their inner not-so-incredible Hulk is always lurking just below the surface. Everyone walks on eggshells around them, guarding their every word, gesture, and expression, because the Hothead, the Hulk, is a ticking time bomb. With the Hothead, their anger is like "a buried landmine just waiting for someone to step on it – deeply buried, yet shallowly accessible."[190] The Marvel character, *"The Incredible Hulk"* warns, "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."[191] And family and friends of the Hothead feel the same way. Whatever you do, they think, don't make him or her angry! Long before the Hothead blows his or her top, there is a heart issue and that issue in the soul causes great strife, loneliness, and, like a virus, eventually kills its host.

SILENT, SIMMERING, AND SAVAGE ANGER

Anger begins in the heart. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:9, "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools." Imagining the heart as a house, Solomon explains that a fool's heart houses anger. The Hothead's heart is host (that's quite an alliteration) to constant anger. Long before the explosion of a temper, Silent Anger has taken up residence in the heart of the Hothead. This silent anger can be hidden under a fake smile, but like a volcano, eventually there will be an eruption. Whether the person is more vocal or tends to be more docile, if silent anger moves into the heart and isn't addressed, eventually it will lead to unhealthy and ungodly expressions. Unchecked silent anger, becomes simmering anger. John MacArthur talks about anger that is "brooding, simmering… nurtured and not allowed to die. It is seen in the holding of a grudge, in the smoldering bitterness that refuses to forgive. It is the anger that cherishes resentment and does not want reconciliation."[192] Because of that simmering anger, innocent comments are perceived by the Hothead as insults and character attacks, further enflaming the

ready-to-boil-over Hothead. Every situation is seen through the lens of frustration, annoyance, and resentment. Issues, whether real or imagined, are piled on and this monster hidden in the heart continues to grow. Soon, in the heart of the Hothead, there isn't room for anything or any other emotion. Anger is the last emotion left standing. The Hothead's life is now ruled by the dictator Savage Anger. These outbursts are what we normally associate with the Hothead, but this isn't a new person being introduced. It's the real person coming out. Beware, everyone within shouting distance becomes a target for the Hothead's fury. The Hothead can find plenty of reasons to be angry and feels justified in consistently venting toward all of the injustice done in the world and to him. When the Hothead goes off, there is collateral damage.



This is when anger often begins to cause relational strife. "Long ago, in a galaxy far, far away," one teacher cautioned, "Here is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering."[193] Please forgive my *"Star Wars"* reference. It's true though, the Hothead will soon find strife all around him or her. Spouses, children, parents, friends, family, co-workers, employees, and just about everyone on the globe will struggle being around the Hothead. The constant angry outbursts are hurtful. Rather than being unpredictable, it's predictable that the Hothead will find someone or something to be mad about.

"A man of quick temper acts foolishly." (Proverbs 14:17)

"A hot-tempered man stirs up strife." (Proverbs 15:18)

"A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression." (Proverbs 29:22)

"…pressing anger produces strife." (Proverbs 30:33)

Not only will a “quick temper” cause strife in relationships, but the Hothead feels an internal emotional storm in his own soul. Dave and Ann Wilson, in their book *“Vertical Marriage,”* wisely write, “Anger is not usually the first emotion we feel in a stressful situation. The first emotion may be hurt, frustration, fear, or something else – but we instead jump to anger because we’re too uncomfortable with the initial emotion…immediately default[ing] to anger instead.”[194] The Hothead becomes emotionally one dimensional. If he or she isn’t angry, they don’t know how or what to feel. The Hothead refuses to process real emotions and simply bypasses them all, choosing the comfort and safety of anger instead.

Anger often leads to physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, and even spiritual abuse. Pastor Ray Ortlund asks, “Have you ever felt that envy and resentment deep inside? It is where violence begins.” Then in reference to Proverbs 1:11, he says, “Your heart is lying in wait for blood.”[195] Eventually, anger completely isolates the Hothead. Nobody can stand the constant outbursts, berating, or abuse anymore. Nobody wants to be around the Hothead and continue to endure this emotional hurricane. In the end, the only company the Hothead has left are those who are obligated to them and even they are looking for an exit. The Hothead’s anger becomes an embarrassment at family functions, the office, church, the gym, and kids’ athletic events. Family members cover their faces, turn away or leave because of the shame and humiliation they feel as their Dad, Mom, or spouse loses their mind. Proverbs says the Hothead holds up, essentially advertises, their foolishness (Folly) for everyone to see.[196] The Bible compares friendship with an angry man to a trap. The Hothead’s rage causes destruction around them.

“He who has a hasty temper exalts folly.” (Proverbs 14:29)

> "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare." (Proverbs 22:24-25)

Not only is there only one emotion left, but a short fuse is all the Hothead is known for. They are angry all the time. Anger has consumed and overwhelmed them. My mind is drawn to a giant wave that comes crashing over our heads as we wade into the ocean. Proverbs 27:4 says, "Anger is overwhelming." The Hothead is overwhelmed and drowns in a sea of his own indignation and self-hate. Ultimately the Hothead's anger brings death - death of relationships, emotional health, spiritual life, and healthy self-love. In the book of Job, the Scripture says, "Anger slays the foolish man" (Job 5:2, NASB).[197]



RIGHTEOUS ANGER

However, within the Scripture, we find there are legitimate reasons to be angry. The Gospel of Mark records an account, where the Lord Jesus becomes angry.

> "Again, he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come here.' And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." (Mark 3:1-6)

Rather than demonstrating pity on the disabled man or then celebrating the miraculous work done, they baited Jesus to heal on the Sabbath to give them reason to plot His demise. They were religious and supposedly God-loving, yet Jesus saw the true condition of their hearts, which was far from God (Matthew 15:8-9; Isaiah 29:13). Jesus was angry at the hardness of their hearts. He was angry about something worth being upset over. He was righteously angry. This man clearly had a need and Jesus divinely met that need, but the people didn't care. In their minds, Jesus had spoiled the Sabbath. When Jesus asked them a question, they couldn't even muster a response. Their hearts were void of any compassion for the man with a withered hand. John 2:14-17 and Matthew 21:12-13 record Jesus cleansing the temple. It's hard to imagine Him not being angry as He cracks His homemade whip. He drove the money changers and other extortionists from their religiously-themed flea market, cleansed the court of the Gentiles, and restored the worshipful purpose of the temple. Seeing this example from Jesus, Charles Spurgeon taught, "Evidently it is possible to be angry and to be right."[198]

DEALING WITH ANGER

When I was growing up, our go-to show was *"Family Matters."* Now, it's been 20 plus years since I've watched the show, so I can't vouch for it. One of my favorite memorable moments from the show was a comedic bit that they often repeated. The Winslow family's annoying neighbor Steve Urkel would come over unwanted. Of course, as the audience, we loved him. He was far from unwanted on the show. But at the Winslow's house, he was a pest. Carl, the Dad, would often say, "Go home Steve! Go home! Go home! Go HOME!" Steve would calmly respond, "I don't have to take this…I'm going home." It was funny every time. Throughout the show, Carl attempts to use different methods of dealing with the anger that Steve inevitably brings out. On one occasion, Carl tries saying, "3-2-1, 1-2-3, what

the heck is bothering me?" He glances over to Steve, realizes his anger has yet to subside, so he tries again, "3-2-1, 1-2-3, what the heck is bothering me?" Finally, giving up on his new coping method, he answers his own question and screams at Steve, "YOU ARE!" He proceeds to chase him out of the house.

Learning to deal with anger and a temper is really important. If we don't, eventually we'll be consumed and become The Hothead of Proverbs. We need to learn from Jesus. Unlike the Lord, we often become angry about the wrong things.[199] We fall into the trap of a quick temper that Proverbs warns about. "Let us admit it," DA Carson writes, "by and large we are quick to be angry when we are personally affronted and offended, and slow to be angry when sin and injustice multiply in other areas."[200] Don't sweat the small stuff. It isn't all small stuff as the erroneous statement goes, but most of it is. "Wisdom asks, 'Why should I feel intensely about that issue?'"[201]



> "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."
> (Proverbs 16:32)[202]

> "He who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding." (Proverbs 17:27)

> "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." (Proverbs 19:11)[203]

> "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back." (Proverbs 29:11)

> "Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil." (Psalm 37:8)

We don't need to be afraid of the emotion of anger. It's ok to be angry, just be angry about things that actually matter. We also need to find healthy ways and spaces to express our anger. One of my favorite commentators, Kent Hughes says, "In our anger we must be very, very careful because anger often leads to sin, which will give an 'opportunity to the devil.'"[204] Anger often leads to vengeance. Revenge is never a healthy expression of anger (Romans 12:17-21). In losing our temper and pursuing revenge, a place or a foothold has been given to Satan and he quickly moves in for the kill (1 Peter 5:8). We must be extremely cautious, especially if we've had a history of unleashing the beast of anger over dumb things or in unhealthy, sinful ways. John Calvin asks the person with a "violent temper," why "have [you] conspired with Satan so to torment yourselves?"[205] The Hothead, as Calvin puts it, is actually tormenting himself.

> "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."
> (Ephesians 4:26-27)

> "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."
> (James 1:19-20)

For many people, it seems like there has been a rage brewing in their hearts for a long time. When it comes to anger, dealing with the deep issues causing this pain can be very challenging, but extremely enlightening. In his biography on the Old Testament leader Moses, Chuck Swindoll spends a chapter recounting all of Moses' recorded angry outbursts. Swindoll's observation and advice, "The living Lord," he writes, "is the only one I know who can come in like a flood and smother the flames of a vicious temper."[206] Anger isn't sin, but angry outbursts, revenge, curses, and all the things that often come with

anger are SIN. Only the Lord Jesus, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, can change the Hothead.

> "Now the works of the flesh are evident…fits of anger…." (Galatians 5:19-20)

> "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath…" (Colossians 3:8)

> "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." (Ephesians 4:31)

> "For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered…." (Titus 1:7)



HOTHEAD'S NOT SO ANONYMOUS

When I told Jen that I was working on the Hothead chapter and that I was going to use my story in college about anger, she responded, "Which one?" That hurt, but she was right. Which one? Sadly, there are too many. So many that I've forgotten. One story sticks out in particular because it was the beginning of a long journey of revealing what was really going on in my heart.

One night, our university decided to host a dodgeball tournament between dorms. As you read this, you might be thinking, "You got mad at a dodgeball tournament?" Yup and you are not alone in realizing the immaturity and foolishness of that fact. The tournament started and the dorm that housed the majority of the baseball team was crushing all the other teams. In hindsight, of course, they would. They were NCAA Division I athletes who could throw a baseball a country mile. We didn't stand a chance. Well, my team lost, but in

my not-so-humble opinion, because their resident director was the referee. We couldn't have possibly lost simply because they were better. I had to find something or in this case, someone to be angry at.

So like a good Christian at a Baptist College, I threatened to beat up the resident director. He was a snivelly, little guy and had "obviously" cheated. I was much bigger than him, so he called campus security. Needless to say, throughout this confrontation, I was running my mouth threatening and saying all kinds of stupid stuff. The next day I was called into the Executive Vice President's Office. In my anger, I had said all kinds of things that I wouldn't have remembered, but that resident director remembered every word and relayed it to the man who held my fate in his hands. I was nearly kicked out of school and almost lost my job on campus. It was ugly…really ugly. Instead of being expelled, I was graciously ordered to weekly counseling and warned that if this type of behavior repeated itself, I'd be gone.

The long, bumpy journey began that day. I was an angry young man. I could snap at any moment and I was often big enough, strong enough, and mean enough to back it up. I was the Hothead. Life was filled with relational and emotional strife. On the inside I was dying. I was an emotional wreck: either mad, sad, fake happy, or really mad. Over time, I learned for me, anger was the emotional outburst of a prideful heart. I was better and smarter than anyone else. I knew best. My anger came out when the world and everyone in it refused to bend to my order. I was an overgrown little brat. I suffered secret depression because of loneliness. C.S. Lewis, in a chapter we used in our discussion of the Proud Fool, writes, "Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity – it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God."[207] Being a Hothead, I was left alone. It was what I became known for.

I still fight against my temper. I still find anger an easier, more familiar emotional response than truly facing the complexities of my emotions. Recently a counselor told me, “Use your anger.” WHAT?!?!? I’m still wrapping my brain around anger being okay.

So I decided to end this chapter in a little bit of a different way. I’ve written a letter, but not to my kids. I’ve written a letter to personified Anger. After reading it, you may realize we have a lot in common as Hotheads. You aren’t alone in the struggle. And from someone who is walking that road of repentance, just know that the power of the Gospel can change you. It changed and is changing me.



DEAR ANGER,[208]

MY OLD FRIEND, WE NEED TO TALK. THINGS HAVE TO CHANGE. I'VE DECIDED THAT IT'S TIME TO SET SOME BOUNDARIES. YOU HAVE AGGRESSIVELY ECLIPSED ALL OF MY OTHER EMOTIONS FOR YEARS AND YEARS. I REALIZE THAT I'M GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO FUNCTION WITHOUT DEFAULTING TO YOU WHEN I'M EMBARRASSED, AFRAID, FEELING POWERLESS, INTIMIDATED OR THREATENED.

HONESTLY, I USED TO REALLY LIKE YOU. YOU MADE ME FEEL GOOD, INVINCIBLE. I DON'T BLACKOUT WHEN YOU COME AROUND, I ACTUALLY THINK MORE CLEARLY AND MY TONGUE AND BRAIN ARE SHARPER. I THOUGHT YOU WERE A GOOD FRIEND. YOU WERE MY GO-TO. I REALIZE NOW THERE IS NOTHING SINFUL ABOUT BEING ANGRY, EVEN JESUS WAS ANGRY AND GOD IS ANGRY WITH THE WICKED DAY AND NIGHT. SO IT ISN'T THAT YOU ARE INTRINSICALLY SINFUL, IT'S WHAT OFTEN FOLLOWS THAT CAUSES SO MUCH DAMAGE. ANGER IS THE ROOT, AND WRATH IS THE FRUIT. AND MAN, DOES IT HAVE A BITTER, GROSS AFTERTASTE.

I RELIED ON YOU FOR MANY YEARS AS MY GO TO EMOTION. YOU BECAME MY MASTER, MY SOURCE OF POWER, INTIMIDATION. I SURRENDERED TO ANGER IN EXCHANGE FOR THE FEELING OF POWER, STRENGTH, AND CONTROL. YET CONSTANTLY SURRENDERING TO ANGER LEFT ME FEELING ALONE AND FOOLISH. NOBODY REALLY WANTED TO BE MY FRIEND. WHO WANTS TO HANG OUT WITH THE HOTHEAD? THE GUY WHO IS UNSTABLE AND COULD BLOW UP AT ANY TIME, FOR NO REAL OBVIOUS OR APPARENT REASON.

I'VE LET YOU OFF THE LEASH TOO MANY TIMES. YOU'VE HURT ME, MY WIFE, MY KIDS, MY FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND CHURCH. I LET YOU DO THAT. I LIKED YOU WHEN YOU MADE ME FEEL POWERFUL AND FORCEFUL, BUT THINGS HAVE GONE TOO FAR. FROM NOW ON, WE CAN HANG OUT ONLY UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES. WE ARE ONLY GOING TO BE TOGETHER WHEN IT'S TRULY NECESSARY... WHEN WRONG IS DONE, WHEN INJUSTICE SEEMS TO PREVAIL, AND ONLY IN A WAY THAT REFLECTS GOD'S ANGER. WE ARE NOT GOING TO HANG OUT WHEN I'M SLIGHTLY OFFENDED OR WHEN MY EGO TAKES A HIT. YOU MAY WANT TO RISE UP AND RIGHT WHAT WE PERCEIVE TO BE A WRONG, BUT DON'T BOTHER.



I'M GOING TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH MY OTHER EMOTIONS NOW. I'M A LITTLE NERVOUS TO MEET THEM FOR THE FIRST TIME, BUT I THINK IT'S TIME. I'VE IGNORED THEM, BUT I'M GOING TO SPEND TIME WITH HURT, FEAR, EMBARRASSMENT, WEAKNESS, POWERLESSNESS, AND ALL THE OTHERS WHO I'VE IGNORED BECAUSE THEY WERE TOO UNCOMFORTABLE AND CHALLENGING. I'M ANXIOUS TO MEET THESE NEW FRIENDS AND EXPAND MY EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY.

I'LL SEE YOU SOON, I'M SURE. AND I KNOW YOU'LL TRY TO BREAK THROUGH THOSE BOUNDARIES AND I'LL BE TEMPTED TO LET YOU. I'M SURE I'LL GIVE IN, BUT THINGS ARE NEVER GOING BACK TO THE WAY THEY WERE BEFORE. WE ARE NOT GOING TO BE SPENDING AS MUCH TIME TOGETHER IN THE FUTURE. I WILL SEE YOU AND YOU ARE PART OF MY LIFE, JUST NOT THE ONLY PART OF MY LIFE.

YOUR FORMER BEST FRIEND,
JOSH

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Are you an angry, irritable person?

Are you an angry, resentful person? (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Why are you so angry?

How has the emotion of anger negatively affected you?

If you were to write a letter to Anger or to your temper, what would it say?

How have you been righteously angry?

Read Psalm 7:11.

How do you reconcile Jesus' anger with His call to meekness?[209] (Matthew 5:5)

William Barclay paraphrases Matthew 5:5, "O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct, and impulse, and passion under control because he himself is God-controlled, who has the humility to realize his own ignorance and his own weakness, for such a man is a king among men."[210]





15.

Drunkard

Proverbs 23:29-35 kind of sounds like the TV game show *"Jeopardy."* Well, at least to me it does. In Proverbs, the passage is less than a game show with questions and answers, and more of a riddle, but I still see *"Jeopardy"* in my mind. Most of us have seen the show, but just a quick summary may help. The show is a slight twist on the typical questions and then answers. It reverses that order, giving the "answer" first, and then the actual answer is given in the form of a question. "What is" or "Who is" precede the answer. Maybe Merv Griffin ripped off Proverbs, but probably not.



The category of Proverbs chapter 23 is DRAMA. The chapter is filled with folks whose lives are filled with strife, contention, and pain. So we select "Drama" for $800. It turns out to be a "Daily Double." Of course, we tell Alex that we want to make it a true "Daily Double." "Here's the answer," Alex says. He reads, "These have woe, sorrow, strife, complaining, wounds, and red eyes. They see strange things, say crazy things, and do even crazier things." We pause and then answer, "What is a Drunk?" Correct! Actually, we could have used hundreds of synonyms for drunkenness. In 1737, in *"Poor Richard's Almanac,"* Benjamin Franklin published *"The Drinkers Dictionary,"* which included over 200 hundred phrases used to describe drunkenness. In 1927, another list was published called *"The Lexicon of Prohibition."*[211] Almost 100 years later, I'm sure we've added quite a few euphemisms for drunkenness.

In TV and movies, drunkenness is often played for laughs, but the Bible is pretty clear, drunkenness is no laughing matter. Our family has two shows that we love to watch together. As I've mentioned, we love *"The Andy Griffith Show."* In that sitcom from the '60s, Otis the town drunk is a sweet, kind, and harmless man. He also is absolutely unreliable and embarrassing. The show is fiction of course, but I wonder, when does Otis ever go to work? What does he do for a living? He's married, but when he gets hammered and

celebrates his anniversary alone in a jail cell, I just can't imagine that marriage lasting too long. The other show that we watch is *"Little House on the Prairie,"* from the late '70s and early '80s. On that show, drunkenness has been played for a few laughs. And I admit, when a normally uptight citizen is portrayed as drunk, it makes me laugh. But other times when a farmer beats his wife or his son or gambles his money away in a saloon, drunkenness isn't humorous. Those shows have made for some good discussions with our kids about biblical and unbiblical uses of alcohol. The Bible has several stories of drunkenness as well.

Following the devastation of the flood in the book of Genesis, the Bible says, "Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent" (Genesis 9:20-21). It seems that Noah became a sloppy drunk. I kind of want to give Noah a bit of a pass. The Bible doesn't say it, but maybe his drinking was prompted by the fact that he had just watched the whole world die. Even while trusting in God's sovereignty, that would be super depressing or it was the fact that he had just spent an entire year on a boat with his family.

A few chapters later in Genesis, the Bible records an extremely uncomfortable story. Lot and his daughters had just fled the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. On the way, his wife turned back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Lot finds himself alive, but broke. He is no longer living in wealth. He lives in a cave. His wife, friends, and future sons-in-law are dead. He and his daughters are the lone survivors. What happens next in the passage just demonstrates the moral depravity of the cities God had just destroyed. Lot's daughters decide to get their father drunk and have sex with him so that they can become pregnant and their father can have an heir. For two nights this takes place, all because Lot got hammered (See Genesis 19:30-38).

Proverbs has some pointed warnings about the dangers of drunkenness.

> "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." (Proverbs 20:1)

> "Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich." (Proverbs 21:17)

> "Be not among the drunkards or among the gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags." (Proverbs 23:20-21)



> "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink." (Proverbs 31:4)

Here's the definitive passage from Proverbs describing the Drunk and the warning against drunkenness.

> "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. You will be like the one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. 'They struck me,' you will say, 'but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink.'" (Proverbs 23:29-35)

The Drunkard has knowingly or unknowingly chosen a life of anguish, sorrow, strife, fights, complaining, wounds, and bloodshot eyes (Proverbs 23:29, NLT). They have traded relational, emotional, and physical health for their new love…wine. The poetry of Proverbs likens drunkenness to lust, "Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly" (Proverbs 23:31). The idea here isn't to close your eyes when you see a liquor store, but more poetic and almost romantic. The Drunkard has let wine catch his eye. He's in love, having fallen head over heels - sometimes literally. However, this isn't romance, this is addiction. The sage of Proverbs calls Drunkenness, "Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine" (Proverbs 23:30). Bruce Waltke writes, "Lingering over wine to a diligent and difficult quest to make it a more spicy, potent, and enjoyable drink by mixing it with honey and spices."[212] Addiction is the unending quest for the same high that a person had the very first time, whether that's drugs, sex, or, in this case, alcohol.

The writer of Proverbs warns that everything might be smooth at first, but drunkenness is a venomous snake and it bites. "In the end," Proverbs says, "it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Proverbs 23:32). Proverbs is always inviting us to the place of wisdom to see beyond the present pleasure. The Drunk stumbles around in grave danger and can't see the issue. We often call this rock bottom. However, many alcoholics will say, "I can quit anytime I want" or "I'm fine. I'm not hurting anyone." But that isn't true. In Alcoholics Anonymous or A.A., an organization started in the 1930s in Akron, Ohio by two alcoholics, they strategically realized they needed to "raise the bottom."[213] Through the stories of other alcoholics, they try to show that "years before we realized it we were out of control, that our drinking even then was no mere habit, that it was indeed the beginning of a fatal progression."[214] A drunk, rather than accurately seeing rock bottom, thinks they are flying high. Proverbs says, "You

will be like the one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast" (Proverbs 23:34). Drunkenness is compared to walking around a ship sailing through the sea. I've been on a few ships during storms. As Jen and I try to walk a straight line down a hallway, we laugh and find it impossible. I often wonder what a drunk person feels like, already stumbling around and now the ship decides it's drunk too.

Tragically, the Drunk is "completely oblivious to the real world."[215] The Drunk is blind to the world, but because they are intoxicated there's just no reasoning with them. "Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things," Proverbs 23:33 says. I once met a man who spent nearly 20 years in prison. He was an alcoholic who went to prison for sexually assaulting his daughter. In a very genuine conversation, I asked him if the accusation was true. He told me he didn't know and couldn't remember because he was so drunk. The damage was done. His family was destroyed. Like Lot, deep wounds and scars will last a lifetime. Drunkenness perverts the way an alcoholic sees the world. "Intoxication is folly. Instead of seeing things as they truly are, the inebriated sees an upside-down world. His perversions represent a topsy-turvy moral order."[216] A Drunk thinks they are taller, stronger, better looking, smarter, wiser, and tougher than they really are. Not only does a Drunk see themselves wrongly, they see the world and everyone in it wrongly. A Drunk is often quick to get offended, cry, fight, complain, yell, flirt, and just generally say some of the most ridiculous stuff ever. Their meter for embarrassment is broken. Their inhibitions are thrown out the window. Sadly, friends, spouses, and children are left to bear the brunt of the Drunk's embarrassing actions.



A Drunkard feels no pain, but inflicts quite a bit. "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it" (Proverbs 23:35). Drunkenness dulls personal pain, but also blinds

the drunkard to the pain of others. The pain of embarrassment, shame, physical, sexual, mental, or verbal abuse. I have sat with fathers who had to hear stories or even watch videos of themselves physically abusing their children and see the bruises and black eyes that they inflicted upon their loved ones. The deep anguish as they wrestled with the reality that they were so drunk they didn't even remember is an added source of grief and shame. A night spent in the "drunk tank" at the local jail sobers some up, while making others just all that much more belligerent.

> "Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools." (Proverbs 26:9)

What one commentator calls, "An unforgettable study of the drunkard,"[217] ends with, "When shall I awake? I must have another drink" (Proverbs 23:35). Proverbs gives us the thought process, the internal dialogue of a drunk. Passed out and certainly in for a brutal hangover, the Drunk is dreaming about drinking. Even in his dreams, all the Drunk can think about is getting another drink! This is a craving… an enslaving craving. The Drunk is enslaved to his habit. His first thought in the morning is booze. If you've ever seen someone quit "cold turkey" you know they've become physically and emotionally entangled with alcohol. The two founders of A.A. developed what is commonly known as "The Twelve Steps." The first and second steps are all about humility. Step 1: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable."[218] Step 2: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."[219] One of the founders of A.A. wrote, "In A.A.'s pioneering time, none but the most desperate cases could swallow and digest this unpalatable truth. Even these 'last-gaspers' often had difficulty in realizing how hopeless they actually were."[220] Admitting we are powerless and enslaved by anything or anyone is a very

difficult thing to admit. The first two steps of A.A. have an echo of the words of Jesus:

> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:3-5)

The Drunk of Proverbs chapter 23 is enslaved. He is captured. When he isn't drinking all he is thinking about is getting back to the bar. In Romans, Paul calls this slavery, even an internal law, compelling the drunk to return to his master (Romans 7). From a biblical standpoint, drunkenness is idolatry. It is looking to something other than God to satisfy. A drunk fundamentally believes that his liquor gives him what God ultimately can't. A drunkard is not a follower of Jesus. A drunk is a follower and worshipper of the false god of drunkenness.



> "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one." (1 Corinthians 5:11)

> "Drunkards…will [not] inherit the kingdom of God."
> (1 Corinthians 6:10)

> "Now the works of the flesh are evident…drunkenness."
> (Galatians 5:19, 21)

> "For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the

same flood of debauchery and they malign you."
(1 Peter 4:3-4)

It is not that a follower of Jesus never sins in the area of drunkenness, but that his or her life is not characterized by a pattern of alcohol abuse. Believers are called to be sober-minded and self-controlled.

"Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in… drunkenness…." (Romans 13:13)

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18)

As I conclude this chapter, I recognize that there are many questions left unanswered. Can a Christian drink? Should a Christian drink? How much is too much? Alcohol in Bible times isn't the same as Jack Daniels, so how do I square the two? These are valid questions that could fill an entire book. The focus of the passages in Proverbs is specifically targeting drunkenness. That leads to a few crucial questions that we need to answer. What is drunkenness? When is a person drunk? Does the Bible define drunkenness? I think it does. Just take Proverbs 23:29-35. When you are drinking…

Have you become overly emotional? Lost control of your emotions? Anger, sorrow, etc.

Are you extra loud and opinionated?

Are you looking for a fight?

Are your eyes bloodshot?

Has alcohol caught your eye? Do you stare at it? Does it fascinate you? Have you fallen in love with it?

Are you seeing things? Has your perspective been altered? Of people? Or yourself?

Are you saying unkind, abusive, crass things?

Are you having a hard time standing up straight? Or keeping your balance? Walking a straight line?

Are you incapable of listening to wisdom? Instruction? Correction?

Do you feel pain?

Do you feel invincible? (I originally had the typo “invisible” here. If you feel invisible, I guess that applies too.)

When you wake up, are you thinking about drinking? Do you crave it?



If some of these or all of these are answered with “yes,” then you are quite possibly drunk. You may even have a serious addiction. For me, too many people want to debate about when a person is actually drunk. I think the Bible gives a pretty good grid to work through. Admittedly, I’ve never been drunk. I don’t really even like the smell or taste of alcohol. It’s never had a lot of appeal to me. I’m not a teetotaler because of a biblical or moral conviction. For the most part, I don’t drink because it scares me to death. Many years before I was born, my paternal grandfather was an abusive alcoholic. I grew up hearing the stories and seeing the scars. I saw the drunks in my extended family. I guess on my mom’s side we had a great uncle who

was a Catholic priest and an alcoholic. My great-grandfather was killed by a drunk driver. The list goes on, but you get the point. My family has had a complicated history with alcohol.

What is most important though, is to know that God changes drunkards. I've seen it firsthand. I've seen God rescue men and women in their battle with the bottle. I've seen God restore marriages. I've seen God restore families. The power of the Gospel is not simply securing sinners an eternal home in Heaven. It is changing the heart and desires of drunkards. The Gospel is turning "our will and our lives over to the care of God."[221] We recognize that we are powerless and hopeless, and that Christ is powerful and the source of hope. That is the power of the Good News. Remember, nobody including yourself is beyond the saving grace of Jesus. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). That offer, with all its promises, includes the Drunkard.

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

I googled "Quotes about drinking" and this is what popped up. Some are quotes from actual people, some are little quips about it.

1. "I'll drink to that."
2. "My relationship with Whiskey is on the rocks."
3. "Because alcohol is better than tears."
4. "Alcohol... because no great story has ever started with someone eating a salad."
5. "Too much of anything is bad, but too much good whiskey is barely enough." Mark Twain
6. "I make beer disappear, what's your super power?"
7. "Wine is cheaper than therapy."
8. "I feel bad for people who don't drink. When they wake up in the morning, that's as good as they're going to feel all day." Frank Sinatra
9. "The problem with the world is that everyone is a few drinks behind." Humphrey Bogart
10. "I drink to make other people more interesting." Ernest Hemmingway



I knew when I did the search, they would all pop up as funny sayings. Why? Because that's how we treat being drunk. We act like it's a joke, it's a comedy show and we're all laughing. Until we're not. Until we are so hurt by drunkenness we don't know where to turn. So far in life, you haven't seen your Dad or me drink a drop. I grew up where people drank.

I hung around kids who occasionally drank. I'm thankful that the Lord protected me and I never plunged in. I had the opportunity but lacked desire. I saw what drunkenness did to people. How loud it made them, how rude it made them, how funny it made some of them, how obnoxious it made them, but most of all, how out of control it made them. I remember one time I was in high school at a bonfire and one of my friends decided it was a good idea to walk around the fire on the rocks, until he lost his balance and about fell in. The only reason he didn't was because I grabbed his shirt and yanked him away. I have come to the place in my life where I don't ever want to be out of control. It's enticing, don't get me wrong. Throw caution to the wind and jump right in. I want to be fully controlled by the Lord and His Holy Spirit. I want the Lord to be able to use me whenever He wants, not having to wait for me to sober up. I realize you can drink without getting drunk. But honestly, I'm afraid that I would like it too much and not stop. So I avoid it altogether. You have to make that choice for yourself. Dad and I can't make it for you. I will continue to pray as I always do, that you will all grow to honor and serve the Lord. That you will grow to be virtuous women and a mighty man for Him. If you can do that while drinking, To God be the Glory. But if you can not, there is no shame in that game. You have the opportunity to abstain and you are no less because of it.

Love you all to pieces,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What are some ways you've seen drunkenness played for a laugh?

Why do you think Noah drank? Survivors' guilt, grief, or celebration? Or something else?

How has alcoholism/drunkenness affected your life? Your family history? Personal choices?

Do you see the 12 Steps from A.A. rooted in biblical wisdom? How?

Do you have or know of a story of God's victory over drunkenness in someone's life?





16.

Sluggards and Thieves

Throughout Proverbs, there are major and minor characters in the word pictures that are painted. Two of those characters seem to have a connecting theme: the Sluggard and the Thief. What seems to connect these two is how they approach money and material things. The Sluggard feels entitled to what is yours while the Thief wants what is yours and takes it.

SLUGGARD

When I think about work, a scene from the '60s John Wayne western comedy, *"McLintock,"* is what comes to mind. Admittedly, the movie is a bit ridiculous and misogynistic, so I can't completely recommend it. However, there is a scene that I have a great deal of respect for. In the movie, Devlin Warren, played by John Wayne's son Patrick Wayne, reluctantly thanks the wealthy rancher for giving him a job. The title character responds, "Gave? Boy, you got it all wrong. I don't give jobs. I hire men." Then McLintock's right-hand man asks the younger Wayne, "You intend to give this man a full day's work, don't you boy?" The young man affirms his commitment to "deliver a fair day's work." The Duke responds, "Then for that, I'll pay you a fair day's wage. You won't give me anything and I won't give you anything. We both hold up our heads." Each time the emphasis is on the word give. The point of the dialogue is quite clear: no free rides, but a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. The Bible says, "A laborer deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18).



Solomon, the wise sage of Proverbs, tells of something he saw one day while taking a walk. He writes:

> "I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and

> received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man." (Proverbs 24:30-34)

Seeing the field overgrown and filled with thorns and nettles, Proverbs tells us that it's the Sluggard's field. The stone wall originally built to protect the vineyard is broken down. There is a lack of care and concern at this home. The Sluggard lives there. He has been blessed with land, a vineyard, and a wall but he has been a poor steward of what he's inherited. He's lazy and careless. A Sluggard is a slacker, a procrastinator, lazy, a free-loader, and slothful. Proverbs has a lot to say about the Sluggard.

> "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!' As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly." (Proverbs 26:13-16)

Rather than get down to the business of work, the Sluggard is constantly giving excuses, asking for five more minutes, entitled, and thinks he is better than everyone else. "His life motto is, 'Don't rush me.'"[222]

The Sluggard uses any and every method possible to avoid working. Proverbs says he'll even use the excuse that going to work means he'll die! There's a lion outside! Let's stay inside and be safe. Waltke calls it "irrational fear."[223] I think what he's afraid of is getting dirty or, Heaven forbid, a blister or worse yet a sliver. Sluggards come up with the most elaborate excuses: "I can't find a job…I've looked. Nobody is hiring…I don't feel good…" Eventually, the Sluggard

becomes what Jen and I call a basement dweller. They've extended adolescence to the point where they are an over-grown adult-child living in their parents' basement. If you have a basement dweller, stop enabling them, kindly kick them out, and make them get a job – a full-time job. Maybe even two full-time jobs…then, hopefully, they'll be tired from working all day instead of staying up all night wasting their life playing video games. In all honesty, there are lots of ways to waste time other than video games. Whatever you do, don't enable the Sluggard. It's unkind and unchristian. Their excuses might sound legit, but Proverbs basically says they are claiming that a lion is outside. It's a lame excuse.

> "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!'" (Proverbs 22:13)



Over the course of 2020, laziness seems to have swept over our nation. Rather than work, people opted for a free ride. Many Christians abandoned the God-ordained responsibility of honoring the Lord in our WORK. Paul told the church, in Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." We were created to work (Genesis 2:15)! Work is honoring to the Lord and reflects God's character (John 5:17). When we are lazy and constantly giving excuses, we are a bad reflection of the God whom we claim to love and serve.

The Sluggard refuses to work. Actually, as Derek Kidner wisely puts it, "He does not commit himself to an [open and defiant] refusal, but deceives himself by the smallness of his surrenders. So, by inches and minutes, his opportunity slips away."[224] Rather than outright saying, "I'm too lazy to work," the Sluggard just says, "Give me five more minutes." In essence, the Sluggard "five-more-minutes" himself to death. The alarm goes off and he hits snooze. Like a door on its hinges, he just turns over. That's the most effort he's going to put in

today. Eventually, he stops setting an alarm and just sleeps his life away. When Sluggard miraculously happens to be out of bed, they just put off everything until tomorrow, because they are too tired. “There’s no hurry,” they’ll say, “I’ll get to that project or start looking for a job tomorrow.” The Sluggard procrastinates to “next semester” or “later this year” or “this summer” or “after the holidays” or “in the fall” or “after vacation” or…the list goes on forever. Spurgeon wrote, “Tomorrow is only to be found in the calendar of fools; today is the time of the wise man.”[225] Solomon tells the Sluggard to learn from the ants. They don’t have a boss cracking the whip and they still get their job done. I imagine the nightstand of the Sluggard filled with unwashed dishes, half eaten sandwiches, and ants. The Sluggard would only have to roll over and crack open one eyeball to get an education in work.

> “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.” (Proverbs 6:6-11)

> “He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.”
> (Proverbs 10:5)

> “Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.” (Proverbs 19:15)

> “He who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.” (Proverbs 28:19)

In Proverbs, a field, a vineyard, food, and a bed are all things that the Sluggard has. Those were likely inherited, because vineyards don't just pop out of the ground overnight. With all of the effort of the previous generation, the Sluggard squanders his opportunity. The Sluggard has been blessed but has fallen in love with sleep.[226] In contrast to a fair wage for an honest day's work, a Lazy Person or Sluggard, ironically feels entitled to everything. Without exerting any effort, they feel entitled to have what others have worked hard for and/or have been blessed with. The Sluggard's sense of entitlement is so strong that they even seem to degrade to the point of being too exhausted to feed themselves. This isn't someone who is in a difficult or challenging season. The Sluggard's entire life has become a wasted opportunity. They've become masters at giving elaborate excuses all from the comfort of the couch. They are a couch potato. That might not be politically correct, I certainly wouldn't want to offend potatoes.



"A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." (Proverbs 10:4)

"The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied." (Proverbs 13:4)

"The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor." (Proverbs 12:24)

"The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing." (Proverbs 20:4)

"The desire of a sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor." (Proverbs 21:25)

> "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth." (Proverbs 19:24)

If you've worked a job or been assigned a project with a Sluggard, it can be really challenging. The Sluggard is always looking for the easy way out. He's searching for the shortcut, even a cheat. Anyone who is diligent, studious, or productive is seen by the Sluggard as trying too hard. They need to relax, Sluggard will say. They need to take it easy and just do the bare minimum. A Sluggard, like Scoffer, thinks they are the smartest person around and wisest on the team. Not only are they better than anyone on the team, every job is below them. They are better than manual labor – overqualified. Slackers can be lovable until you have to work with them, employ them, and depend on them.

> "Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him." (Proverbs 10:26)

> "Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth." (Proverbs 12:27)

> "The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway." (Proverbs 15:19)

> "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys." (Proverbs 18:9)

Solomon says he saw the field and vineyard of the Sluggard "and received instruction" (Proverbs 24:32). The lazy person's field, vineyard, and life have become a "wasteland."[227] The irony is that the Sluggard lacks wisdom, but we can gain wisdom by observing their folly. There are lessons to learn from the slacker. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica addressing the issue of laziness in

the church. The ESV translates it “idleness” and the KJV calls it “disorderly.” People who claimed Christ were being Sluggards. “A Christian Sluggard!” Spurgeon preached. He then asked, “Is there such a being?” Paul knew laziness would be a major detriment to the Gospel effort. Nobody respects a lazy man, so if and when a lazy person finds the gumption to get out of bed, nobody takes them seriously. “Let’s all admit it – there is a sluggard deep inside each of us.”[228] These verses from Paul are both an encouragement and a biblical command given to rouse us from our slumber. Maybe that laziness has nothing to do with your job. Maybe it has to do with your walk with the Lord or your marriage or your health or your family. We find and make all kinds of excuses for why we are lazy in certain areas of our lives. Let this passage confront the slacker in your soul.



> “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”
> (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

A lazy person feels entitled to things, whereas a thief takes what isn’t theirs. A Sluggard may actually resort to being a thief just to avoid good and honest, hard work.

THIEVES

I vividly remember in middle school coming home one day to find out that our house had been robbed that morning. Apparently, while my Mom was away, thieves who had been casing houses on our street, kicked in the door from the garage into the house and stole our stuff. In my mind, I can still see the imprint of a Nike shoe on the door. It was a strange education and an almost surreal experience. I was puzzled that the TV, VCR, Nintendo, microwave, vacuum, and a toolbox would be their targets. Some made sense, but a vacuum? I learned that these items would be pawned for some quick cash. The strange and surreal part was that the Kirby vacuum they stole was in a closet in my room. As I lay in bed that night, I thought, "Some unwelcome person was in my room today." It was kind of creepy. I also learned about insurance. They took a broken VCR… we got a new, working VCR. They took a Nintendo and we got a Super Nintendo in exchange. They took the vacuum and we got out of that chore for a little bit. In my life, that was a lesson in the reality that some people take what isn't theirs.

Early on in Proverbs, we are introduced to the father instructing his son, specifically warning him that sinners will invite him to be part of their gang. They'll invite him to their Folly. Solomon says:

> "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse' - my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight

> of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors." (Proverbs 1:10-19)

Robin Hood is a fun character, but he's still a thief. Robbing from the rich is still stealing and stealing is wrong. In English, the commandment is only four words and that's all that is needed – "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15). That law is written on the hearts of every person, so to violate our conscience we have to justify our sin to ourselves. A thief recognizes that what he has taken or is planning to take doesn't belong to them, so they have to "dispose" of the person whose stuff it really is. That disposal often comes in the form of justifications, such as, "They have so much money, they'll never even notice" or "Insurance will cover it" or "They stole from people, I'm just attempting to even the score" or "I'm not really stealing, I'm borrowing" or "They owe me this." People have used these justifications to rob banks, houses, friends, neighbors, churches, parents, and their workplaces. We have lots of terms for stealing: larceny, shoplifting, embezzlement, misappropriation, fraud, tax evasion, and of course, the list could go on for a while. The point is that to steal, the thief must deal with the rightful owner. In Proverbs chapter 1, disposing or removing the barrier of the rightful owner elevates all the way to murder.



This stealing and dehumanizing of people has become the pattern of the thieves' life. There isn't one isolated victim. Solomon, speaking for the thief, says, "Let us swallow *them* alive" (Proverbs 1:12, emphasis added).[229] The thief no longer sees people as valuable. The thief covets the stuff someone has and plots to eliminate the person so they can fill their houses with stolen goods. The thieves' invitation to "throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse" is a warning. If they stole with you, they'll steal from you. Friendship

among thieves will always go badly. The Apostle Paul writes, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Timothy 6:10). Falling in love with worldly treasures has caused people to make the most ludicrous and reckless decisions. Family and friendships that seemed unbreakable can’t survive greed.

Both Paul and Proverbs teach that a trap indeed has been set, but it’s not what the thief intended. The thief has set a trap for himself. Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage as saying, “Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after.”[230] Greed is a deadly trap. The Greedy become violent thieves.

> “People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house.” (Proverbs 6:30-31)
>
> “Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.” (Proverbs 10:2)
>
> “Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies, for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you. You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your pleasant words.” (Proverbs 23:6-8)
>
> “The partner of a thief hates his own life; he hears the curse, but discloses nothing.” (Proverbs 29:24)

> "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8-9)

Money and possessions – you own them or they own you. Proverbs says, "Unjust gain…takes away the life of its possessors" (Proverbs 1:19). Money and things can quickly become our idols, which become our gods, lords, masters, and owners. Greedy, violent, thieves are slaves to the god of money. This is why Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24), but you can serve God *with* your money. How we view money and possessions is closely related to how we view people. In our culture, money is muscle and wealth is power. It becomes a license to treat others as lesser. "Sinners love wealth and use people; saints love people and use wealth to help others."[231] We have become a covetous culture. In our covetous hearts, greed has forced us to dehumanize people, entire races, countries, and people groups, simply because we want what they have. We want their land, natural resources, labor, and money. Christians must view every person as an image-bearer of God, regardless of their socio-economic standing. Christians must show no partiality (James 2:1-13). Pastors must preach against greed, because the Gospel demands it.



CONCLUSION

The Gospel confronts both the laziness and greed hidden in our hearts. The Good News is that the Lord and King of all Creation humbled Himself. Jesus, rich in glory, power, majesty, and the worship of an endless number of angels, became poor. Paul writes, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might

become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Greed is ungodly. It's pride in money and wealth. Jesus laid down His rights and died in the poorest way possible. The Bible tells us that He was hung between two thieves (Matthew 7:38). He who was rich became poor, oppressed, beaten, and crucified, so that we could be rescued, saved, and forgiven. How could we respond to such grace with greed? How could we respond to the saving work of Christ in such a lethargic way? Let us rise from our spiritual slumber. Christian, churchy nap time is over. It's time to go to work (2 Corinthians 6:1). Jesus our Master yokes up with us (Matthew 11:29). This is your spiritual alarm clock going off. Don't hit snooze.

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

Ok, so I know I said there isn't anything I hate more than a liar...and that's true, but next in my lineup is a lazy person. They drive me absolutely crazy, and I've come to realize that I value hard work probably more than I should. It's definitely one of my core values. Your Dad and I are firstborns, a little headstrong, and full of ambition. We definitely work more than we should. But I like what Proverbs 14:23 (NIV) says, "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." I don't have to tell you that your Dad is a dreamer, you've been listening to ALL of his crazy ideas for a lot of years. But one thing that I am thankful for about him is that he isn't just a talker, he is a doer.



The Bible is warning us about the types of people that are just talkers. I've met this guy. He has all of the ideas in the world with all of the excuses in the world too. He can't get anything done. Don't be lazy and don't just flap your jaw about all of the great ideas you have. Get to it. Make a plan and execute it. What are your excuses? I can tell you my biggest one. Sleep. I remember reading Proverbs 20:13 for the first time, "Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty, open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread." I do love me some sleep, and I've passed that down to you guys, but Dad and I have also done our best to pass on being hard workers. We meet parents that are super hard workers but then don't require that of their kids. What a disservice they are doing to themselves, their kids, our society, and the Lord.

You all are amazing workers, don't let that stop when you leave my house. Continue that for your life. Remember when we gutted the whole first floor of our house? I can't even blame that one on your Dad, that was my idea. We never thought it could be done. But as a team, we did it. Sometimes you just need a team. We've made a great team over the years. Remember that one time that we rented a jackhammer and Dad had you guys run it! Oh dear, I thought it was going to carry you away down the road! How about the time we took down a 60-foot willow tree and shattered a window or the time we carried the buffet server up a ladder and over into the loft. That one actually made me the most nervous! We've done some crazy jobs over the years, but Dad and I wanted you to know how capable you are.

Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men..." Be used by Him, work for Him. Don't be lazy, especially being a follower of Christ. If you are lazy and believe in Jesus as your Savior, you give Him a bad name. Be the best,hard worker you can for Him.

Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What was your first job?

Who is the hardest worker you know?

What's the difference between a workaholic and a hard worker?

What's the best excuse you've heard for getting out of work?

Are there tasks that you persistently procrastinate? Is it laziness?

Have you ever been robbed? Was the thief ever caught?

Have you ever stolen something? Why?

How does the Gospel confront our sin of laziness and greed? How does the Gospel give hope?





17.

Kings

In America, we don't have a king, so we might be tempted to skip this chapter or these portions of Scripture when we come across them. What Proverbs is talking about is leadership, specifically in government. It's not as if governments that don't have kings are excluded, rather the Bible is taking a top-down approach. From the throne of the monarchy all the way down to the smallest village's local official, these are the principles and responsibilities of leadership in government. I've never met a king, but I once met the President.

A friend of mine who works in the Secret Service called me one day and told me the President was coming to town. He asked me if my family and I would like to come, see Air Force One land, see the President, the presidential limo, and its accompanying entourage of other vehicles, and be witness to the details of this spectacle of presidential travel. And, if the timing works, my family and I might get to shake the President's hand. It was, at least up to this point, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. My family and I traveled to the airport where the President was going to land. We checked in through security, wands, metal detectors, and ID's. It was serious and we understood. My friend came to get us and took us on a little VIP tour. It was incredible. We met the driver of the president's limo, which is more like a well-decorated tank with a Cadillac logo on the front grill. He opened the door to what they call "The Beast." I remember the door being as thick as any vault door I've ever seen. My family and I took our picture in front of the limo with the small American flag and presidential seal mounted to the front fenders. Then we walked outside and waited. After a brief wait, Air Force One landed. All at once, what had been a somewhat calm atmosphere, perked up. Secret Service personnel were everywhere, and I could even see a sniper in the distance. There wasn't a lot of pomp and circumstance, but there were tons of moving parts. One of those strange airport vehicles with stairs on them drove over to the airplane and the door opened. Then all at once, there was the President. It



was a strange feeling to see a guy in person who you feel like you've seen thousands of times, but in reality, you've never really seen. He talked with a few local political folks and gestured that he was going to come say hello to the group of about 30 people waiting behind zip-tied, parade-type, guard rails. The President made his way down the line shaking each person's hand. When he reached me, I said, "Mr. President, it's an honor to meet you. This is my family." One by one I introduced my kids to the President as my wife snapped photos. He called Ruby "curly-top" and gave a mischievous smile to my son, who was wearing jeans and cowboy boots. He asked my kids if they got out of school for this and they explained that they were homeschooled. I introduced him to my wife and he looked at me and said, "Sir, you have a beautiful family." And with that, he made his way into the car and was off to give a speech. My friend later told me, "Dude…you got major face time with the President." It was a neat experience. As we drove home, my older kids asked me what I thought about the President and did I vote for him? It was a riveting discussion about honor, respect, and disagreement. That day was a priceless civics lesson through the lens of a biblical worldview. The Bible has a lot to say about government, kings, rulers, and presidents. I originally intended to write about kings in another chapter. I was planning to combine it in a discussion of other smaller characters in Proverbs. But as I studied, I realized verses about kings, rulers, and government officials were all over the book. Government in Proverbs warrants its own chapter.

Some scholars see Proverbs as a king training his son and successor.[232] There are definitely multiple kings mentioned: Solomon, Hezekiah, Agur son of Jakeh, and Lemuel. Princes are mentioned as well, but these lessons aren't just for kings. The wisdom of Proverbs is for royalty and commoners, presidents and citizens alike. The Proverbs focused on kings are meant to inform government leaders of their responsibilities to God and their nation, inform citizens of the

proper expectations they should place on their leaders, and warn either group of the danger of disregarding their duties before God.

Proverbs gives brief character sketches of good kings and bad kings. A good ruler or leader recognizes that it is by the grace and wisdom of God that he is in a position of power, so he rules with love, faithfulness, truth, and justice. By contrast, a bad king seizes power and goes for an ego trip. He lies, oppresses the people by over-taxing them, and corrupts justice through bribes and favoritism to the rich.



ROYAL RESPONSIBILITY

At the outset of his rule, Solomon was a great king. He prayed, "O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude" (1 Kings 3:7-8). Solomon recognized that he was simply a servant and that the throne and the position of authority over the people was a gift from God. A good ruler not only realizes the gift of power, but desires the gift of wisdom to come with it. This type of leader realizes God through wisdom ordered the world, so a good king needs wisdom to order his kingdom.[233]

> "By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly."
> (Proverbs 8:15-16)

> "The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men."
> (Daniel 4:17)

> "The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (Daniel 4:32)

> "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." (Romans 13:1)

> "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good." (1 Peter 2:13-14)

Solomon's son Rehoboam failed to learn the lesson of wisdom from his father. When he inherited the throne, the power went straight to his head. The kingdom had prospered greatly under Solomon, but the people were wary of taxation. Older men counseled the new King to cut taxes and win the people's affection. Rather than cutting taxes or even keeping them the same, the arrogant King declared, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:14). A young fool had come to the throne and within a very short time, the nation split into two.

> "When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves." (Proverbs 28:12)

> "Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people. A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor." (Proverbs 28:15-16)

> "When the wicked rise, people hide themselves." (Proverbs 28:28)

"When the wicked rule, the people groan." (Proverbs 29:2)

"By justice a king builds up the land, but he who exacts gifts tears it down." (Proverbs 29:4)

"Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: a slave when he becomes king…."
(Proverbs 30:21-22)

"Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice."
(Ecclesiastes 4:13)

"Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!" (Ecclesiastes 10:16)



The earth trembled and the kingdom could not stand. It was like a slave – an unprepared, uneducated commoner – had ascended to the throne. The Bible isn't affirming a ruling class, it is warning against power and authority that isn't matched with character and integrity. In Rehoboam's case, his opportunity and skills took him further than his character could sustain him. When being a king or president, boss or leader becomes a power trip rather than an opportunity to humbly serve God's people, things won't stand for long. "Outward power will always unveil the inner resources, or the lack thereof."[234]

A good government official realizes they have been put in place by God and serves the people with love and faithfulness. In general, David, Solomon's father, was that type of king and ruler. As a young man, David had been anointed king by the prophet Samuel, yet he would spend the next decade running for his life from the current King. All the while, God was taking the kingdom from Saul and giving it to David. David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14;

Acts 13:22). In 1 Samuel chapter 22, the Bible says that while David was hiding in the cave at Adullam, "…everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them" (1 Samuel 22:2). In this passage, David exemplifies the Lord Jesus, when Christ welcomes "all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). David was trained as a shepherd and he loved, cared for, and protected his sheep. When David eventually ascended to the throne, he loved, cared for, and protected God's people. He certainly was not flawless, but his spiritual legacy garnered God's grace for generations to come. In the incredible book *"A Tale of Three Kings"* by Gene Edwards, he writes of David during that time, "There in those caves, drowned in the sorrow of his song, and in the song of his sorrow, David very simply became the greatest hymn writer, and the greatest comforter of broken hearts this world shall ever know."[235]

> "Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king, and by steadfast love his throne is upheld." (Proverbs 20:28)
>
> "He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend." (Proverbs 22:11)
>
> "If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever." (Proverbs 29:14)

As the kingdom was being taken from Saul and given to David (See 1 Samuel 15:26-28), King Saul became more erratic, violent, and eventually even consulted a witch for access to the, by then, deceased prophet, Samuel. He lied and refused to take responsibility. He became paranoid, threw spears at David who was faithfully trying to comfort him in his distress. Saul is the story of a once-promising king who fell into spiritual and emotional madness. Rather than

leading the people in a path of fidelity to God, he failed to love and faithfully serve them. The story of King Saul is a tragedy.

A wise king fearlessly searches out the truth. Proverbs 25:1 is a transition in the book; it reads, "These also are the Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied." Wisdom mattered to Hezekiah. A couple of generations after this king came Josiah. A brief but wonderful summary is given of this ruler. The Scripture says, "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left…while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father" (2 Chronicles 34:2-3). It was during his reign that the Book of the Law of the Lord was rediscovered. The King searched out what the Lord would have him do. God was honored by this humble King. Josiah even read the Book of the Covenant for all to hear. He made a public commitment to God's standard. A righteous ruler is committed to truth. He doesn't lie and won't stand for falsehood or evil. Truth and justice matter. "Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a prince," Proverbs 17:7 says. In the love and faithfulness that a good king has for his people, he is dedicated to the establishment of justice. This is a reflection of the character of God shown in the duties of leadership in government.



> "An oracle is on the lips of a king; his mouth does not sin in judgment. A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work. It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves him who speaks what is right. A king's wrath is a messenger of death, and a wise man will appease it. In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain." (Proverbs 16:10-15)

> "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. As the Heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable. Take away the dross from the silver, and the smith has material for a vessel; take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness." (Proverbs 25:2-5)

Proverbs chapter 16 is a pairing of Proverbs about God and kings. A balance, scales, and weights are mentioned. This is about business honesty. "Some merchants used two sets of weight stones, one for buying and one for selling."[236] A righteous ruler would make sure that honesty and integrity were practiced in business and in the courts. To do otherwise would be an unthinkable abomination. In *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* Christian and his friend Faithful stand before the judge called "Lord Hate-good."[237] This judge is part of the corruption of his city. Eventually, this judge on the words of lies from "Envy" and "Superstition" condemns Faithful "to the most cruel death that could be invented."[238] In the role of judge, a ruler is often asked to make decisions of real consequence. A judge must be above corruption or sway of bribery. Justice is blind in the sense of equal application of the law for rich and poor, powerful and powerless. An honorable judge or ruler is devoted to having clarity of mind and sight to distinguish fact from fiction, the genuine from the artificial, and the wise counselor from the butt-kisser. Like a silversmith (25:4) removes the worthless dross from silver and a farmer winnows the wheat from the chaff (20:8),[239] a righteous, loving king will examine the facts and give justice to his people. A wicked ruler spoils and robs the people of justice.

> "A servant who deals wisely has the king's favor, but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully." (Proverbs 14:35)

"A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass." (Proverbs 19:12)

"The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; whoever provokes him to anger forfeits his life…A king who sits on the throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes…A wise king winnows the wicked and drives the wheel over them." (Proverbs 20:2, 8, 26)

"When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers." (Proverbs 21:15)



REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

God has high and clear expectations for kings, judges, presidents, and all government officials. In keeping with that, citizens should have equally high expectations for leaders. Not separate expectations, but the same. What God demands of leaders, citizens should as well. The citizens of every nation are on firm footing when they expect honesty, "righteousness, justice, and equity" (Proverbs 1:3) from their government and leaders. To illustrate this point, the wise teacher of Proverbs goes to the extremes of the socio-economic scale. He starts with kings, essentially saying these principles apply to everyone from the top down, even the guy on the throne. When Proverbs addresses issues of justice, it goes to the other end and starts at the bottom. Starting with the poor means that nobody, even the bottom rung of society is excluded from the protections of justice. It's a mirror reflection of the instructions to the king. The poor are equally entitled to justice. A bad king, ruler, president, or judge spoils justice, particularly for the poor, because they are easy, vulnerable, under-resourced targets. By advocating so strongly for the lowest class, those with a social position higher up the "ladder" would have confidence that their kings and as a whole, their nation were comprehensively committed to fair execution of the law.

Kings and citizens both recognized their need for each other. Kings knew that without people they weren't really a king. John Maxwell said, "He that thinketh he leadeth, and hath no one following is only taking a walk."[240] You can easily apply that to kings. If you're sitting on the throne with no citizens, then you're just relaxing in a fancy chair. If you think you're in a parade with no spectators, you're only riding down Main Street. Yes, people need kings, rulers, and presidents. But conversely, kings, rulers, and presidents need people. Kings should never forget their dependence on their people.

> "In the multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined." (Proverbs 14:28)

> "Three things are stately in their tread; four are stately in their stride…a king whose army is with him." (Proverbs 30:29, 31)

This symbiotic relationship that God established is intended to help foster a loving, committed, and respectful relationship between kings and their kingdom. Citizens should speak respectfully of the king, knowing he has been placed in his position by God and is ultimately responsible to God for all of his actions. Resting on that truth prompts restraint.

> "My son, fear the Lord and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise." (Proverbs 24:21)

> "If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them." (Ecclesiastes 5:8)

> "Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king."
> (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

Even in the New Testament context, both the Apostle Paul and Apostle Peter affirmed these truths.

> "Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." (Romans 13:2-7)



> "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." (1 Peter 2:17)

KINGS AND KINGDOMS BEWARE

The tragedy of our fallen world is that citizens are often plagued by foolish, self-serving, wicked leaders. Certainly, no leader is without fault, but at times good leaders are overthrown by violent, rebellious citizens. Human history is filled with revolutions, coups, civil wars, assassinations, and uprisings. The 20th century alone is filled with violent clashes: The Boxer Rebellion in China, the Mexican Revolution, the Communist Revolution in Russia, the Spanish Civil War, the Cuban Revolution, the Iranian Revolution, Iraqi Revolution, the more peaceful uprising in India, and many more seem to have

shaped the 20th century.[241] Even in the new millennium, the Arab spring, multiple civil wars on the continent of Africa, Brexit, the Occupy Wall-Street movement, and others have reminded us that people need leaders and leaders need people. When that mutual respect, understanding, and submission to God is erased, that society is headed for chaos and collapse. In the Bible, the book of Jeremiah is a testament to God's anger, judgment, and sadness at the rebellion of kings and people. As a result, God destroys the nation using the mighty Babylonian army.

> "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14:34)

These realities of our fallenness are simply part of the world we live in. Jesus said, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6). Broken, fallen, and sinful people are governed by equally immoral leaders. This reality leads to uprisings, oppression, revolutions, abusive dictatorships, and even the rest of our less violent frustrations with government. This brokenness births within the human heart a longing for justice, peace, and harmony. Throughout the course of human history that longing in mankind has motivated communism, fascism, democracy, theocracy, and even anarchy. We want a just, righteous, and perfect leader. We want a holy King. Thankfully, that King has come. Two thousand years ago, a boy was born. His mother was told, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus is that King.

At the time of Christ's birth, the "king" was Caesar Augustus. He was emperor of the Roman Empire. The title "Augustus" associated

Caesar with the divine. "It was under Augustus' rule that decisive strides were taken toward making the Caesars gods."[242] In a more local context, Herod the Great was the ruler over Israel at the time of Jesus' birth. Through the visit of the wise men, he learned that the "King of the Jews" had been born. When the wise men failed to return to Jerusalem and report the location of this new King, Herod sent troops to the little village of Bethlehem and murdered all of the baby boys that were two years old and under. He was a violent, cruel king. One of his grandsons, Herod Agrippa I, inherited the same murderous rage and god complex. He killed his own father Aristobulus in his rise to power.[243] Sounds like a pleasant family. In the early days of the church, Agrippa martyred James and arrested Peter with intentions of killing him as well. By a divine miracle, Peter was spared death at that time. Acts records the story of Herod Agrippa delivering a speech while seated on his throne. The audience began to shout, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" (Acts 12:22). The Bible says that, "Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last" (Acts 12:23). The historian Josephus corroborates this story with a riveting account. He writes, Herod Agrippa I:



> Put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good) that he was a god; and they added, 'Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto reverenced thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.' Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery.[244]

Shortly thereafter, Josephus notes, Herod:

> Fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in the most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, 'I, whom you call a god, am commanded to presently depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death…When he said this, his pain was become violent…And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life.[245]

THE KING OF KINGS

Jesus was born into a world ruled by corrupt leaders. The early church began and thrived under the persecution of a series of maniacal rulers, but the King had come. The Christmas carols *"It came upon a midnight clear," "O Holy Night,"* and *"O come, O come Emmanuel"* each speak of a world that waits. The advent of Christ is the arrival of that King and His everlasting Kingdom. The King of all kings has come. The prophet Isaiah, wrote of the coming Messiah, "The government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore" (Isaiah 9:6-7). That leads us right to the Gospel. Every king, president, councilperson, mayor, congressman, man and woman across the globe and throughout history must come and bow in submission to the King of kings. Our own part in the broken systems of this world brings us to our desperate need for a king. The Good News is that a kind, faithful, eternally loving, and eternally saving King has come. Unlike the selfish despots of history,

King Jesus died to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). He rose victorious over the grave, ascended to Heaven, and, as a conquering King, returned triumphantly into Heaven. Salvation is welcoming the true, rightful, and eternal King to the throne of our heart. King David wrote:

> “Lift up your heads, O gates!
> And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
> That the king of glory may come in!
> Who is this King of glory?
> The Lord, strong and mighty,
> The Lord, mighty in battle!
> Lift up your heads, O gates!
> And lift them, O ancient doors,
> That the King of glory may come in.
> Who is this King of glory?
> The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!”
> (Psalm 24:7-10)



Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

I have always had a problem with authority. I don't like to be told what to do. Ever. Just ask my mom. Or your Dad. It's like if someone is about to tell me I have to do something, my insides instantly say no! I don't even have to hear what that thing is, and my flesh automatically shouts NOOOOOOO! It's like nails on a chalkboard. I wish I could say I'm exaggerating but I'm not. Being a follower of Christ really smacks that feeling in the face and tells you to get your crap together. Being a Christ follower is about ultimate submission. I pray that you learn this lesson early and that the Lord doesn't have to discipline you into submission. The Lord is our ultimate King and He has designed His Kingdom in a very orderly fashion.

You as children are to obey your parents, I as a wife am to submit to your Dad, while we are both to submit to the Lord. There are going to be many people in life that you have to submit to. Some that you aren't going to agree with. Some that you are going to think are dumb and unqualified. And yet the Lord tells us to submit. You are going to have teachers and bosses. Police Officers and Parents. Coaches and eventually spouses. I remember one time, I had an Assistant Principal that was out to get me. I swear it didn't matter what I wore to school, I was her target. I could have on the same outfit as the next girl and I was the one being reprimanded. So I took it as a challenge, I would push the

envelope even more every day, just to get a rile out of her. My poor mother; this Assistant Principal was her boss.

What I didn't know then was that Romans 13:1 says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." I was in direct disobedience to the Lord because I didn't submit to the person that was in authority over me, that He put there. She wasn't asking me to partake in sin. She wasn't asking me to go against the Word of God. She was simply trying to make me comply with the rules of the school. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." I should have submitted. Thankfully the Lord has been kind in teaching me this lesson and didn't smite me like He probably should have and had every right to. Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." The Lord is in charge. I am to trust that. If you are following Christ, you are to believe those things and let those things affect the way you live your lives. Don't be a stink like I was.



Love,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Have you ever met the President or other prominent government official?

If you could meet any President or world leader, living or deceased, who would it be?

In what ways do you feel like the government has upheld its responsibility to God and the people?

In what ways do you feel like the government has failed?

In 1 Timothy 2:1-3, Paul writes, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.”

In relation to government, how does the Bible tell Christians to act?

Are you praying regularly for “kings and all who are in high positions?” If not, why not?

What does longing for God’s Kingdom mean to you?





18.

The Poor

In 2015, a dear friend of mine had “complications with a routine outpatient surgery.” At least that was the explanation given to his church for the absence of their pastor. It was a diplomatic line explaining that he had had a personal surgery and it had gone poorly. Thankfully he did eventually recover. Jen and I still laugh when thinking about the first time they came to our house after the “complications.” He laid on the couch and looked like he had been through a war. A few weeks prior, when I first heard the news that he wasn’t doing well, I texted him on my way to Sunday morning gatherings to see if we could do anything for them. My thought was to provide meals, help with their kids, or run a few errands he and his wife may need done. He responded with, “Can you go to Haiti for me? I’m supposed to fly out tomorrow and preach there.” I remember getting that text and thinking, “Dude…I will bring you lunch and dinner and pick up your prescriptions. Haiti? No thanks.” But I had asked what he needed and he had responded. The next morning, I flew to Haiti. I spent three or four days traveling around, meeting pastors, seeing church buildings, hospitals, preaching through a translator, and seeing a country still reeling from the devastation of the 2010 earthquake. It was only a few days, but my mind was blown.



Throughout my life, I have been privileged to travel around the world. I have been to Europe, South America, Central America, the Middle East, and Asia. In Haiti, I saw poverty on a scale that still troubles me. The images of shacks, trash, and human waste are beyond imagination. One particular memory stands out in my mind. I remember traveling to a small village to preach in a newly constructed building. It was a long, skinny cinder-block structure with no windows and doors. Rows of poorly constructed benches filled the room. Before I spoke I was spending time with a small group of kids. The image of one little girl is burned into my mind. She was standing with the group of children holding what was clearly her “toy.” You may assume it was a doll or dirty stuffed animal, but it wasn’t.

Those would have made some sense. She was holding what at first I had trouble identifying. After looking more closely, I realized this little girl's treasured "toy" was the actual tape on the inside of a cassette tape. She was stroking and caressing it. The softness of the tape seemed to comfort her, like a special blanket or doll. For me, that picture in my mind represents real poverty. I can't get it out of my head.

I've never really known poverty or what it means to be poor. Being "broke" is a phrase that I've used to describe a week where all the bills are paid and we don't have any extra cash. "Broke" means being forced to eat at home, rather than enjoy the convenience of eating out. My kids have never had to play with a cassette tape for enjoyment. Honestly, some of them don't even know what a cassette tape is. They are as familiar with a cassette tape or 8-track as we are with real poverty.

Poverty is part of the human condition. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "The poor you always have with you" (John 12:8). Poor people will always be around. That isn't the main point that Jesus was making in this passage, nevertheless, it is *a* point the Lord made. Now that verse shouldn't be used to derail efforts to alleviate or eliminate poverty. Jesus is simply pointing out an obvious reality of the world we all live in. To think that poverty is simply a choice or a sign of laziness is naive. Poverty is caused by a variety of factors: birth, family of origin, country of origin, disabilities, economic opportunities, war, famine, disease, and a ton more. I felt my own arrogance and ignorance about poverty in Haiti. In America, we have a "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" type mentality. But when you don't have straps or boots, there just isn't anywhere to pull. Poverty can certainly have a spiritual component to it, but I think that unless God has clearly made that connection, we should be hesitant to race to such a conclusion.

The Bible certainly speaks of poverty caused by laziness.

> "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." (Proverbs 10:4)

> "Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich." (Proverbs 21:17)

However, throughout Proverbs, care for the poor is encouraged, even commanded. It's important to realize that the Bible makes a distinction between enabling a lazy man and helping someone who is down on their luck. And by "down on their luck" we mean they may have lacked educational opportunities, be disabled, HIV positive, trafficked, an immigrant, or a million other things. I was born at Pontiac General Hospital in Pontiac, Michigan in 1981 to married, white, educated parents. The material blessings that I was afforded from birth far surpass that young girl playing with a discarded cassette tape. When we come to realize that our birth, race, nationality, family of origin, cognitive and physical abilities were assigned by God, we should immediately feel less arrogant and more thankful. We should instantly feel less entitled and more generous. Maybe you feel like a self-made man or woman because of a certain level of success. Just know that it is the Lord God Almighty who gave you the boots, the straps, and the hands and arms to pull yourself up. God in His sovereign purposes has assigned the socio-economic positions of every person, family, and nation on earth. Whether a person moves up or down the scale is by divine design.



> "The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all." (Proverbs 22:2)

> "The poor man and the oppressor meet together; the Lord gives light to the eyes of both." (Proverbs 29:13)

Seeing the Proverbs through the lens of royal instruction, a king is instructing a prince. To royalty, poverty is a completely foreign concept, especially to Solomon. Viewing the passages on poverty this way seems, in my opinion, to give more care, grace, and compassion. The king is trying to help his son understand, "Son, not everybody lives like we live." Taking an even higher view, this is God saying to each of us, "Not everybody has what you've been given… be gracious, generous, and understanding." In 1890, Jacob Riis published a shocking book entitled *"How the Other Half Lives."* The book intended to expose the upper echelons of society in New York City to the living, working, and sleeping conditions of those on the other end of the economic scale. The powerful and startling photos worked. It forced much-needed social reforms. In the introduction of the book, Riis begins, "Long ago it was said that 'one half of the world does not know how the other half lives.' That was true then. It did not know because it did not care."[246] God's instructions in Proverbs concerning the poor are to help us better see and understand the plight of the poor and care in an active way by defending their rights against would-be oppressors.

UNDERSTANDING THE POOR

Like Riis' efforts of the late 1800s, the sage of Proverbs intends to inform his son and student of "how the other half lives." Several Proverbs addressing poverty compare and contrast the position of the wealthy to the poor. The wise man addresses the social standing of the poor as it affects relationships, position, and security. The sage also uses the poor as an example that there are some things that money just can't buy.

The poor man knows firsthand the superficiality of most friendships. He is unable to throw any great parties. He doesn't have resources to share or connections to make. He may have his integrity, but still,

he may often find himself alone. He is an illustration and a reminder that many friendships are self-serving relationships.

> "The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends." (Proverbs 14:20)

> "Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend." (Proverbs 19:4)

> "All a poor man's brothers hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him!" (Proverbs 19:7)



Positionally, Proverbs likens the poor to a slave. Due to their weak economic standing, they are unable to enjoy certain freedoms. Even the way they speak is influenced by their financial status. They must entreat or beg or ask nicely. A rich person is afforded the luxury of answering however they like. The poor just can't afford to live like that.

> "The poor uses entreaties, but the rich answer roughly." (Proverbs 18:23)

> "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender." (Proverbs 22:7)

In Proverbs, there is a sad irony – nobody is looking to steal from the poor, because he doesn't own anything of value, but there are times where a beggar will assault another beggar. Proverbs chapter 28 calls this pointless. While the rich enjoy the security of a well-fortified life, likened to a strong city, the poor are defenseless against predatory lending and social oppression.

> "One pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth. The ransom of a man's life is his wealth, but a poor man hears no threat."
> (Proverbs 13:7-8)

> "A rich man's wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin." (Proverbs 10:15)

> "A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food." (Proverbs 28:3)

Regardless of the socio-economic position of the poor, the young prince is informed that there are some things that money just can't buy. Integrity and character aren't something that can be purchased. In some cases, it's better to be poor, than a liar, con man, or know-it-all.

> "Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool." (Proverbs 19:1)

> "A poor man is better than a liar." (Proverbs 19:22)

> "Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways." (Proverbs 28:6)

> "A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out." (Proverbs 28:11)

In Philippians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul writes, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need" (Philippians 4:12). Throughout his life, Paul had moved quite fluidly up and down the socio-economic scale. He knew seasons of feast and famine. He faced times of surplus

and deficit. To Paul, there was a "secret" to be learned.[247] The wise teacher of Proverbs is trying to teach us the secret.

CARING FOR THE POOR

Something strange happened in the early parts of the book of Acts. Under the oppressive Roman taxation, voluntary socialism broke out among the followers of Jesus. The author of Acts, Luke records, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45). A couple of chapters later, Luke writes, "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (Acts 4:34-35). Generosity marked the early church. The key phrase of these verses is "as any had need." In the family of God, everybody had their needs met. It wasn't forced or brought about by shame. The government didn't have to force care for the poor through taxation. A characteristic of a Christian was generosity to those who had needs. One of the wealthiest men I've ever known was no slouch when it came to men working, but his heart couldn't be more tender when he cared for and provided for sizable needs of the poor. He understood the Christian wisdom of meeting the needs of the poor. He realized it was a great investment, both here and in eternity.



> "Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor." (Proverbs 14:21)

> "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed." (Proverbs 19:17)

"Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor." (Proverbs 22:9)

"Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor." (Proverbs 28:8)

"Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse." (Proverbs 28:27)

DEFENDING THE POOR

Throughout the entire Old Testament, God warns against abusing the poor. He warns that He is their ultimate protector. All of the government, including court systems, legislative bodies, and law enforcement are to reflect God's care and compassion for the widow, orphan, and immigrant. To rob them of justice is to stir the anger of Almighty God. The volume of verses in the Bible warning against oppressing the poor and encouraging the defense of the poor speak for themselves.

"The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice." (Proverbs 13:23)

"Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker." (Proverbs 14:31)

"Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker." (Proverbs 17:5)

"Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered." (Proverbs 21:13)

"Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty." (Proverbs 22:16)

“Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.” (Proverbs 22:22-23)

“Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the field of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.” (Proverbs 23:10-11)

“A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.” (Proverbs 29:7)



“There are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind.” (Proverbs 30:14)

“Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:9)

“You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.” (Exodus 22:22-24)

“They kill the widow and the sojourner and murder the fatherless.” (Psalm 94:6)

“The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless.” (Psalm 146:9)

“Seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.” (Isaiah 1:17)

"Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them." (Isaiah 1:23)

"If you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place…then I will let you dwell in this place." (Jeremiah 7:5-7)

"Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." (Jeremiah 22:3)

"Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you." (Ezekiel 22:7)

"Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor." (Zechariah 7:10)

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against…those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 3:5)

CONCLUSION

God calls His people to see the poor, care for the poor, and defend the poor. The Wisdom of God came to earth in the flesh and did

all of these things. Jesus saw the poor, cared for, and defended the defenseless. Jesus accused the religious leaders of His day of "devouring widow's houses" (Matthew 23:14). The Lord traveled among the poor, outcasts, and sinners of society. His ministry wasn't only to the poor, but He Himself fit well within that class. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests," Jesus said, "but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). John celebrated the humble humanity of Jesus proclaiming, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The literal reading is that the creator of the world descended from glory to *tent* with us. The Son of God who had everything lowered Himself to the bottom rung of the economic ladder. His purpose was not to vilify the rich but to validate the poor. From the lowest class, Jesus would proclaim Himself to be Lord of all creation and yet live and travel like a common peasant. God couldn't descend any lower. A manger would be His cradle. The learned trade of carpentry would be His work. His death would happen between thieves and His grave would be borrowed. Oh the poverty and riches of Christ!



When John the baptizer had a crisis of faith, Jesus sent word back to him. "Go and tell John," Jesus told John's students, among other things "…the poor have the good news preached to them" (Matthew 11:5). It wasn't that the Gospel was exclusive to the poor, but that the poor had a head start on grasping essential Kingdom truths, like, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Being financially poor doesn't equal or guarantee spiritual poverty or bankruptcy, but without the deceitfulness of riches, the poor could more easily embrace spiritual humility. By contrast, the rich entering the Kingdom of Heaven is a miracle on the scale of a camel going through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24). A Christian's care, advocacy, and generosity to the poor comes from seeing the example of our Savior. In the eternal sense, our care of the poor comes from our own experience, where we recognize our

spiritual poverty and God's glorious riches. Not earthly wealth, but the riches of His grace, mercy, and forgiveness that He has so freely given to us. The Gospel informs and motivates how we treat the poor, because in the redemption story, we are the beggars and He the patron. David wrote in Psalm 34:6 what all Christians sing, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles."

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

When your Dad sat down to write this chapter, the first thing he asked me was, "When I say poverty, what do you think about?" My answer straight away was that our family has never experienced true poverty. The Lord has always provided and for that I am thankful. I want to share with you a few verses that speak to my soul about having less.

Proverbs 15:16 (NLT) - "Better to have little, with fear for the Lord, than to have great treasure and inner turmoil."



Scripture is teaching us that it is better to have less in this life and to be a person of integrity, a person who fears the Lord, a person of peace. How countercultural is that?! Our world tells us to GET all that you can, whether you need it or not. Gimmie, Gimmie, Gimmie, I need, I need.[248] Scripture is telling us that it's better to have less than to have great treasures and be people of turmoil. I have met people like this over the years, the pursuit of more ends up making them a wretched person on the inside and outside. Dad, over the years hasn't always made a lot of money, some years we even took substantial pay cuts. We never were impoverished, but there were opportunities that we could have let the all mighty dollar drive us. I could have gone and got a paying job, he could have taken a second job. But we knew we had enough. More wasn't needed. Is more nice, sure. But we weren't going to sacrifice you guys or each other just to be more comfortable. I of course don't

wish you to be poor. But if I have to choose for you to live a peaceable life and that means that you have less...I will choose that every day of the week. I have always told you that I don't care what you do in life, as long as you serve the Lord and do what He has called you to do.

Proverbs 15:17 - "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it."

Proverbs 17:1 - "Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife."

It's better for you to not have a full belly and live in a peaceful house than to have a big juicy steak dinner with hatred and strife. Again, it is better to have less. It seems so crazy, but so many times the Lord's rules are opposite of what we think and feel. So many people sacrifice their marriages and their kids so they can have more and not be considered poor. When in reality, they would be better off living in a shack together than sacrificing their relationships to live in a big fancy house with a fridge full of expensive beef.

Proverbs 28:6 (GW) - "Better to be a poor person who has integrity than to be rich and double-dealing."

"The Oxford Languages" definition of integrity is "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness." It's better for you to be poor and have

integrity than to have a lot of money because you are a con or because you are a cheat. It is better for you to have less and be a person that others feel safe doing business with. It is more important for you to not ruin relationships in the pursuit to get more, to be on top.

Proverbs 30:7-9 - "Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."



This is one of my most favorite verses in Proverbs. Give me just enough Lord so I depend on you, not too much otherwise I may forget that I need you, and not enough so I steal and give the Lord a bad name.

These are just a few things I hope and pray over you.

Love you bunches,
Mom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Have you ever experienced poverty?

When you think of the poor, what images come to mind?

Have you seen the poor oppressed? How?

Do you think the church cares for the poor in the way Jesus did? (Keep in mind, you are the church. Sorry for the trick question.)

What role do you think the government should play in caring for the poor?

What does voluntary socialism look like in Acts? What does it look like to you?

What does Gospel-grounded generosity look like?





19.

Proverbs 31 Woman

When Jen and I began dating, we started serving in ministry together in the same month. A year later we got married and a year after that we started full-time in children's ministry. Then a year after that we had our first daughter and a year after that had another daughter. Basically, we've always been well-paced, healthy people. Yikes. Anyway, we loved the kids' ministry and honestly, some days I miss it. I'd like to go back and correct some mistakes and do a few things better than I did them before. Kids are so much fun.



One of the major events we had each year was our one week of summer camp. At that time, we traveled down to a camp just outside of Mansfield, Ohio – the same camp I grew up going to. I loved creating and directing camp. I learned a lot of hard but important leadership lessons throughout those years. In our final year in Ohio, we built a pretty elaborate castle set in the chapel. I have pictures and still wonder how I got away with spending that much money. As a leader during that time in my life, I was really burdened about teaching biblical gender roles. I wanted boys to understand that they were called to be mighty men for God. Having two daughters of my own at that point, I wanted girls to understand who and what God had designed them to be. With that goal in mind, we gathered the older groups of girls and their leaders together for what in hindsight was a breakout session. As I began to teach, something strange and magical, and extremely educational happened that day. I was at a point in my life where I was really falling in love with the Bible and although I wasn't a very competent or tactful speaker, I thoroughly enjoyed explaining what the Scripture was saying. During that breakout session in the summer of 2005, I sat with maybe 30-40 girls and their leaders, walking them through the words of Proverbs 31:10-31. I realize now it would have been more effective for my wife to teach through the passage. I have no idea why that didn't happen, and I don't remember if the campers were particularly inspired that day, but I will never forget the leader's faces. It was like the Scripture

was calling to something deep within them. I'm not a woman, nor do I get subtlety, but that day God let me see both the power of His Word and the response of His people. We are all affected by the fall, but I saw in those ladies' faces the Word of God call to their inner Eve. That might sound weird, but I watched as they were moved, challenged, and convicted by the gold standard of femininity presented in the final words of Proverbs. The Bible gives a more profound and powerful view of womanhood than modern feminism ever could. The Bible provides a path to redemption or what I like to call "The Revenge of Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13-15).

Proverbs chapter 31 has come to serve as the model of what a godly woman strives to be and what kind of woman a young man should pursue in marriage. Paul Koptak is right in saying that "this poem has been used to praise and pressure women."[249] He is also right in saying this portion of Scripture "makes a fitting conclusion to a book about wisdom."[250] Similar to Lady Wisdom, the woman of Proverbs 31 is the embodiment of all the wisdom that has come before in the previous 30 chapters. She is the culmination of wisdom. She is the prize. The beauty of the passage is that it follows a lesson that King Lemuel's mother taught him. Seeing the chapter as one sequence, the King recalls the words of his wise mother, "An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels" (Proverbs 31:10). Lemuel's mother is instructing him to find "a valiant wife"[251] – to choose wisely.

Throughout Proverbs, multiple passages give similar warnings and instructions. The book is primarily written as a conversation from a father to a son or a male teacher to a male student, but in the final chapter, a woman is the teacher and her son, the king is the student. Proverbs tells us to choose a wife or husband wisely or we may find ourselves hiding "in a corner of a housetop" or longing "to live in a desert land." In our culture these would be like hiding in the garage,

overworking, vacationing separately, and overall just reluctantly coming home.

> "It is better to live in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife." (Proverbs 21:9)
>
> "It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman." (Proverbs 21:19)
>
> "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop, than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife." (Proverbs 25:24)
>
> "A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike." (Proverbs 27:15)



All I can imagine at this point is the ancient crusader knight in *"Indiana Jones,"* saying, "He chose poorly." Derek Kidner says it more clearly and succinctly, "The woman is the making or the undoing of her husband."[252] The point is: Choose wisely. Sadly, I have seen many men chase beauty and booty – I don't know if I'm allowed to say that – and ruin their lives. They chose poorly. Solomon writes, "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones" (Proverbs 12:4). There is a rottenness of regret in making an unwise choice, choosing the wiles of a worldly woman over wisdom.

Lemuel's mother likened finding a wife to finding a great treasure. It doesn't come cheap and easy, yet that's exactly what most men and women settle for. Finding the right partner in life is a quest or a treasure hunt. I'm trying not to use another *"Indiana Jones"* reference, but I can't resist. Treasure hunts are fraught with danger, death-defying stunts, betrayal, unfinished maps, and giant boulders trying to roll over top of you. Finding a wise wife is an adventure. It is a pursuit, but ultimately a wife is a gift from God.

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." (Proverbs 18:22)

"A prudent wife is from the Lord." (Proverbs 19:14)

Proverbs chapter 31 has a specific two-fold purpose: Guys, this is the woman you should be looking for, and ladies, this is who you should strive to be.[253] Whole books can easily be written about this passage and they have been. Please forgive my simple summary of this grand woman. A few key things stick out about the valiant wife: her worth is found in more than the fleeting fashions of this world, she "works with willing hands" (verse 13), and in the end, she wins a great prize.

WORTH

The descriptive poem begins by explaining that this kind of woman is rare. She isn't commonplace. She's exceptional, "…far more precious than jewels" (verse 10). Her worth or value lies deep within. It's her character, her integrity. Her husband's heart is safe with her. She is his trustworthy (verse 11) and wise confidant. She is a faithful friend and lover. "Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land" (verse 23). And one of the reasons he is so respected is because of the high character of his bride. He wouldn't be what he is without her diligence and dedication. She is strong and caring. "She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong" (verse 17). "She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy" (verse 20). She is fearless in the face of circumstances. "She is not afraid of snow for her household…" (verse 21) and "…she laughs at the time to come" (verse 25). And yet, she fears the Lord. "A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). Her value is not in charm or beauty (verse 30) but in the high quality of her character. In simple terms, it is who she is that is valuable, not what she does or what she looks like.

HER WORK

It's hard to know where her worth ends and her work takes over because her character is what propels her tenacious work ethic. As Jim Collins would say, "She is more plow-horse than show horse."[254] Actually I shouldn't compare any woman to a horse, but you get the point. She isn't just for display. She isn't a dainty, little, glass doll. This lady flat-out gets stuff done. In biblical terms, she is a Martha with a Mary heart (See Luke 10:38-41). A large portion of the poem is dedicated to her diligence, productivity, and skills as a businesswoman.



> "She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hands to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.
>
> She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness." (Proverbs 31:13-22, 24-27)

Her work includes travel, sleepless nights, real estate deals, long-term preparation for seasonal changes, manufacturing, and sales. I would like to see someone imply to this woman that she is just a "stay-at-home-mom." She also instructs her children, maidens, and husband in wisdom and kindness. Her work includes care for herself (verse 22), the needy (verse 20),[255] her household (verse 27), and for her husband (verse 12). Her care for her husband is a covenant commitment. "She does him good, and not harm," Proverbs 31:12 says, "All the days of her life." She is committed to her marriage vows. It's important to note, her work comes from her worth, not the other way around.

As Jen pointed out way back in the *Mother* chapter, women should get paid a lot. The poem describing the virtuous or valiant woman is an acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet, as Waltke points out, this woman is "everything from A to Z."[256] He also points to this poetry being a type of "heroic poetry, characterized by recounting the hero's mighty deeds, usually military exploits."[257] I guess love isn't the only thing that's a battlefield. Being a godly woman is a war and the writer of Proverbs chapter 31 felt the accomplishments of this woman were worthy of comparison to great military heroes. Being a true woman is heroic. It isn't for the faint of heart. The same language that would be used to express adoration of returning military heroes is used in the Bible to praise motherhood! From time-to-time Jen and I will meet someone for the first time. They will often know what I do "for a living" and then the question comes, "Jen, do you work?" Oh man! In those moments I want to duck and run for cover. My wife always answers that question graciously, but I know there's a fire behind those brown eyes. She doesn't get a paycheck, but she does WORK! Culturally we have demeaned women who work at home. We may not consciously do it, but questions like what I just mentioned have been asked to Jen countless times. The implied response, "Oh…so you don't work. It must be nice to stay home, eat bonbons, and watch

soaps all day." Even in the church, and I could say especially in the church, we have disparaged women as second class and lesser. In his letter to Titus, Paul encourages "Older women…to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled" (Titus 2:3-5). "Should women work" is a dumb question. The woman of Proverbs chapter 31 was running a full-scale business from her house. This Valiant Woman would laugh at what we call full-time "work."

> "The wisest of women builds her house." (Proverbs 14:1)



HER WINNINGS

In the end, she is praised by her husband, children, and community. "Her children rise up and call her blessed," the Bible says, "her husband also, and he praises her" (Proverbs 31:28). What the husband says in celebration of his virtuous wife is inspiring. "Many women have done excellently," he says, "but you surpass them all" (Proverbs 31:29). Free marriage tip: write that in a card to your wife and place it in a spot she's sure to find it…you're welcome. The biography of those 20 or so verses is a thorough summary of a force of nature. The Scripture essentially says, "Let her reputation speak for itself. No exaggerations needed."

> "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates." (Proverbs 31:31)

The praise of her husband and children isn't hollow, forced, or obligatory. The children and husband don't have to fabricate compliments for the valiant women. Nobody at a party in her honor

or her funeral has to lie. I'm often amazed at funerals at the disparity between who the person actually was in life and the fictional person being presented at a memorial. With the woman of Proverbs chapter 31, her husband, children, and community know her to be everything that verses 10-27 describes her to be. Behind every verse are stories and people that she's positively impacted. Her maidens and the poor she has helped will each tell stories of her grace, patience, and generosity. And those she has done business with will remember her as savvy, wise, and knowledgeable. Her children will be proud to have such a gem as their mother, and her husband, who knows her the best, confirms that his wonderful wife is the same in private and in public. She is his crown! (See Proverbs 12:4.) She has never embarrassed him or caused him shame. He is eager for his parents, friends, and co-workers to meet his bride. She is a real trophy of a wife and this man wants everyone to hear what she has to say.

When all is said and done, she wins. She leaves a lasting and inspiring legacy for generations to come. Some scholars see this woman as a myth or a summary of all the wisdom principles of Proverbs. I agree with those who see her as real. In her family, she set the high standard for what it means to be a woman. She raises the expectations of her sons and grandsons. She challenges those young men to not just marry a beauty, because beauty fades. She stirs them to find Ruth. In the divinely orchestrated love story of the book of Ruth, Boaz says to Ruth, "And now…do not fear, I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman" (Ruth 3:11). Ruth was a valiant, virtuous woman. Her tribute and legacy were one of strength, beauty, tenacity, courage, dedication, and commitment. God saw fit to include Ruth in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Her winnings were far beyond what was dreamed.

Jennifer has a note in her Bible near Proverbs chapter 31 that reads, “Spiritual strength – no fear for the future, her life is right with God, so she smiles.” In eternity, she will be among the wise, because she “fears the Lord” (Proverbs 31:30). The valiant, virtuous woman of Proverbs has incredible worth, she works day and night, and in the end, because of dedication and diligence, she will win.

A PROVERBS 31 “MAN?”

I want to conclude this chapter with a specific challenge to men. You might have read or listened to this chapter and thought, “Man, I wish my wife was the kind of woman described in Proverbs chapter 31!” or “Why can’t my wife be more like this or that?” And, I suppose hoping for your wife to be like the “excellent wife” is an honorable desire. But for a moment, let’s flip the passage around: are you an excellent, valiant man? Are you trustworthy? Caring? Serving? Diligent? Disciplined? Do you have high integrity? How’s your work ethic?



The focus of the passage is primarily on giving us a character sketch of a spectacular wife. However, her husband makes three appearances.

> “The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.” (Proverbs 31:11)
>
> “Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.” (Proverbs 31:23)
>
> “Her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.’” (Proverbs 31:28-29)

Waltke, in commentating on verse 11, writes this "implies that this husband and wife enjoy a robust spiritual relationship."[258] Are you leading spiritually? Or are you passively going along for the ride? Have you forced your wife to be the spiritual leader? When it comes to leadership in your home, don't ever make your wife be your mother. That's for boys. Be a man, so that your wife can be exactly that… your wife. Don't make her the villain, the bad guy, or the killjoy. She's your God-given partner and helpmeet. Boys masquerading as men force their wives to be their mommas, maids, house cleaners, and chaperones. Then they demand sex as some sort of part of the deal. That is nothing like biblical manhood, and because it isn't anything like biblical manhood, we are often robbing women of the opportunity to be everything that God designed them to be.

The husband, in verse 23 is a wise man, known among the leaders and elders of the land. Are you pursuing wisdom? Are you growing as a person? Wisdom isn't a guarantee. So is your wife stuck being married to an old fool? If you get anything from this book, getting wisdom is a journey…a quest. GET WISDOM!

Lastly, the husband of the excellent woman praises her. When was the last time you praised your wife? Or are you constantly complaining about her? Her friends? Her schedule? Her weight? Her mother? The kids? The house? You fill in the blank. In the chapters on *The Mouth,* we saw that words have power. According to 1 Corinthians chapter 13, Love "…bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). Believe the best in your wife, by using your words to build up and not destroy. To encourage her, not manipulate, but truly encourage and strengthen her to live up to the high call of Proverbs chapter 31.

These are ways that a husband can love his wife "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). This is the

Gospel! I will often hear Christians express that God is at the center of their marriage and home. Cynically, I often doubt that reality. A husband loving, praising, and delighting in his wife is a reflection of how Christ loves the church. If that's happening, then Christ is indeed at the center of their home, marriage, and family. Marriage is the original picture of the Gospel, all the way back in Genesis chapter 2. The Apostle Paul teaches, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). Like a beautiful love story, Christ pursues His love, His bride. The price that He paid for her was His life. He died to pay for the sins of His bride (Romans 5:8) and to cleanse and purify her (Ephesians 5:25). He traveled to prepare a place for her (John 14:1-3) and eventually He will return and the marriage and feast (reception) will begin (Revelation 19:7-9). Marriage is a sacred, living, breathing picture of the Gospel – of Christ and His church, His Bride. So whether man or woman, may we all reflect as well on Christ as the valiant woman of Proverbs chapter 31.



Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

I have been praying that you girls would become virtuous women since you were babies. And boy, I've been praying for you to be able to find a virtuous woman in this world to be married to and share life with. But what does being virtuous even mean? Seems like kind of a weighty word to be throwing around for such young people, Good thing Scripture puts it quite plainly.

1. She is a rare breed of woman - verse 10
2. She is trustworthy - verse 11
3. She does good - verse 12
4. She has no ill will towards her husband - verse 12
5. She does tedious tasks (hellllllo laundry that never ends) and she does them willingly - verse 13
6. She travels far to get food her family enjoys - verse 14
7. Verse 15 I always make jokes about because it talks about the virtuous woman having maidens...I always tell Dad...when are my maidens arriving? Surely they will be cleaning and cooking maidens! HA! Just cracking myself up over here (I do that often!)
8. She is entrepreneurial - verse 16
9. She is strong. She is not a weak, frail or helpless woman -verse 17
10. She pulls long work hours - verse 18
11. She is capable - verse 19

12. She takes care of others - verse 20
13. She is prepared - verse 21
14. She takes care of herself - verse 22
15. Her husband is great because she is great - verse 23
16. She can make money - verse 24
17. She is beautiful on the inside - verse 25
18. She is wise - verse 26
19. She is not lazy - verse 27
20. People speak well about her - verse 28-29
21. She fears the Lord - verse 30
22. Her work speaks to her character - verse 31



This type of woman is comfortable in the role that God has placed her. She embraces her design. She not only embraces it, she rocks it. No one is going to tell her that she is lesser than because she has her God-given priorities straight.

I remember when I was a young mom, I had three of you under three. Claire and Belle, you're eleven months apart, Belle no less turned two, and then we had Maverick. At that time in my life I felt like I was drowning. I never thought I would survive. I'm pretty sure I have a permanent eye twitch because of it. I definitely deserve a badge of some sort. I feel like I have survived a war. But honestly, I am so thankful. I'm thankful because it forced me to cling to the Lord and learn what my role was designed to be. We only ever had one car and Dad would take that to work. At first, I always wanted to leave. Get me outttta here!!! I was willing

to go do anything else to get me out of the house and away from diapers. Now almost 20 years into being a wife and mom, you can barely drag me out of here. I have taken a lot of years to master and embrace my design. I think there is nothing more incredible than watching a woman embrace her design. I definitely didn't do it willingly at first, I am eternally grateful to the Holy Spirit for working on my heart and mind.

Mav, I hope and pray that you will encourage your wife to embrace her design as a godly virtuous woman.

Girls, the world will tell you one of two things...#1 is that you need to be a feminist because you are the same as a man, that's a lie. We are not the same, we are very different yet very equal. Nothing saddens my heart more to watch people struggle with their sexuality and not being comfortable the way God designed them. You watch people fight the very nature and fiber of their being. It's heart-wrenching. #2 The world will tell you that if you submit to this role that you will be a doormat. I don't want you to be doormats, and I don't believe the Lord wants you to be either. Nor do I ever want Maverick to treat a woman as such, The Virtuous woman is the exact opposite of a doormat. She is capable and everyone knows it.

Girls, the Lord chose you specifically for your families. Whatever your role turns out to be in it, mom, daughter, sister, aunt, grandma, He perfectly matched you. There is

no better person to do this job as a virtuous woman in your family. How different would our families be if we ladies rallied and took this job seriously? The Lord will give you strength, endurance, and wisdom for this task. Do you accept the challenge? How is the Lord asking you to change the way you operate to be more conducive to that of a virtuous woman?

Love,
Mom



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

If you are married, how did you meet your spouse?

Where do most people find their worth? Where do you find your worth?

Do you work from your worth or work to define your worth?

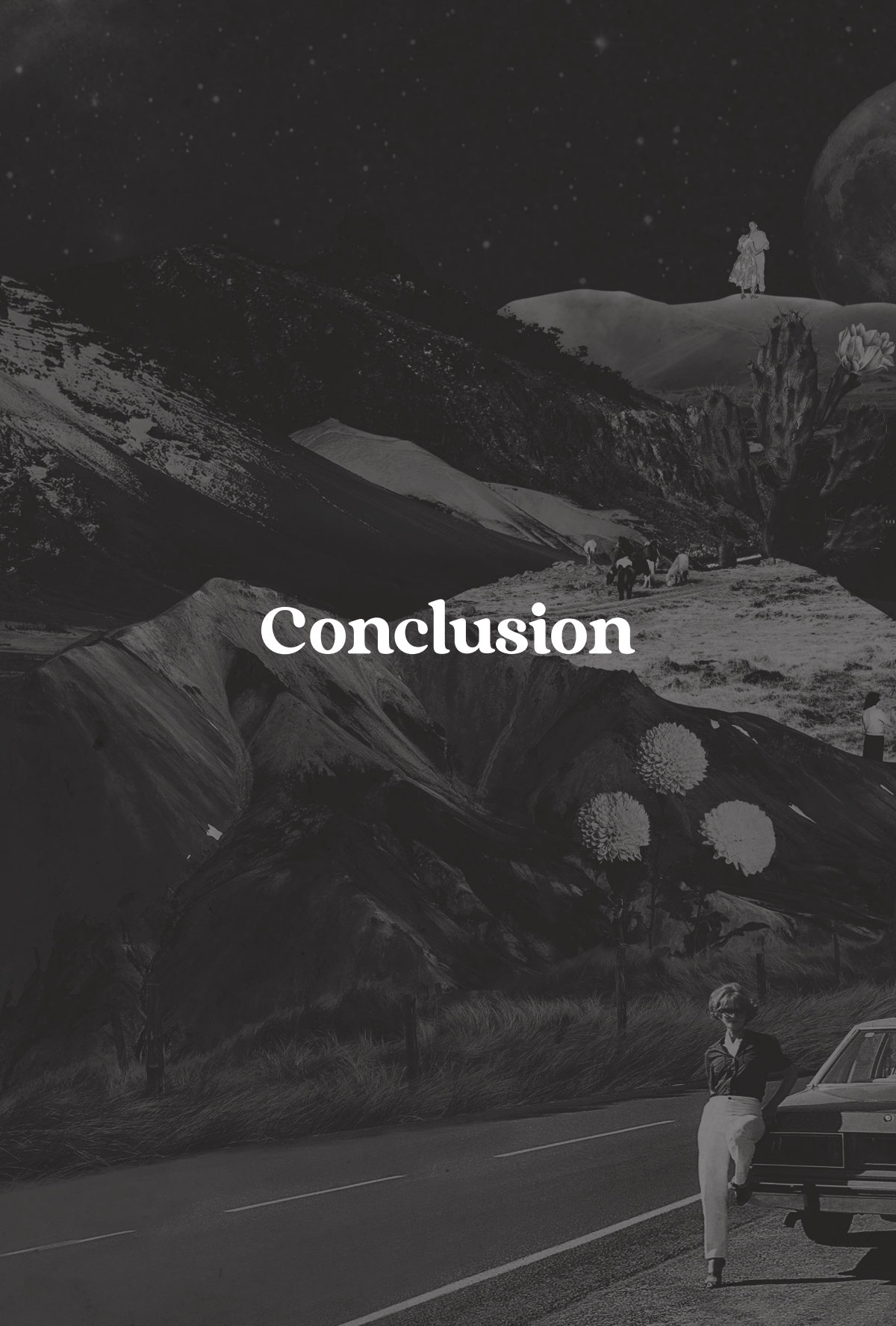
At the end of our life, what is a win?

Who is a valiant, virtuous woman that you know?

If you are a woman, what are some areas of Proverbs chapter 31 that challenged you?

If you are a man, turning the poem on its head, what challenged you?





Conclusion

Over the last few years, my son and I have begun taking guy's trips each year around his birthday. We have had a great time on these little adventures with just him and me. The first year, I decided to take Maverick hiking along the Manistee River. It's a beautiful trail that came highly recommended as one the most beautiful in Michigan. Mav and I prepared all of our supplies – packs, tents, food, cooking supplies, sleeping bags, bug spray, bear spray – we were going to venture into the wilderness for two days. Just prior to hitting the trail, we made a bad life choice and ate Arby's in Cadillac. Now I need to admit, I like hiking, but I'm not in the best of shape, so carrying a 40-pound bag for 20 miles was exhausting. My son by contrast is all muscle. He is just ripped and completely in shape. We started the trip with the fresh air, faint sounds of the river in the background, and a stunning, winding trail in front of us. Early on in the hike though, we made a mistake. We came to a fork in the trail and took a wrong turn. We only walked about 100 feet or so down the wrong path, but the problem was that 100 or so feet was completely downhill. As we reached the bottom and realized our mistake, we learned that our skills for discerning between the actual trail and little offshoots were lacking. We walked up the hill and back onto the trail powered by an Arby's beef and cheddar sandwich and a vanilla shake. The rest of the hike we were much more careful about committing, both to trails and food. We never made a wrong turn again. Our mistake had taught us discernment. Also, I don't think I've eaten Arby's since.



Discernment is about staying on the path. It is the outflow of wisdom. Discernment is seeing, understanding, and then making a choice. Basic discernment is choosing between right and wrong. It is seeing the difference between good and evil. In the story of Solomon's request to God for wisdom, he prays, "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" (1 Kings 3:9). The newly crowned King recognized his

need for God's guiding hand. He petitions God to show him right from wrong and fact from fiction. He asks for discernment or an understanding mind.

> "…inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:2-6)
>
> "…understanding will guard you." (Proverbs 2:11)
>
> "They are all straight to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge." (Proverbs 8:9)
>
> "On the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found." (Proverbs 10:13)
>
> "The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way." (Proverbs 14:8)
>
> "When a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue." (Proverbs 28:2)
>
> "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments." (Psalm 119:66)

Having understanding or discernment is more than black and white decisions. Discernment is navigating "unmapped darkness."[259] Discernment is making wise decisions, when it's not simply a question of right or wrong, but between choosing better and best.

Charles Spurgeon said, “Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.”[260] It is discerning the answer to, “God, what path would you have me take?” “What job offer should I accept?” “What college should I attend?” “What church should me and my family be part of?” “What house should we buy? Should we sell our house? When should we sell our house?” The pastors I get to serve with will often pray for wisdom and discernment. The prayer for wisdom is from James 1:5. Asking God for discernment is realizing, “Not every fork in the road has a biblical arrow.”[261] Not every decision will have a specific Bible verse.



In early 2021, I found a quote from John Piper. I copied it down on a sticky note and put it in the front of my Bible. Piper wrote, discernment “is how we follow God’s leading through the process of spiritually sensitive application of biblical truth to the specifics of our situation… His Spirit shapes the mind and heart through the Word and prayer so that we have inclinations toward what would be most glorifying to Him and helpful to others.”[262] Discernment is developed by faithful study of the Scripture, which re-tunes and re-shapes our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit, which then softens us to wise counsel. This is discernment.

For a portion of a hike that Mav and I went on, we were on the North Country Scenic Trail. It’s a trail that starts in Vermont and ends in North Dakota. Along this specific part of our hike, blue marks were imprinted on trees along the path. It was a constant reminder that we were on the right track. The Scripture serves as the same type of guidance for us. We want to stay on the straight and narrow, so the Scripture helps us know that we are on the right road. Wisdom and discernment start with God. The Lord has revealed His will and His way in the Scripture. The Psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). But it isn’t going

to tell us where to step or where to stop for the night. Again, Piper writes, “People whose minds are saturated with God’s word and submissive to His thoughts have a wisdom that in eternity will prove superior to all the secular wisdom in the world.”[263] If we truly want to be discerning about the “gray” areas of life, we must get the “black and white” issues of life settled. God’s Word gives us His definitive will or path as we can call it for illustrating purpose as the following:[264] (Please forgive the extensive “S” alliteration)

God’s will is that we are saved – 2 Peter 3:9
God’s will is that we are Spirit-filled – Ephesians 5:17-18
God’s will is that we are being sanctified – 1 Thessalonians 4:3
God’s will is that we are submitting to authority – 1 Peter 2:15
God’s will is that we are being sacrificial – Romans 12:1-2
God’s will is that we are faithful in suffering – 1 Peter 3:17

Pastor and Bible teacher John MacArthur has a little book called *“Found: God’s Will”* that goes through the commanded will of God. In the last chapter, he addresses the issue of who to marry, where to go to school, and the other “gray” areas. He writes, “If you are doing all…of the basic things, do you know what the next principle of God’s will is? Do whatever you want!”[265] How can that be? Again, the Word of God reshapes and retunes our hearts and minds. David writes, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). The Word of God takes root in our hearts and begins to transform our desires. We begin to naturally, actually more supernaturally, desire what our Heavenly Father desires. This is the transformation that the Holy Spirit brings to our lives. The Holy Spirit guides us. Our will begins to be conformed to His will. The Apostle Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is

the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). When we saturate our minds and hearts with the Scripture, the Holy Spirit conforms and renews our minds. Paul Koptak writes, "As we follow him on that way, we also learn that we are at a new crossroads every day, and every day must choose to follow Jesus again."[266]

One other way that discernment shows itself is in the counsel we listen to. In C.S. Lewis's wonderful book *"The Screwtape Letters,"* in a masterful way, Lewis through letters, tells the story of an older demon training a younger demon. Even though the subject is dark, the book is instructive and at times humorous. In one of the later letters from Screwtape to his nephew and student Wormwood, he writes, "And since we cannot deceive the whole human race all the time, it is most important thus to cut every generation off from all others."[267] In this letter, Lewis warns of being cut off from history and wisdom of ancient authors. I would take this also to apply, though a slight stretch, to wisdom from those further down the path. Proverbs says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise" (Proverbs 13:20). We must walk with the wise. We must sit with, listen, and spend time with those who have gone a little further down the path than we have. Then and only then can we be discerning. If there's such a thing as a shortcut to wisdom and discernment, it's learning the easy way, rather than the long, hard way.



Maverick and I finished our hike. We walked 20 miles in a little less than 24 hours. We drove another hour north to Traverse City to have a burger and fries at Don's Drive-in. I also ordered a strawberry shake that looked like a five-gallon bucket with a straw sticking out the top. It was a fitting end to an exhausting hike. After every road trip, we must eventually return home. Every journey must come to an end. In *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* Christian and his friend Hopeful eventually reach the Celestial City. As they enter the city, bells

ring, angels escort them, “ten thousand welcomes”[268] greet them, trumpets sound, songs, shouts, angelic choirs sing, and the king opens the gates and His kingdom to them. The city is described as a place where “you shall reap what you have sown – the fruit of all your prayers, tears, and sufferings for the king along the way.”[269]

Your journey and mine will eventually come to an end. Will we have lived as wise and discerning men and women? Or will we be the fool who has squandered away his life? Jen and I think about these questions a lot. We talk about what kind of old people we want to be. We know there is no guarantee, but we talk about what type of parents to our adult children and grandparents we want to be. Winston Churchill once said, “When youth departs, may wisdom prove enough.” I recently asked Joe Stowell, former president of Moody and later Cornerstone University, how to end well. I figured here was a guy who was a pastor, author, husband, father, and grandfather in his 70s. I had a clean sheet of paper and a pen ready for what I expected to be a lengthy answer. He simply said, “Finish every day well.”[270] I like Joe a lot, but his answer annoyed me. “That’s it?” I thought. But the more I have pondered that answer, the more I realize that that answer is what Jesus said. “Don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:34, NLT). The journey of wisdom, of ending well can be daunting, even overwhelming. How can I be a wise, kind, pure old man? How can I grow to be gentle and patient? The answer was so simple that I had missed it: “Finish every day well.” I must strive to be discerning and wise, kind, and pure today! I don’t know what tomorrow holds, but I must strive to end today well. If I want to be a wise, kind, pure, gentle, and patient older man, then I need to start today by practicing those things. There isn’t a magical transition at the path marked “old age” that radically transforms our character and personality. Eugene Peterson in his pastoral memoir calls it, “A long obedience in the same direction.”[271] Like Christian

at the eternal Celestial city, old age is reaping what we have sown in the days, months, and years of our life. Paul writes, “God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). This isn’t a rush to age or even act old, but to live wisely in every stage of life. Kidner writes, “Each age has its appointed excellence, to be respected and enjoyed in its time.”[272] Youth is only wasted on the young when they fail to use their strength and energy to build, invest, and develop godly character for the future.

> “The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.” (Proverbs 10:7)

> “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.” (Proverbs 16:31)

> “The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.” (Proverbs 20:29)



That is my parting counsel and wisdom to you – finish today well. In whatever season of life you are in, sow seeds of wisdom, kindness, and honorable, godly character that will grow in the years to come, that will yield “a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:18). You may have made a mess yesterday, but start fresh today, right now! “His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23). The voice of wisdom calls to young and old fools alike. Run from the fraternity of Fools and get wisdom. Humbly call out to God, He is faithful, kind, compassionate, and slow to anger. You may have made a lot of wrong turns, went a long way out of the way, and feel stuck at a dead end, just know that we proclaim, “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). Jesus is strong enough to turn everything around and create a new you. All the foolishness that was you, can be done away with and you can be made “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Begin

in this moment with a freshness that only comes from God. "'I will give you' – that is the Gospel in four words."[273] The Gospel is Good News – God has everything, and we have nothing, but in Jesus and through Jesus, the Father gives us everything, including wisdom and discernment. That will make for a nice closing chapter, both of a book and our lives.

Claire, Belle, Maverick, Ruby, Mavis,

Your Dad and I want so badly to end well. We want to end well to honor the Lord, but also to honor you. We haven't met a whole lot of people that have ended well in ministry. Anytime we do, we sit and soak in whatever wisdom that person has to share. We pick their brains, we take notes, and just listen. It really is an intense desire of our hearts. We pray and work our butts off in hopes that it will happen. We know that if it does, it will be a true miracle of the Lord.



Ministry life is hard. It's a different type of hard that you can't even convey to those who don't live it. You guys live it with us. You've helped with all sorts of things as Dad and I have struggled with the emotional weight of it all. Even just getting through the writing of this book, it wouldn't have happened without you. You are home right now at 11:40 pm running the house, while Dad and I are working. You guys are amazing. You've seen firsthand the tears, the anger, frustration and hurt. The joy, the excitement, and the awe.

Being leaders takes all of the wisdom and discernment the Lord will rain down on you, Job 28:28 tells us how to get wisdom and discernment, he says, "'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'" You will all be leaders. Leaders of families. Leaders at work. Leaders of a team. You were born to lead. I can see it in each and every one of you. You must fear the Lord and you must turn from evil.



My closing words of wisdom for you all are 1 Thessalonians 4:11, "And to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one." I feel like this verse is the embodiment of what I would want for you all. A peaceable and quiet life. Hardworking and one that your testimony speaks to the unbeliever. If you have that, you have everything.

Love,
Mom



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Have you ever struggled to discern God's will? What happened?

Of the clear, scriptural commands about God's will, are you in line with each of them?

> Are you saved? Have you repented of your sin and believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus?
>
> Are you Spirit-filled? Does the Holy Spirit or your own personal desires control your life?
>
> Are you being sanctified? Surrendering sin to God or hiding it?
>
> Are you submissive to authority in your life?
>
> Are you living a sacrificial life of worshipful service to God? Generosity?
>
> Are you faithful in suffering for doing right? Are you steadfast in those difficult moments?



Knowing that every road comes to an end, have you thought about how you want to end?

What does "finish every day well" mean to you?



Acknowledgments

As we conclude this “road trip” or journey through Proverbs, I have had a lot of time to reflect on my own journey and the different people along the way. Jen and I are very thankful for the hundreds of people who have helped shape our lives.

This book has been a journey in and of itself. During this project, we have been blessed to work with an incredible team. Thank you to The River publishing team: Dr. Randy Johnson, Donna Fox, Shawna Johnson, Michael Fox, Casey Schieferstein, and Roy Townsend. Thanks to the elder team Assistant Jill Osmon. Thank you to James Mann for helping with the mass of endnotes and proper citations.



Our friends Amy Grimes and Samantha Woodbeck who so kindly agreed to read a messy rough draft and gave honest and super helpful feedback. Thank you to Sherry Osmon, who despite being in PT and a neck brace, volunteered to read an early draft. Thank you Chuck Lindsey for reading the book and encouraging me in this process, as well as drawing a rough sketch almost 3 years ago that kind of encapsulated, at least for me, this journey. Thank you Grant Grimes for keeping track of how many verses we were using from Proverbs.

Thank you to the elders of The River Church. Serving Jesus with each of you is an incredible blessing, honor, and privilege. To each of the location pastors, your love and care for God’s people is inspiring.

To The River Church: being part of your story for essentially the entirety of my life has been a thrilling journey. To the folks of our Goodrich location, thank you for your patience with my maturing process and seasons of pain and sorrow. Your love and support of Jen and I has been moving. God has used you at critical moments to reaffirm His call on our lives.



Acknowledgments

To our children, Claire-Anne, Belle-Anne, Maverick, Ruby-Sue, and Mavis, you are each a delight to us. You have brought us such great joy. Being together as a family is a sneak-peek into Heaven.

To my wife, Jennifer, you are a valiant and virtuous woman. “Many have done excellently, but you [far] surpass them all.” Sorry I used so many quotes from Waltke, Koptak, Kidner, Ortlund, Spurgeon, Lewis, and others. In spite of my obsession with quotes, you consistently encouraged me to find my own voice.

Saving the best for last, the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus. You are our Savior and friend. You have carried us through the deepest valleys and celebrated with us on the highest mountain tops. You and You alone are wise and worthy. We long for our lives to please You. As we often pray, teach us and use us. Thank You for rescuing us from our sin and shame. Yours is the glory!







Appendix I Suggested Resources

Other than the Bible, no book is perfect. Other than Jesus, no person or author is flawless. So each of these books has positive and negative qualities. Here is a list of books and chapters that we've found helpful and instructive in the area of sex, sexual sin, and marriage. These are just a few books from our shelves on marriage and family that we've found interesting and instructive.

"Holy Sex" by Michael Pearl

"Created to Need a Helpmeet: A Marriage Guide for Men" by Michael Pearl

"Captivating" by John and Stasi Eldredge

"At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry" by Steve Gallagher

"Not Even a Hint" by Joshua Harris

"I Surrender All by Clay and Renee Crosse

"Every Man's Battle" by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey (Although the opening illustration bothers me, this book is filled with some great practical advice)

"Every Woman's Desire" by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey

"Real Marriage: The Truth About Sex, Friendship, and Life Together" by Mark and Grace Driscoll

"The 4 Seasons of Marriage: Secrets to a Lasting Marriage" by Gary Chapman (Jen and I love this book. It was super helpful during a difficult season.)

"Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage" by Dr. Kevin Leman

"Created To Be His Help Meet" by Debi Pearl

"Vertical Marriage" by Dave and Ann Wilson

"The 5 Love Languages" by Dr. Gary Chapman

"From Bondage to Bonding: escaping codependency, embracing biblical love" by Nancy Groom

"100 Ways to Love Your Wife" by Matthew L. Jacobson

"100 Ways to Love Your Husband" by Lisa Jacobson

"His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage" by Willard F. Harley Jr.

"Every Heart Restored" by Fred and Brenda Stoeker

"The Healing Choice" by Brenda Stoeker and Susan Allen





Appendix II
Friends

Here are 5 simple observations about friendship in Proverbs.

1. Don't try to be everybody's friend. You don't have the time. Enjoy the friend who has become like family.

> "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24)

I remember being a kid hosting a birthday party at my house. I had friends from church, school, my sports teams, and my cousins over. I vividly recall at the end of the party thinking, "Well, that wasn't very fun." The reason was that juggling all of those social obligations was too much. It was exhausting. You'll be lucky in life to have a handful of real friends. Treasure them and limit the names on your dance card. Some people collect "friends" like baseball cards. Actually, nobody really collects baseball cards anymore. Let's use a more modern illustration. Some people think their "friends" on social media are actual "friends." In reality, they don't have any network of support (pun intended).



2. Friends keep us sharp

> "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17)

It was said of Churchill that he had countless ideas every day, but only a handful of them were any good. I know the feeling. I have pitched my friends on all kinds of things, only to be kindly laughed at. Actually, sometimes the laughing wasn't kind, but it kept me sharp. Friends are a sounding board. They ask penetrating questions, debate, and disagree. When I sharpen iron, there are always sparks. That is how Proverbs is visualizing authentic friendship. Friends help us refine an idea or project. They help make us better and we do the same for them.

3. Real friends will wound us

> "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy." (Proverbs 27:6)

> "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel." (Proverbs 27:9)

Sometimes a friend will have to look at you and tell you that you're ridiculous, stupid even. Genuine friends don't just tell us what will make us feel good. If you have a "friend" that won't address your bad attitude, behavior, or choices then he or she isn't really your friend. I am thankful to have a couple of friends that'll punch me in the head when I need it. And trust me, I need it…often.

4. Real friends are there when the crap hits the fan

> "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (Proverbs 17:17)

With real friends, you are allowed to be yourself. You don't have to pretend. It's ok to have a bad day. It's ok to invite them over when your house isn't spotless. Friends will endure meals gone wrong. Friends will laugh with you and cry with you. Even as I write this, I can't help tearing up. I am so thankful for my friends. In the final book of *"The Lord of the Rings Trilogy,"* Frodo and Sam are nearing Mount Doom. As Frodo crawls forward, Sam sees his friend and weeps. He cries out, "I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you!"[274] True friends see us struggling and help carry the load. This sometimes means just listening. This means sitting together in times of grief and celebration. Friends are in for the fight when everyone else runs away.

5. True Friends care about you, not your stuff

> "Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts." (Proverbs 19:6)

Everybody wants to be friends when there are parting gifts. It's like the perpetual birthday party. "Thanks for coming…here's your party bag to go." Real friendship isn't a business deal or "I scratch your back and you scratch mine." A faithful friend cares about you, your marriage, your kids, and your integrity. There isn't an ulterior motive. A real friend loves.



In *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* Christian is joined on his journey by two friends, Faithful and then later Hopeful. At the end of their journey, Christian and Hopeful are passing through their final difficulty. Christian in despair cries out, "It is you, it is you they wait for; you have been hopeful ever since I knew you." Faithful responds, "And so have you."[275] That is real friendship.



Appendix III
Neighbors

The two verses from Proverbs that make me actually laugh are about neighbors.

> "Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you." (Proverbs 25:17)

Don't overstay your welcome. Don't always let your friend's host. Take turns. Even though some people may not admit it, hosting too often becomes exhausting. Jen and I have a family of seven. Occasionally people will invite us over. We do our best to try and direct this to a restaurant. It's not that we don't want to spend time in people's homes, we just realize what seven extra people means. Feeding and entertaining that many more people is hard. By the end of the evening, people may not hate us, but they regret the invitation.



The other practical principle here is to limit your overnight stays with friends and family. Every family has its own rhythm. When you put different rhythm's together, they clash. For a short time that is tolerable, but eventually the differences will start to drive you and your host crazy. I was told that when my Grandpa and Grandma came to visit us in Texas in the late '80s, my Grandpa made a lot of trips to the grocery store. He was used to a quiet home and definite routine and at our house it wasn't quiet or predictable. It's like the expression "too many cooks in the kitchen." When staying with friends or family, set clear expectations and timelines. If you do, the different rhythms of your households can be upended for a short time and then reset when you leave. Wisdom keeps relationships intact.

> "Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing." (Proverbs 27:14)

Don't be too noisy or perky in the morning. My wife and kids tell me I need to abide by the "loud voice" Proverb. When I wake up, I'm ready

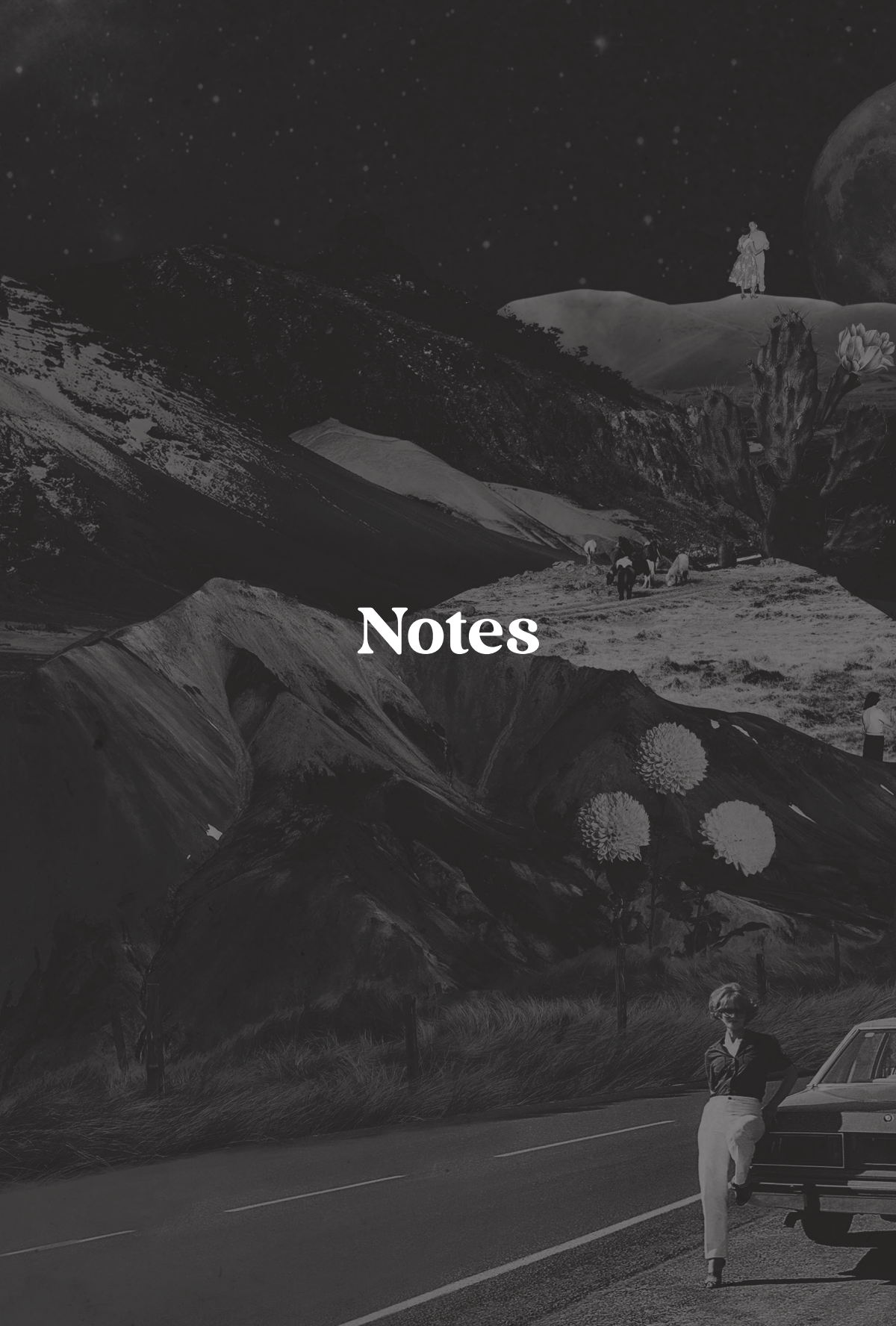
to go. I don't drink coffee or caffeine; my brain just turns on and starts running a hundred miles an hour. Being a good neighbor, roommate, husband, or parent means taking it easy in the morning. You may be bubbly in the morning, but others are not. Use some of that energy to understand your excitement in the morning will be heard like a curse to some people. Courtesy and biblical wisdom is being "peaceable and quiet," especially in the morning.

> "Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away." (Proverbs 27:10)

Neighbors can be terrific or terrible. Frankly, I've had both. One time our kids found a box of microwave popcorn in the cupboard. We don't have a microwave, so they walked to our neighbor's house. She gladly popped the entire box for them. In crisis a neighbor who is nearby is better than the greatest help far away. The point of the Proverb: make friends with your neighbors. Know their names. Drop off Christmas cookies. Shovel their driveway. Invite them to your church. Don't fight over silly issues. Neighbors can be a great blessing. Are you a good neighbor?

Proverbs 3:28-29; 6:1-5; 16:29; 25:7-10,18





Notes

Preface

[1]Thanks Doc for this way of seeing things.

Introduction

[2]"Chain of Fools" by Aretha Franklin.

[3]The Emphasized Bible: A New Translation (JB Rotherham).

[4]A New Translation of the Bible (James Moffatt).

[5]The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals (Monsignor Ronald Knox).

[6]The Message.

[7]All the Men of the Bible, Herbert Lockyer, page 320.

[8]Derek Kidner, page 51.



Chapter 1. The Lord Part I

[9]Koptak, page 29.

[10]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 101.

[11]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page xxi.

[12]The NIV Application Commentary by Paul Koptak, page 413.

[13]"The cross of Christ sits at the center of redemptive history. It provides a beautiful image of Christ's saving work reaching with one arm back to the time of Adam and the other arm reaching to our time and to the very end."

Chapter 2. The Lord Part II

[14]Keil – Delitzsch "…it does not always happen to one to find the fitting and effective expression for that which he has in his mind; it is, as this cog. Proverb expresses it, a gift from above… (Matthew 10:19)" page 334.

[15]Matthew Henry, Commentary on Proverbs, page 880.

[16]Jesus makes a connection between heart, mouth, and then actions. Matthew 15:18-20, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from

the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."

[17]Kidner, Proverbs, page 118.

[18]Kidner, page 33.

[19]Koptak, Page 422.

[20]"Little Lies" by Fleetwood Mac.

[21]Nancy Groom, From Bondage to Bonding: Escaping Codependency, Embracing Biblical Love, page 71.

[22]Chuck DeGroat, When Narcissism Comes to Church, page 95.

[23]Nancy Groom, Page 68.

[24]Ironically, I have moved this paragraph around, deleted it, and doubted whether it should be in the book. Only to put it right back where it started.

[25]I owe this thought and understanding to Paul Koptak.

[26]Paul Koptak, Proverbs, page 423-424.

[27]Koptak, page 424.

[28]God is even the source of weapons. Isaiah 54:16, "Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals and produces a weapon for its purpose. I have also created the ravager to destroy."

[29]Kidner, page 118: I was directed to this specific quote by Allen Ross in The Expositors Bible Commentary, page 1003.

[30]Allen Ross in The Expositors Bible Commentary, page 1003.

[31]The Message: Remix, Eugene Peterson, Proverbs 16:5.

[32]C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, page 122.

[33]Matthew Henry, Proverbs, page 881.

[34]Koptak, page 415.

[35]Koptak, page 415.

[36]The New Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, updated by Judith E. Markham, page 64.

Chapter 3. The Lord Part III

[37]Eugene Peterson, The Message, Proverbs 15:33.

[38]Derek Kidner, page 55.

[39]From Raymond Ortlund, Preaching the Word. He references Henri Blocher, "The Fear of the Lord as the 'Principle' of Wisdom" Tyndale Bulletin 28 (1977): pages 3-28.

[40]Ortlund, page 31.

[41]C.S. Lewis, Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and Wardrobe, page 146.

Chapter 4. Father



[42]Bill Glass, Crime: Our Second Vietnam, page 21.

[43]Bill Glass, page 20-21.

[44]Meeker, Hero, page 20.

[45]This thought is really close to a Steven Curtis Chapman song he wrote for one of his children.

[46]Meeker, Hero, page 110.

[47]"Meeker, Hero, page 78.

[48]Meeker, Hero, page 63.

[49]Dodd, page 38.

[50]Koptak, page 59.

[51]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 249. "…behind the noun his correction…belongs in the sphere of legal proceedings…means 'to establish what is right…"

[52]NT, MacArthur, 2 Timothy, page 157.

[53]Expositors Commentary, Allen Ross, page 918.

[54]Koptak, page 59.

[55]Allen Ross in Expositors, page 918, "Wisdom literature knows that the righteous do not enjoy uninterrupted blessing; suffering remains a problem to the sages, and this text records one of their solutions."

Chapter 6. Simple

[56]"Simple Man" by Lynyrd Skynryd.

[57]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 202-203.

[58]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 203.

[59]Ortlund, page 45.

[60]Koptak, page 67.

[61]Koptak, page 149.

[62]Kidner, page 67.

[63]Ortlund, page 85.

[64]Bunyan, The New Pilgrim's Progress, page 49.

[65]IBID, page 52.

[66]Bunyan, The New Pilgrim's Progress, pages 52-53.

[67]Kidner, Proverbs, page 67.

[68]Sadly, this source has been lost. I've looked and can't find the source and the author to whom credit is due.

[69]Koptak, Proverbs, page 160.

[70]Ortlund, page 85.

[71]Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress, page 78.

[72]Spurgeon, Volume 5, page 197.

[73]Kidner, page 68.

Chapter 7. House of Lady Wisdom

[74]Proppe, August 31, 2018.

[75]Kidner, page 76.

[76]Ortlund, page 124.

[77]Expositors, Allen Ross, page 943. He references Plaut.

[78]Ortlund "…that adverb 'diligently' means with intentionality, going out of our usual way, breaking with routine." page 118.

[79]Kidner, page 38, "Wisdom is for the humbly eager – one might almost say for the lover, the suitor."

[80]Koptak, page 231, "'Love' frames 8:17-21 and may be another use

of erotic language to describe the seeker's relation to wisdom."

[81]Koptak, page 231, "Wisdom claims that she walks in the paths that were recommended throughout the parents' lectures. To walk on these paths is to walk with her."

[82]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 409.

[83]Kidner, page 79, "…the present passage makes excellent sense at the level of metaphor…as a powerful way of saying that if we must do nothing without wisdom, God himself has made and done nothing without it. The wisdom by which the world is rightly used is none other than the wisdom by which it exists."

[84]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 433.

[85]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 431-432.

[86]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 421, "Celebrating…generally denotes 'to make merry,' 'to play,' …in the positive sense of expressing joyful vitality and favor in actions involving dancing and music…"



[87]Kidner, page 78.

[88]Koptak, page 258.

[89]Koptak, page 252, footnote 19.

[90]Kidner, page 79.

[91]MacArthur, John 12-21, page 100.

[92]"Big, Big House" by Audio Adrenaline.

[93]William Barclay, John, Volume 2, page 179.

[94]J. Ramsey Michaels, The Gospel of John, page 768.

[95]Ortlund, page 115.

[96]Ortlund page 121.

Chapter 8. Folly and Her House of Fools

[97]Ortlund, page 123. I was already seeing this thought in the passage, but this was a nice affirmation.

[98]Waltke and Keil-Delitzsch use the word “rival” to describe wisdom and folly personified in chapter 9.
[99]Koptak, page 270, “Folly’s use of the very same words as Wisdom (9:4, 16) sounds like mocking, proving her to be one of the mockers who will not receive correction but rather does harm (9:7-8).”
[100]Koptak, page 263, “…Wisdom and her nemesis, Folly.”
[101]Expositors, page 950, “’Loud’ comes close to the idea of riotous… McKane defines her as restless and rootless.”
[102]Koptak, page 272.
[103]Excerpts from The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe by CS Lewis, chapter 4: Turkish Delight.
[104]Add Kidner, page 84, Like Folly, the king of Fools, Satan, knew in the Garden of Eden that “…Eve had to be convinced that the sweetness would survive the stealing; we have fallen far enough to be persuaded that it depends on it.”
[105]Ortlund, page 129.
[106]Ortlund, page 123.

Chapter 9. Scoffer

[107]Christian Standard Bible.
[108]KJV.
[109]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 187.
[110]Thank you, Pastor Chuck Lindsey, for this thought. Once in a meeting he made what I still think is a brilliant observation and statement. He simply said, “Sin makes you stupid.”
[111]CJ Mahaney, Humility: True Greatness, page 29.
[112]MacArthur, Matthew 1-7, page 208.
[113]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 13.
[114]The New Pilgrim’s Progress, page 103.
[115]“Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing…” Job 36:18
[116]C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, page 122.

[117]Kidner page 41-42, "He shares with his fellows their strong dislike of correction."
[118]Patrick Lencioni, The Ideal Team Player, page 167.
[119]Ortlund, page 45.
[120]C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, page 125.
[121]C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, page 122.
[122]Mahaney, page 31, quoting Charles Bridges.
[123]Mahaney, Humility: True Greatness, page 32.
[124]Kidner, page 145, "…scoffer is the most damning, since it defines the Godward attitude."
[125]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 13.
[126]Charles Spurgeon, Treasury of David, Volume 1, page 1.
[127]This date is based on some paperwork Jen had filed away. I could be misreading it, but to the best of my ability it's accurate.
[128]Ortlund, page 23.



Chapter 10. Humble

[129]C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, page 128.
[130]DeGroat on Covert Narcissism "Vulnerable Narcissism" page 38.
[131]The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham, quoting Estelle Smith, page 198.
[132]C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, page 128.
[133]CJ Mahaney, Humility: True Greatness, page 71, "An ungrateful person is a proud person."
[134]Mahaney, page 121, "In my experience, where there's an absence of edifying words there's also normally the presence of pride and of self-righteousness, because those who are proud are too preoccupied with themselves and think too highly of themselves to care about building others up or to be sensitive to their true needs."
[135]CJ Mahaney, page 119, "Never correct without reminding the individual, at some point, of the gospel. Any conversation including correction must also include the gospel, because biblical correction

is incomplete apart from the gospel."

[136]I was at a retreat with Joe. I don't have the exact quote, but he shared this thought in one of the sessions.

[137]Ortlund, page 144.

[138]Another line from me and Jen's time with Joe Stowell.

[139]How the Mighty Fall by Jim Collins, page 39.

[140]The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham, page 196. Quote from "Russ Busby, longtime official photographer."

[141]Dan told me this over lunch one time. His view of humility was radically biblical and different than my own.

[142]Spurgeon, Volume 9, page 201.

[143]John MacArthur, John 12-21, page 65.

[144]Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, page 1.

[145]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 8, "…is a religious term for the quality of renouncing one's own personal sufficiency for life and committing oneself to the Lord."

[146]Doug Schmidt, questionnaire for a retreat.

[147]CJ Mahaney, Humility: True Greatness.

Chapter 11. The Adulterous Woman/Man

[148]Thank you to Jeff and Mim England for this counsel. It's been incredibly helpful.

[149]"Lists of Note: An Eclectic Collection Deserving of a Wider Audience", 2014, page 12.

[150]Kidner, page 75.

[151]Thank you to Kent Hughes for the idea of this illustration. He uses it in a different context, but I am still indebted to him. Disciplines of a Godly Man, page 173.

[152]Insects and Spiders of the World, page 86.

[153]Insects and Spiders of the World, page 87.

[154]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 376.

[155]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke,

page 377.

[156]C.S. Lewis, “The Screwtape Letters”, page 89.

[157]Koptak, page 210, “She has just presented a sacrifice; the irony, of course, is that he is the next victim.”

[158]Koptak, page 208, “…her attire signals her intent.”

[159]Several commentators pointed this irony out: Koptak, page 208 and Expositors, Allen Ross, page 940, “This, interestingly, contrasts with her attire, which gives her away.”

[160]Kidner, page 75.

[161]Koptak, page 174.

[162]Kidner, page 75.

[163]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlett Letter and Other Writings, edited by Leland S. Person, page 162.

[164]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlett Letter and Other Writings, edited by Leland S. Person, page 162.



Chapter 12. The Mouth Part I

[165]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 299.

[166]Kent Hughes, Disciplines of Godly Man, page 175.

[167]Koptak, page 292, “A wink is typically a secret signal associated with the evil and deceptive person in Proverbs.”

[168]James 1:22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” See also Matthew 7:24-27.

[169]Myths and Their Meaning, Herzberg, page 56, 206-207.

[170]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 469.

[171]The Complete Word Study Dictionary NT, Page 1144.

[172]“I Heard it Through the Grapevine” by Barrett Strong and Norman Whitfield.

[173]John Maxwell, page 1, Everyone Communicates, Few Connect, quoting Matthias R. Mehl et al, “Are Women Really More Talkative Than Me?” Science, 6 July 2007, 82 http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/

content/full/317/5834/82, accessed 11 November 2008.

[174]Most people attribute this quote to Mark Twain even though the original context is not known.

[175]Kidner, page 49, "…what a man says wells up from what he is – it will be worth what he is worth."

[176]"O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He…who swears to his own hurt and does not change." Psalm 15:1,2, 4.

[177]Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, page 322 "Jesus is saying that in the end we must all give account of ourselves and that words we take lightly will then be seen to have meaning, for they show what we are in our innermost being."

Chapter 13. The Mouth Part II

[178]From Churchill by Roy Jenkins, page 591, quoting War Papers, II, page 22.

[179]From Churchill by Roy Jenkins, page 611, quoting Hansard, 5th series, vol. 361, cols 787-96.

[180]From Churchill by Roy Jenkins, page 592.

[181]From Churchill by Roy Jenkins, page 621.

[182]From Churchill by Roy Jenkins, page 621, quoting Hansard, 5th series, vol. 362, cols 51-61.

[183]Observing this time in history we can note that Hitler greatly used the power of words, as did Churchill and FDR. FDR's voice on the radio provided comfort during the crushing Great Depression and WW2. The King's Speech is also a movie during this time about the power of words.

[184]John Maxwell, Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do Differently, page 223.

[185]Kent Hughes: Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, page 350.

[186]Daboss, June 15, 2014.

[187]Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man, page 177.

Chapter 14. Hothead

[188]The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 6.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 55, "All of A.A.'s Twelve Steps ask us to go contrary to our natural desires…they all deflate our egos." The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 52, "The most common symptoms of emotional insecurity are worry, anger, self-pity and depression. These stem from causes which sometimes seem to be within us, and at other times too come from without."

[189]Scholars have found incredible similarities between Solomon's wisdom in Proverbs and Egyptian Wisdom literature. There are many explanations for these connections. In my opinion, Augustine explains it best by his simple but profound statement, "All truth is God's truth." With a slight modification, we would say: all wisdom is God's wisdom. In The Instruction of Amenemope, Egyptian wisdom reads, "Don't start a quarrel with a hot-mouthed man, nor needle him with words. Pause before a foe, bend before an attacker, sleep (on it) before speaking. A storm that bursts like fire in straw, such is a heated man in his hour." From Koptak, footnote on page 399, The Instruction of Amenemope, in Lichtheim, AEL (V, 10-15), page 150.



[190]Dave and Ann Wilson, Vertical Marriage, page 93.

[191]For an entertaining and perceptive look at The Hulk, read Who Needs a Superhero by H. Michael Brewer.

[192]MacArthur, Matthew 1-7, page 294.

[193]Yoda in Star Wars: Phantom Menace.

[194]Dave and Ann Wilson, Vertical Marriage, page 87.

[195]Ortlund, Proverbs, page 40.

[196]Ortlund, page 161 "Fools unleash [anger] without filtering it. In so doing, they exalt, they lift up for everyone to see, their own folly."

[197]"The hot temper of a fool eventually kills him..." Job 5:2 (The Message).

[198]Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia, Volume 3, "Jesus Angry with Hard Hearts," preached

March 28th, 1886, page 385.

[199]Lloyd-Jones, Sermon on the Mount, page 226.

[200]Carson, Sermon on the Mount, page 42.

[201]Ortlund, page 161.

[202]Ortlund, page 161, "But the wise rule their emotions with a nobility that outclasses world conquerors…Conquering a city is child's play compared with ruling the turbulent, demanding, upset world inside us."

[203]Koptak, page 470, "The patient person is (lit.) 'long of nose,' meaning that it takes a long time for the nose to get hot in anger…" See 16:32… Strong's "…rapid breathing in passion…anger, snout…

[204]Kent Hughes, Ephesians, page 148.

[205]John Calvin, Sermons on Ephesians, page 444.

[206]Swindoll, page 304, Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication.

[207]C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, page 124.

[208]This idea of personifying anger came from Mindy Caliguire of Soul Care in Boulder, CO. I heard Mindy speak at a small gathering of pastors and leaders in NYC in September of 2021. She spoke about an exercise she had led some pastors through in writing a letter to personified power. This idea of writing a letter to something personified really stuck with me. My familiarity and "relationship" with anger seemed to be a good fit for this exercise.

[209]Complete Word Study of the NT, "According to Aristotle, praotes is that virtue that stands between two extremes…uncontrolled anger and unjustified anger [quickly angry] and…not becoming angry at all no matter what takes place around you."

[210]William Barclay, Matthew Commentary, page 93.

Chapter 15. Drunkard

[211]"Lists of Note: An Eclectic Collection Deserving of a Wider Audience", 2014, page 20-28. This source is where I found both Franklins and the 1927 list.

[212]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke,

page 263.
[213]The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., 1952, page 23.
[214]IBID, page 23.
[215]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 266.
[216]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 266.
[217]Kidner, page 153.
[218]The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., 1952, page 21.
[219]The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., 1952, page 25.
[220]The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., 1952, page 22.
[221]IBID, page 5.



Chapter 16. Sluggards and Thieves
[222]Ortlund, page 100.
[223]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 356.
[224]Derek Kidner, page 42.
[225]Spurgeon, Volume 14, page 358.
[226]Kidner, page 43 "…the sluggard is no freak, but, as often as not, an ordinary man who has made too many excuses, too many refusals and too many postponements. It has all been as imperceptible, and as pleasant, as falling asleep."
[227]Kidner, page 43 "…through procrastination the disorder of his life has become irreversible: all is wasteland."
[228]Ortlund, page 100.
[229]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 192, "The shift from the singular victim to plural 'them' makes clear that this is not an isolated murder but their pattern of life."

[230]The Message, Eugene Peterson, page 1753.
[231]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 by Bruce Waltke, page 193.

Chapter 17. Kings

[232]Koptak, page 230, "While many suggest that Proverbs was designed to train princes and courtiers, like other ancient Near Eastern instructions, there is no evidence in the speech that this fear of Wisdom's activity is limited to court personnel."
[233]Koptak, page 247, "Wisdom, who watched Yahweh set the boundaries of creation shows kings how to do the same for the social order."
[234]Gene Edwards, A Tale of Three Kings: A Study in Brokenness, page XX.
[235]Gene Edwards, page 28.
[236]Koptak, page 416.
[237]New Pilgrim's Progress, page 107.
[238]New Pilgrim's Progress, page 112.
[239]Kidner, page 137, "The practiced eye of a ruler sifts the chaff from the wheat."
[240]Maxwell, August 7, 2012.
[241]A helpful and interesting resource: The Time Chart History of Revolutions: 3,000 Years of Rebellion, Civil War, and Revolutionary Change; Meredith Macardle, Nicola Chalton, and Pascal Thivillon.
[242]Hughes, Luke, page 83, "He was the first Caesar to be called 'Augustus' when the Roman Senate voted to give him that title. Augustus means 'holy' or 'revered,' and up to that time the title was reserved exclusively for the gods. It was under Augustus' rule that decisive strides were taken forward making the Caesars gods...An inscription…even called him 'savior of the whole world."
[243]MacArthur, Acts 1-12, page 320.
[244]Josephus, Book XIX, chapter VIII, page 582.
[245]Josephus, Book XIX, chapter VIII, page 582-3.

Chapter 18. The Poor

[246]Jacob A. Riis, How the Other Half Lives, page 1.

[247]Spurgeon, Morning by Morning, page 49, This thought was inspired by a quote from Spurgeon's devotional. He writes, "On top a pinnacle, their heads grow dizzy, and they are ready to fall. The Christian more often disgraces his profession of faith in prosperity than in adversity. It is a dangerous thing to be prosperous."

[248]Movie: "What About Bob?"

Chapter 19. The Proverbs 31 Woman

[249]Koptak, page 680.

[250]Koptak, page 680.

[251]Waltke, page 520.

[252]Kidner, Proverbs, page 50.

[253]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 520.

[254]Jim Collins, Good to Great, page 33.

[255]Hard Work with Goal of Sharing by Koptak, page 638 – Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

[256]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 514.

[257]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 516.

[258]NICOT: The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 by Bruce Waltke, page 521.

Conclusion

[259]I first heard this phrase from Pastor Mark Pospisil, who later told me that he heard it from a Moody Professor.

[260]Michel, October 5, 2018.

[261]Piper, Desiring God, page 150.

[262]Piper, October 1, 1996.

[263]Piper, Desiring God, page 150.

[264]I owe John MacArthur a debt for this list. Mine is slightly different than his, but at some point along my journey, he was instrumental in collating these passages of Scripture and helping me see more clearly God's Commanded Will.

[265]John MacArthur, Found: God's Will, page 54.

[266]Koptak, page 91.

[267]C.S. Lewis, Screwtape Letters, page 140.

[268]New Pilgrim's Progress, page 182.

[269]New Pilgrim's Progress, page 181.

[270]Joe Stowell's answer at a Pastor's Retreat in Deckerville, MI. I can't remember if I asked in writing or in person, but I can't forget his answer.

[271]Eugene Peterson, The Pastor, page 247. He also has a book of that same title. The quote is from Nietzsche. "The essential thing 'in heaven and earth' is…that there should be a long obedience in the same direction; thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something that has made life worth living."

[272]Derek Kidner, page 141.

[273]Raymond Ortlund Jr. in Preaching the Word Commentary series quotes Spurgeon, page 41.

Appendix II - Friends

[274]Return of the King, page 268.

[275]New Pilgrim's Progress, page 179.





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OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.



GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord's Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher it's bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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