

Proverbs 13-19 Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

Proverbs Illustrations, Devotionals

Proverbs 1
Proverbs 2
Proverbs 3
Proverbs 4
Proverbs 5
Proverbs 6
Proverbs 7
Proverbs 8
Proverbs 9
Proverbs 10
Proverbs 11
Proverbs 12
Proverbs 13
Proverbs 14
Proverbs 15
Proverbs 16
Proverbs 17
Proverbs 18
Proverbs 19
Proverbs 20
Proverbs 21
Proverbs 22
Proverbs 23
Proverbs 24
Proverbs 25
Proverbs 26
Proverbs 27
Proverbs 28
Proverbs 29
Proverbs 30
Proverbs 31

PROVERBS 13

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Proverbs 13:1-14

Warnings In The Word

Swans frequently visit Mill Pond, England, where RBC Regional Director Howard Liverance lives. He writes, "It's a beautiful place ... where ducks, geese, and other waterfowl frolic playfully." Yet even in this idyllic setting there has been danger. Across one corner of the pond are some power lines. A number of swans have been killed because they didn't see them as they approached the pond.

Howard talked with some people about this problem, and eventually the power company installed red flags on the lines. Now the swans can see the danger and avoid it. Since the red flags were installed, not a single swan has died.

God has provided some "red flags" for our protection. The book of Proverbs is filled with warnings about evil and encourages us to seek wisdom. In Proverbs 13:1-14, we find several red flags, including:

Don't ignore instruction and rebuke (v.1).

Guard your mouth (v.3).

Beware of the pursuit of riches (v.7).

Avoid dishonesty (v.11).

Don't disrespect God's Word (v.13).

The Word of God "is a fountain of life, to turn [us] away from the snares of death" (v.14). —Anne Cetas

For Further Study

To learn more about the wisdom in the book of Proverbs,
read *Knowing God Through Proverbs*

God's warnings are to protect us, not to punish us

Proverbs 13

Today in the Word

April 13, 2013

Cultural proverbs are a storehouse of community wisdom. For example, here are several proverbs about friendship: "It is better to be in chains with friends, than to be in a garden with strangers" (Persian). "Hold a true friend with both your hands" (Nigerian). "The death of a friend is equivalent to the loss of a limb" (German). And, "When the character of a man is not clear to you, look at his friends" (Japanese).

Today's reading likewise advises, "walk with the wise and become wise" (Pr 13:20). Friendship is a key area in which wisdom can be seen. To choose the right friend both shows character and develops it. Another area in which wisdom can be seen is in how a person responds to friendly advice and instruction. To fail to heed correction is proud (Pr 13:1). To take offense or start a quarrel is foolish (v. 10). The wise do not make these mistakes.

We've already mentioned how the content of proverbs covers every area of life. Similarly, the literary form of the proverb is quite broad. A proverb might be a general maxim, such as the comment that righteousness tends to be blessed and wickedness is not (Pr 13:25). It might be explicit moral instruction—a wise person acts one way, a fool another (Pr 13:16). It might be an observation on a psychological or emotional event: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" (Pr 13:12).

More than a few proverbs offer practical economic counsel, such as that the best way to save is slowly but surely (Pr 13:11). Many offer consequences-based moral exhortations or warnings, as in Pr 13:3: "Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin."

Apply the Word - Yesterday we suggested keeping a topical notebook in order to sort out all the observations, advice, and moral principles contained in the book of Proverbs. Today here is an idea to help keep the big picture or main theme in mind: In every chapter, every proverb, we need to ask, "What does this tell me about godly wisdom?"

Proverbs 13:3

Words That Defile

Recently I overheard an older woman speaking to a friend about the current obsession with dieting. "These days," she mused, "I'm more concerned with what comes out of my mouth than what goes into it." There's a world of wisdom in those words.

Jesus put it this way: "Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:18-20).

What we say affects others. "There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword," says Proverbs 12:18. But what we may overlook is the effect our reckless words have on us. When we gossip, or when we malign others, our words begin to ruin us, for we gratify the evil that is in us and strengthen it until it overthrows us.

On the contrary, when we guard our lips we strike a blow at this malevolence. "The tongue of the wise promotes health," continues Proverbs 12:18. We protect our souls, for we weaken the very thing that lies in wait to ruin us.

Ask God to "set a guard" over your mouth and "keep watch over the door" of your lips (Psalm 141:3). Let your words promote life, not destruction. —David H. Roper

Guard well your lips, for none can know

What evils from the tongue may flow;

What guilt, what grief may be incurred

By one uncautious, evil word. —Elliott

A word from your mouth speaks volumes about your heart

Proverbs 13:13

Holy Fear

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

HOLY awe of God's Word is at a great discount. Men think themselves wiser than the Word of the Lord, and sit in judgment upon it. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." We accept the inspired Book as infallible and prove our esteem by our obedience. We have no terror of the Word, but we have a filial awe of it. We are not in fear of its penalties, because we have a fear of its commands.

This holy fear of the commandment produces the restfulness of humility, which is far sweeter than the recklessness of pride. It becomes a guide to us in our movements, a drag when we are going downhill, and a stimulus when we are climbing it. Preserved from evil and led into righteousness by our reverence of the command, we gain a quiet conscience, which is a well of wine; a sense of freedom from responsibility, which is as life from the dead; and a confidence of pleasing God, which is heaven below. The ungodly may ridicule our deep reverence for the Word of the Lord, but what of that? The prize of our high calling is a sufficient consolation for us. The rewards of obedience make us scorn the scorning of the scorner.

Proverbs 13:3a

He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his life. (r.v.)

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

What we say influences others, but it has a reflex influence on ourselves. When we speak unadvisedly and impurely, we sow seeds of ill harvests not in others only, but in ourselves, and the very utterance injures us. When, on the other hand, we refuse to give expression to a wrong or unkind thought, we choke and strangle it.

Will each reader and hearer of these words carefully bear this in mind. If you express what is uncharitable or wrong, you gratify the evil nature that is in you, and you strengthen it. If, on the contrary, you refuse to express it, you strike a death-blow at the cursed thing itself. When you guard your mouth you keep your life, because you weaken that which is gnawing insidiously at the root of your life. If there is fire in a room, be sure not to open door or window; for air is its fuel and food. And if a fire is burning within you, be sure not to give it vent. What goes forth from you defiles you. Would you see good days? Refrain your lips from evil.

Perhaps you find yourself unable to guard your mouth. You are only discovering the truth of those terrible words: "The tongue is a fire, the world of iniquity among our members, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire of hell... The tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." If man cannot tame it, the Savior can. Cry to Him then, saying, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." The fire of God's love will burn out the fire of hell. Hand the bridle, or rudder, as the apostle James calls it, over to Him.

"Take my lips, and let them be Filled with messages from Thee."

PROVERBS 14

Proverbs 14

Today in the Word

April 14, 2013

The ancient philosopher Aristotle divided virtues into two categories—virtues of intellect and virtues of character. Cultivating the first leads to practical wisdom, and cultivating the second leads to moral goodness. These two types of virtue cannot be separated in practice; for either to be developed, they have to be developed together.

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom and foolishness are not morally or spiritually neutral, but are always associated with virtue and vice. To do the wise thing is to do the right thing. Exploring today's chapter (or any chapter of Proverbs, for that matter) for specific examples of virtues and vices can provide us with a substantial portrait of wisdom-in-action.

So, what do we learn from today's reading about virtue and vice? A virtuous person is constructive (Pr 14:1) and content (Pr 14:30). She fears the Lord (Pr 14:2, 26). He knows how to control his tongue (Pr 14:3). She speaks truth (Pr 14:5, 25). He reflects carefully before acting (v. 8), thinks critically (Pr 14:15), and demonstrates discernment (Pr 14:6–7). She works hard (Pr 14:23). He shows prudence (v. 8) and patience (Pr 14:29). She shows care for the future (Pr 14:22), for the needy (Pr 14:21, 31), and for the created world (Pr 14:4). By contrast, a wicked person is destructive, envious, dishonest, deceptive (Pr 14:16–17), reckless, unrepentant (Pr 14:9), and proud. The fool is supremely self-centered (Pr 14:12)—oppressing the poor, caring nothing for others, and despising the Lord.

What's at stake is nothing less than life and death (Pr 14:11–12, 14, 19, 26–27). Sooner or later, wicked and foolish people reap the consequences of their actions and come to no good end. Wise and virtuous people, on the other hand, are rewarded and flourish. Wisdom is indeed a "fountain of life"!

Apply the Word - The virtue of prudence might seem old-fashioned today (Pr 14:8, 15, 18). If we use the term at all these days, it tends to be in reference to finances, but its full meaning is much richer. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "The ability to recognize and follow the most suitable or sensible course of action... In early use: the wisdom to see what is virtuous."

Proverbs 14:8-21 Make It Right

Jim Thomas believed the man on trial was innocent, but he couldn't convince his fellow jurors to agree. After 8 hours of deliberation, he gave in and voted with the majority. But after the guilty verdict was rendered, he couldn't stop thinking that he had helped to convict an innocent man.

So Mr. Thomas spent his own money to hire an attorney to appeal the case. A few days into the proceedings, the alleged victim admitted he had lied, and the convicted man was set free.

"I was a juror, and I helped make a wrong," Mr. Thomas said. "It had to be righted."

How easily I dismiss my own mistakes and lack of courage by saying, "Well, nothing can be done about it now." The story of Jim Thomas challenges me to rethink my attitude toward trying to make things right when I've failed others and done wrong.

One translation of Proverbs 14:9 says, "Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright." To a foolish person, a wrong done is no big deal, but a person of integrity and character is burdened to put it right.

If you have helped make a wrong, act quickly and courageously to make it right.

Forgive me, Lord, for all my sins,

The many wrongs that I have done,

And show me how to make things right

Before the setting of the sun. —Bosch

We commit two wrongs when we fail to right a wrong.

Proverbs 14:12 SINCERELY WRONG!

An anesthesiologist was administering a controlled mixture of oxygen and gas to a patient in a New York hospital. When one of the tanks was empty, the doctor began using a new one clearly marked "Oxygen." Almost immediately the patient died.

The coroner's autopsy revealed carbon dioxide poisoning. Upon investigation, the second tank was found to contain pure carbon dioxide and had been mislabeled.

The manufacturer denied any wrongdoing. No one knew how this tragic mistake could have gotten by the inspectors.

Fortunately, such errors are rare. But in the spiritual realm they occur all the time. Regarding salvation, many people will say, "As long as I'm sincere, I'll come out all right in the end." They believe they can get to heaven by their good words; but no matter how right it may seem, it's "the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Don't make the mistake of being sincere but sincerely wrong! Acknowledge your sin and guilt before God and ask Jesus to save you today. -- Henry G. Bosch

No other name can save me,

No other name beside,

But Jesus Christ the risen Lord,

The One they crucified. - Brandt

Christ is the way to heaven - -all other ways lead to doom.

Proverbs 14:13 Mixed Emotions

Read: Revelation 21:1-7

Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief. —Proverbs 14:13

For Marlene and me, “mixed emotions” precisely describes our wedding. Don’t take that the wrong way. It was a wonderful event that we continue to celebrate more than 35 years later. The wedding celebration, however, was dampened because Marlene’s mom died of cancer just weeks before. Marlene’s aunt was a wonderful stand-in as the “mother of the bride,” but, in the midst of our happiness, something clearly wasn’t right. Mom was missing, and that affected everything.

That experience typifies life in a broken world. Our experiences here are a mixed bag of good and bad, joy and pain—a reality that Solomon expressed when he wrote, “Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief” (Prov. 14:13). The merry heart often does grieve, for that is what this life sometimes demands.

Thankfully, however, this life is not all there is. And in the life that is to come, those who know Christ have a promise: “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). In that great day, there will be no mixed emotions—only hearts filled with the presence of God!

Peace! peace! wonderful peace,

Coming down from the Father above,

Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray,

In fathomless billows of love. —Cornell

For the Christian, the dark sorrows of earth will one day be changed into the bright songs of heaven.

Proverbs 14:12 Alternate Route

Read: Proverbs 3:1-12

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

My daughter was coming home from college for the weekend to play the piano at her friend’s wedding. Before she left, I sent her an e-mail directing her to take an alternate route instead of the one she usually travels for the 6-hour drive home. Why? Because on that road a few weeks earlier my wife and I had been delayed for 2 hours by construction crews.

As parents, we must provide alternate routes in life as well. We’ve observed the wrong highways others have traveled or perhaps the foolish ways we have taken, and we know they lead to delay or danger.

Think of all the possible paths our children might choose—the road of sexual immorality, the avenue of alcohol and drug abuse, the way of ungodly friends. But in Christ, there is an alternate path—a route that will lead our children away from the struggles we know they’ll face on any other road.

The right route starts with the Via Dolorosa—the way of the cross. It starts with salvation. It continues with a path that is straight (Prov. 3:5-6) and is directed by God’s Word (Ps. 119:105). It includes Jesus as a traveling companion (Jn. 8:12). That’s the ultimate alternate route. Let’s model it clearly so our children will see the right way.

The journey that we’re on each day

Has many roads to choose;

But if we trust the Lord to guide,

Our way we cannot lose. —Sper

To guide your children on the right way, you must go that way yourself.

Proverbs 14:12a

When Right Seems Wrong

When the crowd is running the wrong way, it's hard to be the oddball who runs the right way. Most of the participants in the NCAA 10,000-meter cross-country race in Riverside, California, thought Mike Delcavo was heading the wrong way. He kept waving for the other 127 runners to follow him, but only 4 believed he had taken the right turn--the turn that all the other competitors had missed.

When he was asked about the reaction to his mid-course decision not to let the crowd determine his direction, Mike responded, "They thought it was funny that I went the right way."

First-century pagans reacted the same way to the changed lifestyle of their Christian neighbors. The apostle Peter said, "They think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4:4). Non-Christians still think that followers of Jesus Christ are going in the wrong direction. But actually, believers are headed for the victor's crown and a heavenly home (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

The route that non-Christians choose may seem right to them, but it leads to eternal loss. Keep on the right path, no matter how many are running the other way. --V C Grounds

The path we're on determines our

Eternal destination;

One leads to everlasting life,

The other, condemnation. --Sper

It's better to be right than popular.

Proverbs 14:31 A Sense Of Concern

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy. —Proverbs 14:31

Statistics are tricky. While numbers give us information, sometimes they can also desensitize us to the people those numbers represent. This hit me recently as I read a statistic: Every year 15 million people die from hunger. That's chilling, and for those of us who live in cultures of plenty, it's hard to fathom. In 2008, nearly 9 million children died before their fifth birthday, with a third of those deaths related to hunger. These are staggering numbers, but they are much more than numbers. They are individuals loved by God.

We can show the Father's heart of love by responding to people's physical needs. Solomon wrote, "He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy" (Prov. 14:31). We can show mercy to the needy by volunteering at a soup kitchen, assisting in a job search, financially supporting the drilling of wells in places in need of fresh water, distributing food in poverty-stricken regions, teaching a trade, or providing lunches for school children.

Accepting this responsibility honors the Father and His concern for all. And those who are starving might be better able to hear the message of the cross if their stomachs aren't growling.

If God ordained to give

One gift for all my days,

I'd want the way He loves

To permeate my ways. —Verway

The more we understand God's love for us the more love we'll show to others.

Proverbs 14:12

Today in the Word

March 29, 2014

The world defines success by the accolades we receive, the material goods we acquire, and by the powerful company we keep. Similar to the king listed in today's passage, people who live for self-promotion in this life do find success in these areas. Like so many in our world, they lash out at others, tearing down kingdoms and amassing wealth and power for themselves, believing that this will lead to their security and salvation. The god that they worship, just like all false gods worshiped in the past, is ultimately about themselves. They bow at the altar of materialism and sacrifice relationships and spiritual blessings in exchange for some stuff.

Any of us in North America can recognize the temptations of materialism, and its effects have spread across the world. When an African church leader was asked about the largest concern that he had for his people, his response was materialism. When we become materially self-sufficient, it is easy to believe that we have provided for ourselves. We succumb to the lie that what we have is ours. When we do so we stand against the true King, failing to acknowledge our dependence on His provision.

The future date of wrath will certainly come, and in some ways is already present, as Jesus is currently reigning in heaven (John 5:25). We realize that all of man's actions outside of Christ are meaningless, for they all end in destruction. As John the Baptist reminded us, the Messiah will burn up the chaff, all that is useless, with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17). Like this king and all who stand with him, they will come to an end, and "no one will be there to help him" (v. 45).

Apply the Word

When people look at your life, do they see a sacrificial lover of Jesus, or a person who values stuff above spiritual growth? Material things need to be seen in their proper perspective: gifts from God to be used for His glory, not for our own status or validation. If you struggle with the allure of materialism, read the story of the rich ruler and Jesus (Luke 18:18–29).

Proverbs 14:12-19 Get Proverbial

I first saw the car in my rearview mirror, weaving in and out of traffic. It zoomed by, cut me off, passed two cars on the right, zipped back into the left lane, roared past two trucks, and cut sharply to the right before disappearing from view.

I had an impulse to chase the car down and yell at the driver. I even rehearsed what I would say to him.

How are we to deal with a bad driver who threatens our safety? What should we do when an obnoxious customer storms into our office and demands immediate service?

Experts advise us to "get philosophical" by repeating common-sense sayings to help keep our cool. But believers in Jesus Christ have an even better option. We can "get proverbial." We can turn to the book of Proverbs for wisdom to handle people who behave foolishly. "A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident" (14:16). "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly" (v.29).

The next time an irritating person barges into your life, ask the Holy Spirit to help you get proverbial. Remember, "A quick-tempered man acts foolishly ... But the prudent are crowned with knowledge" (vv.17-18). —David C. Egner

ADDITIONAL PROVERBS TO CONSIDER:

A man of understanding holds his peace (11:12).

A fool's wrath is known at once (12:16).

He who guards his mouth preserves his life (13:3).

He who loses his temper finds trouble

Proverbs 14:13 Trust And Sadness

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Even in laughter the heart may sorrow. —Proverbs 14:13

In early 1994, when our family found out that the US soccer team would be playing in Michigan in the World Cup, we knew we had to go.

What a great time we had as we went to the Pontiac Silverdome to see the US take on Switzerland! It was one of the most remarkable events of our lives.

There was just one problem. One of our four children, 9-year-old Melissa, couldn't join us. While we enjoyed the event, it was not the same without her. Even in our joy at being there, we felt sadness because of her absence.

As I think back on that day, I'm reminded that our sadness then is a little like our sadness now that Melissa is gone from this life—having died in a car accident 8 years after that game. While we cherish the help of the "God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3), even that great comfort doesn't change the reality of her empty chair at family gatherings. Scripture doesn't tell us that God wipes away our sadness in this life, but it does tell us that God is faithful and will comfort us.

If you have lost a loved one, lean heavily on God's comfort. Keep trusting Him. But know that it's okay to feel sadness for this absence. Consider it one more reason to place your burdens on your loving heavenly Father.

I have been through the valley of weeping,

The valley of sorrow and pain;

But the God of all comfort was with me,

At hand to uphold and sustain. —Garlock

Earth has no sorrow that heaven does not feel.

Proverbs 14:15-21

Givers And Takers

Some young children were talking about what they wanted to be when they grew up. When it was Jimmy's turn to speak, he didn't mention one of the more common professions like doctor, lawyer, policeman, and fireman. What he wanted to be was a philanthropist. When the other kids asked him to explain, he replied, "I heard they're the guys who have all the money."

Jimmy was only partially right. According to the dictionary, a philanthropist is "one who loves and seeks to benefit mankind." Simply having a lot of money, then, doesn't make one a philanthropist. In fact, a poor person who "loves and seeks to benefit mankind" out of his limited resources is more of a philanthropist than a person of great wealth who is a miser and gives grudgingly—even though the amount of his charitable gifts is large.

The apostle Paul encouraged takers to become givers. He said, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor ... that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). That kind of giving will give joy to the giver (Proverbs 14:21).

Regardless of our income or vocation, we can all be philanthropists. —Richard De Haan

It's not what you'd do with a million

If riches should e'er be your lot,

But what you are doing at present

With the dollar and quarter you've got. —Anon.

God gives us all we need, so we can give to those in need

Proverbs 14:15 Don't Be Deceived!

Years ago, one of the largest gold dealers in the United States was caught in the act of claiming something that wasn't true. A court-appointed attorney obtained an order to open the company's vault to confirm a disputed claim that it contained \$2 million worth of the precious metal. When the vault was opened, it appeared to hold a stack of gold bars. But a closer inspection revealed that it contained nothing more than 45 blocks of gold-painted wood. Many innocent investors lost a lot of money.

Our heavenly Father lovingly cautions us in His Word about people in this world who come up with deceptive ventures. The writer of Proverbs told us not to believe everything we hear when we buy or sell something (Prov. 20:14). He told us to seek knowledge, understanding, and good counsel in everything we do (v.18). And because we cannot begin to see as the Lord sees (v.24), we should pray for His wisdom in the decisions we must make. God sees through the lies of deception in a way that we never could. He can steer us clear of good-sounding bad values.

Sometimes we end up learning the hard way. But God cares enough to tell us the right way and to warn us to be careful. —Mart De Haan

Many seek and strive for wisdom

But find folly in disguise;

All too few seek first God's kingdom--

Only this can make them wise. --Anon.

When we know what's true we can discern what's false

Proverbs 14:24

Are You Prepared?

Intelligent people can sometimes be unbelievably foolish. Consider the 19th-century explorers of the Franklin Expedition who tried to reach the North Pole. Annie Dillard, in her book *Teaching A Stone To Talk*, describes the provisions they took for that hazardous journey:

"Each sailing vessel carried an auxiliary steam engine and a 12-day supply of coal for the entire projected 2- or 3-year voyage. Instead of additional coal ... each ship made room for a 1,200-volume library, a hand-organ playing 50 tunes, china place settings for officers and men, cut-glass wine goblets, and sterling silver flatware. The expedition carried no special clothing for the Arctic, only the uniforms of Her Majesty's Navy." Imagine heading into frigid wastelands with supplies like that! What utter folly!

Some people heading into eternity may be even more shortsighted. Multitudes fail to think of their destination with its dangers of everlasting destruction. Ignoring their desperate need for forgiveness of their sin through faith in Jesus Christ, they pay no attention to His solemn question, "What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26).

Are you shortsighted or prepared for eternity? —Vernon C Grounds

If I gained the world but lost the Savior,

Were my life worth living for a day?

Could my yearning heart find rest and comfort

In the things that soon must pass away? --Olander

The one who lives for this life only will have eternity to regret it.

Proverbs 14:26 Legacy

Erma Bombeck wrote a column about the conflicts that sometimes occur as siblings divide family items after a parent has died. Whether it's the mixing bowls, grandma's quilts, or the Christmas ornaments, people are often convinced that they alone should have a certain item. Bombeck said she never wanted a TV set or a tote bag to remember her parents, because their true legacy to her was the way they lived, not what they left behind.

Those comments caused me to ask, "What kind of legacy would I like to leave my children?" I've concluded that I would like my kids to feel that their dad helped them learn where to go during the storms of life.

Three times in Psalm 46, the writer refers to the Lord as "our refuge"—a place of protection during times of danger or distress (vv.1,7,11). And in Proverbs 14:26, we read about the God-fearing man as one whose children "will have a place of refuge."

If I learn to find shelter and strength in the Lord today, then my children have an example to follow and know where to turn. I'd be pleased if someday they would all say of that refuge they've found in the Lord: "Dad wanted me to have this." —David C. McCasland

O God, our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come,

Our shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal home! —Watts

Living for the Lord leaves a lasting legacy

Proverbs 14:26 The Law Of Confidence

Read: Psalm 3:1-8

In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence. —Proverbs 14:26

Do your legs shake and does your mouth get dry at the thought of talking to a nonbeliever about Christ? If so, you're not alone.

To the extent that we learn to fear God, we can overcome our fear of people. This is what I call "the law of confidence." It's not the only factor in developing courage, but it's the most important.

This rule makes little sense to those who look for security only in man-made hiding places. Yet for those who love God above all else, the words of Jesus carry strength: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28).

This truth dissolves fear and gives courage to those who accept it. Deep in their hearts they realize that even if the Lord allows the enemy to destroy their physical life they will lose only what is keeping them from enjoying the presence of their Savior in heaven.

Think of that when God gives you an opportunity to speak or act in His behalf. There may be an initial struggle with fear. But once you see your life as secure in God, as David did in Psalm 3, you'll find sleep and renewed strength.

O feeble soul! O timid heart!

Would you be strong and true?

Then from all sin and wrong depart

And seek God's will to do. —DJD

Fear God and you will have nothing else to fear.

Proverbs 14:27

Snares of death

"The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning people from the snares of death."

J. C. Philpot. RICHES

Snares of death surround and beset our path. Some arise from the world, some from Satan, some from the people of God—but far, far most from ourselves! The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life which detects and manifests these hidden snares—and by its bubbling up as a living spring in the heart it brings the soul into the presence of God—and thus strength, wisdom, and grace are communicated to flee them before fallen into them—or deliver our feet out of them when unhappily entangled.

Proverbs 14:27a

Showing Respect

In Myanmar (Burma), children are taught to give objects to their parents and elders with both hands. I live in nearby Singapore, and I know that in Asia it isn't polite to use only one hand to give a business card to someone. And it's extremely rude to toss it across the table to the recipient. To show respect, I should use both hands to give my business card to a person.

In 1 Chronicles 13, we see how important it is to show respect to God. David had good intentions when he decided to bring the ark back to Jerusalem. During the process, however, Uzzah touched the ark in an attempt to prevent it from falling off the cart. God struck him dead. David was stunned and upset by God's anger. Why did the Lord respond so severely?

David came to realize that what he wanted to do for God had to be done with respect for Him and His specific instructions. God had commanded that the ark be carried by the sons of Kohath on poles, not on a cart, nor was anyone to touch it (Exodus 25:14-15; Numbers 3:30-31; 4:15).

What David learned is something we too must take to heart. Showing respect for God means learning what He wants us to do and then obeying Him completely. To please the Lord, we must do His work His way. —Albert Lee

O help me, Lord, to show respect,

To always honor You;

And may I bring You highest praise

In everything I do. —Sper

We respect God when we obey God

Proverbs 14:30 Beware Of Envy!

Envy may be defined as "resentment at the success or happiness of others." Many cultures regard envy lightly. A home remodeling company in Washington, DC, ran an ad that actually appealed to this vice. It used such phrases as "living room lust" and "kitchen envy." It went on to state that you could become the envy of your neighborhood while enhancing the value of your home.

The Bible views envy quite differently, calling it "rotteness to the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). It was out of envy that the religious leaders sought to kill Jesus (Matthew 27:20). And in Galatians 5:19-26, envy is listed among the life-destroying "works of the flesh."

In 1 Samuel 18, we read that envy contributed to the downfall of King Saul. He had begun his rule well, but because he disobeyed God's command he was rejected as king (15:23). Instead of humbly accepting God's decision, he became consumed with envy and hatred toward David (18:8-9). From then on, Saul distanced himself from God and even sought counsel from a medium (28:7). In the end, he took his own life after a shameful defeat by the Philistines (31:4-5). Envy had destroyed him.

Envy can ruin a life. Never take it lightly! —Herb Vander Lugt

When other people find success

But you do not advance,

Do you congratulate their gain

Or wish you had their chance? —Sper

When you turn green with envy you are ripe for trouble

Proverbs 14:30

Today in the Word

Oct. 2, 2013

In his book *Status Anxiety* author Alain de Botton observes, "Given the vast inequalities we are daily confronted with, the most notable feature of envy may be that we manage not to envy everyone." Instead, he observes, we reserve most envy for those we feel are like us.

The fundamental question of envy is not merely, "Why him?" or "Why her?" The real question of envy is, "Why not me?" When Cain pouted, God provided an answer to this question. After Cain's sacrifice was rejected the Lord declared, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:6-7). The missing component in Cain's offering was faith (Heb. 11:4).

Because envy tends to be secretive, it often feels like a victimless sin. It is unseen by others and easy to disguise. Yet Cain's behavior exposes the destructive power of envy. His murder of Abel vividly illustrates the cycle described in James 4:1-3 where murder is the natural outcome of envy. Elsewhere in the New Testament envy is linked with malice, division, and slander (1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:1).

We envy others when we feel that they get what we deserve. God seems to bless them more than us. Their path appears to be a little smoother. Their burden is a little lighter. It may not be our imagination. God does not promise that everyone's circumstances will be the same. Whatever the cause of our envy, the root problem is the same as Cain's. The jealousy we feel indicates a lack of faith. God does not always give us what He gives to others. He does not always give us what we want. But Christ has assured us that He knows what we need (Matt. 6:8).

Apply the Word - Because envy often develops in secret, it must be brought out into the open before it can be dealt with. If you are struggling with envy today, admit it to God. Be explicit in your confession by telling God whom you envy and why. Ask for the grace to trust Him despite your disappointment.

Proverbs 14:30a

A Tranquil Heart.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

If we would have a tranquil heart, we must resolutely put from us the ambition to get name and reputation among men, to exert wider influence for its own sake, and to amass large accumulation of money. Directly we begin to vie with others, to emulate them, or compare our position and influence with theirs; directly we allow strong desires to roam unchecked through our nature; directly we live on the breath of popular applause, we are like those who step from the pier on a rocking boat — all hope of tranquillity is at an end.

“In God’s will,” Dante said, “is our peace.” When the government is on his shoulder, of its increase and of our peace there is no end. Would you have your peace flow as a river? — then rest in the Lord, be silent unto Him; fret not thyself; turn away from the things that are seen and temporal; set thy face to those that are unseen and eternal. Live in the secret place of the Most High, and hide under the shadow of the Almighty. Say of the Lord that He is thy fortress and high tower. Put God between thyself and everything. Let the one aim of thy life be to please Him, and do the one small piece of work He has entrusted thee with. Look away from all others to Him alone. And learn to look out on others with a tender sympathetic gaze, turning to prayer about them and all things else that might ruffle and sadden. Let all thy requests be made known unto God, so shall his peace keep heart and mind.

“Draw me to Thee, till far within thy rest, In stillness of thy peace, thy voice I hear— For ever quieted upon thy breast, So loved, so near.”

Proverbs 14:33 Words of the Wise

My niece’s husband recently wrote these words on a social media site: “I would say a lot more online if it weren’t for this little voice that prompts me not to. As a follower of Jesus, you might think that little voice is the Holy Spirit. It isn’t. It’s my wife, Heidi.”

With the smile comes a sobering thought. The cautions of a discerning friend can reflect the wisdom of God. Ecclesiastes 9 says that the “words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard” (Eccl 9:17 nkjv).

Scripture warns us not to be wise in our own eyes or proud (Prov. 3:7; Isa. 5:21; Rom. 12:16). In other words, let’s not assume that we have all the answers! Proverbs 19:20 says, “Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.” Whether it is a friend, a spouse, a pastor, or a co-worker, God can use others to teach us more of His wisdom.

“Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning,” declares the book of Proverbs (14:33). Part of recognizing the Spirit’s wisdom is discovering how to listen and learn from each other.

Dear Lord, thank You for Your Word that teaches me how to love You and others. Thank You also for the people You place in my life to remind me of Your truth.

True wisdom begins and ends with God.

INSIGHT: The author of the book of Ecclesiastes is unknown. Many believe it to be Solomon, the legendary wise son of King David. However, we are only told that the author is “the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Eccl. 1:1). This description would fit King Solomon. J.R. Hudberg

Proverbs 14:34 China's Wall

Read: Psalm 33:8-22

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. —Proverbs 14:34

The words of Proverbs 14:34 could be chiseled on the tombstone of many civilizations: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” We think we can build a nation on the gross national product or defend it with armaments, but God says that countries are built on the character of their people.

The people of ancient China sought security from the barbaric hordes that swept down from the north, so they erected the Great Wall of China. The massive wall stretched for 1,500 miles. It was 12 to 40 feet wide and 20 to 50 feet high. The wall was too high for the enemy to scale, too thick to tear down, and too long to go around.

Yet during the first 100 years of the wall’s existence, China was invaded three times. How was the security breached? The enemies simply bribed a gatekeeper and then marched easily through a gate. The fatal flaw in China’s defense lay in spending its wealth to build a wall but paying much less to build the character of the gatekeepers.

A bigger defense system won’t ultimately protect our nation. But we can contribute to her security by being “blameless and harmless, ... without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15).

Protection of a nation's land

Does not come from its mighty hand;

Security is just a fraud

Unless the people trust in God. —Sper

A nation is only as strong as the character of its citizens.

PROVERBS 15

Proverbs 15:1 A Soft Answer

Proverbs 15:1 tells us that "a soft answer turns away wrath." While it's true that a humble response to wrath will normally cause it to subside, it's equally true that some people will never be pacified. Because of long-term bitterness and resentment, the tide of their wrath runs too high.

The only thing we can do—and the thing we must always do—is be meek and lowly in the face of their anger and leave the consequences with God. This doesn't mean we must stay in an abusive situation, for no one has the right to mistreat another human being. But it does mean we can by God's grace respond calmly to another's anger.

Paul stated the matter this way: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). We must be peacemakers even if others refuse to be. Obedience is our job; the rest we leave to God.

We want a word that always works, an easy solution, a quick fix. But some things in this broken world can't be fixed no matter what we do, so we must rely on God's grace to deal with them from day to day.

Calm, quiet words may not always turn away another's wrath. You may be grieved because they go unheeded, but you can never go wrong with a soft answer. —David H. Roper

Help me guard my lips, O Savior;
Keep me sweet when sorely tried,
Answers soft to others giving,
Meekly swallowing my pride. —Bosch

To handle a hard situation, try a soft answer.

Proverbs 15

Today in the Word

April 15, 2013

In "The Road Not Taken," poet Robert Frost reflected on the significance of a choice. Walking in the woods one day, he came to a fork in the path. He could not see what lay ahead in either direction. Which way should he go? In the end, he chose "the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference."

Two contrasting paths is a common picture in the wisdom literature of Scripture. Just as Proverbs gives us a portrait of the godly person who takes the first path, it also gives us a picture of the sinner who takes the second path. What might that second picture look like, based on today's chapter? A fool has a poor relationship with his parents (Pr 15:5, 20). He spurns discipline and correction (Pr 15:10, 12, 31–32). The things he loves are stupid or evil or both (Pr 15:14, 21). The words he says are harsh (Pr 15:1), deceitful (Pr 15:4), ignorant (Pr 15:7), quarrelsome (Pr 15:18), and impetuous (Pr 15: 28)—and since "the mouth of the fool gushes" (Pr 15:2), there are a lot of them!

Comparison proverbs make even better sense in light of the two paths (see Pr 15:16–17). The general form of this type of proverb is, "Better is A with X than B with Y." A is usually an apparently negative quality, activity, or circumstance, with B as an apparently positive opposite. X is usually a genuinely positive quality, activity, or circumstance, with Y as an opposite, resulting in a reversed perception of A and B. For example, in Pr 15:16, A is "a little" (materially) and B is "great wealth." B seems preferable. But add in X as "fear of the Lord" and Y as "turmoil" and the perception flips. A right relationship with God is far more valuable than financial wealth!

Apply the Word - Here is another good overall study question for Proverbs: "What does this tell me about God?" He sees and knows

all (Pr 15:11). He loves righteousness and hates wickedness (Pr 15:8–9). He supports the poor, opposes the proud (Pr 15:25), loves the pure-minded (Pr 15:26), and hears the prayers of the righteous (Pr 15:8, 29).

Proverbs 15:1-18 Cross Word Puzzle

A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention. —Proverbs 15:18

What's a six-letter word for the way parents too often communicate with their children?

Try s-c-r-e-a-m.

Cross words so often fly between parents and children that children must surely be puzzled.

After all, parents who love Jesus are supposed to be noted for their love. We are supposed to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. We are supposed to be able to control our cross words.

The book of Proverbs has some great words of wisdom for those who ask, "How do I stop yelling at my kids?" A nine-letter word holds the key: r-e-s-t-r-a-i-n-t.

Look at Proverbs 15:1-2. "A soft answer turns away wrath." To make that work takes self-control. "A harsh word stirs up anger." Harsh words aren't restrained. "The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly." The unrestrained tongue speaks first and checks the facts later. "But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness." A foolish person lets words come out uncontrollably.

When we use cross words to communicate with our children, we must remember how confusing it is. They are puzzled when we don't show the love we talk about. Restraint can end the cross word puzzle.

When you communicate, use words

That heal and nourish life

Instead of hurling angry words

That wound and stir up strife. —Sper

Sharp words can dull respect.

Proverbs 15:1-23 A War Of Words

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. —Proverbs 15:1

On July 28, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia in response to the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie. Within 90 days, other European countries had taken sides to honor their military alliances and pursue their own ambitions. A single event escalated into World War I, one of the most destructive military conflicts of modern time.

The tragedy of war is staggering, yet our relationships and families can begin to fracture with only a few hateful words. James wrote, "See how great a forest a little fire kindles!" (James 3:5). A key to avoiding verbal conflict is found in Proverbs: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (15:1).

A small comment can start a large fight. When we, by God's grace, choose not to retaliate with our words, we honor Jesus our Savior. When He was abused and insulted, He fulfilled the prophetic words of Isaiah, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

Proverbs urges us to speak the truth and seek peace through our words. "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, ... and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (15:4,23).

A careless word may kindle strife,

A cruel word may wreck a life;

A timely word may lessen stress,

A loving word may heal and bless. —Anon.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

INSIGHT: A major theme in Proverbs concerns the use of our tongues (10:19-21; 12:18, 13:3; 17:27-28; 18:6-8; 25:11; 26:18-22). Proverbs 15 warns of the consequences of using wrong words and the benefits of using right words. A wise person is carefully

restrained and judicious when speaking (vv.2,7,28).

Proverbs 15:1 Talk Low, Talk Slow

Read: Judges 7:24–8:3

A soft answer turns away wrath. —Proverbs 15:1

John Wayne, famous American actor and film icon, once said, “Talk low, talk slow, and don’t say too much.” His advice is hard for me to follow since I’m a fast talker and I don’t always speak quietly or limit my words. However, this idea of controlling our speech can be a useful tool when dealing with anger. The Bible says we are supposed to be “slow to speak” (James 1:19), and that “a soft answer turns away wrath” (Prov. 15:1).

Gideon gave a soft answer during a verbal scuffle with some fellow Israelites (Judg. 8). Just after his army defeated the Midianites, a group of his countrymen criticized him sharply (v.1). They were miffed because they missed out on the main part of the battle. Gideon did not fling back a rough response. Instead, he reminded them that they had captured and killed the Midianite princes. He also honored the men by asking, “What was I able to do in comparison with you?” Finally, “their anger toward him subsided when he said that” (v.3).

With the Lord’s help, we can defuse heated situations by reining in our words. Responding gently and carefully to angry people can promote unity, for God’s glory.

Lord, set a guard upon my lips,

My tongue control today;

Help me evaluate each thought

And watch each word I say. —Hess

Bite your tongue before your tongue bites others.

Proverbs 15:1a

A Time to Keep Silence

What did Solomon mean when he spoke of “a time to keep silence” in Ecclesiastes 3:7? One writer answers this question by pointing out that there is “a foolish silence, a sullen silence, a cowardly silence, and a despairing silence. None of these is to recommended. However, there is a prudent, holy, gracious silence to which Scripture enjoins us.”

If we do not learn to practice this kind of restraint, we will speak injurious words that stir up anger (Proverbs 15:1) and use harsh, uncontrolled language (Prov. 21:23). Unguarded lips always lead to serious consequences. Someone has listed six mischievous “Misses” that result: Miss Information, Miss Quotation, Miss Representation, Miss Interpretation, Miss Construction, and Miss Understanding. They are the result of talking when we should be quiet.

What power there is in the silence of self-control! John Wesley observed this in a disagreement between two women. One was speaking vehemently and gesturing wildly, while the other stood perfectly still—tranquil and unperturbed. Finally the first woman stamped her foot and shouted, “Speak! so I can have something more to say to you!” Wesley commented, “That was a lesson to me: Silence is often the best answer.” -H. G. Bosch

Proverbs 15:1b Calm In An Age Of Rage

Our daughter Melissa is at the “learning to drive” stage, and therefore has to listen to Mom’s and Dad’s numerous safety speeches. On one occasion, we told her, “If someone cuts you off, stay calm. Don’t make the other driver angry. You don’t know what he or she might do.”

That comment seemed so natural. But as I thought about its implications, I realized how much has changed over time. When I was learning to drive, there was never any mention of “road rage” or being “cut off.” Angry drivers weren’t a big problem.

But now angry outbursts are so much a part of our lives that we almost expect them. Hateful words are common on TV and radio shows. Students and teachers get into heated arguments. People who don’t even know each other trade insults in public places. Athletes and fans shout in irate tones at sporting events.

We live in an age of rage. But we can help solve the problem—one person at a time. When we’re on the receiving end of someone’s wrath, we can return a soft answer (Proverbs 15:1). A calm, reasoned approach can stop anger in its tracks.

Christ stayed calm in the face of hateful accusations at His trial (Luke 23:1-12), and we should follow His example by staying calm in an age of rage. —Dave Branon

Help me guard my lips, O Savior,

Keep me sweet when I am tried;

Answers soft to others giving,

Meekly swallowing my pride. —Bosch

He who conquers his anger conquers a strong enemy

Proverbs 15:1-4 The Lockhorns

Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. —Luke 6:45

Since 1968, the characters in the comic strip *The Lockhorns* have been exchanging barbs of bitter wit and marital contempt. Currently syndicated in more than 500 newspapers, the cartoon entertains millions of readers as Leroy says things like this to Loretta: “Sure we can talk now. Just don’t stand in front of the television.” Loretta, at no loss for words or jabs, is just as likely to say something like, “Sure I spend more than you make. I have confidence in you.”

While laughing, we might catch a glimpse of ourselves. Sarcasm is all too common, and far more serious than we might want to believe. Heartless sarcasm can be more harmful than physical bruises. Solomon said there are people who use words like a sword (Prov. 12:18), and that evil words can crush the spirit (15:4).

Controlling our speech isn’t easy, because the real problem is not our words but our hearts. Behind the insults, we are likely to find in ourselves an insecurity, fear, or guilt that tempts us to protect ourselves at the expense of another.

Is there an upside to abusive words? No, unless we take them as a warning that we’re not in step with Christ. In His embrace and grace, let’s not lash out at one another in an effort to protect ourselves.

Instead of hurling angry words

That wound and stir up strife,

Use words of kindness, filled with love,

That heal and nourish life. —Sper

Abusive language reveals a sinful heart.

Proverbs 15:1-7 Mouth Guard

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. —Proverbs 15:2

I was walking in a subway in Minsk, Belarus, with my friend Yuliya and her daughter Anastasia when I suddenly fell face first onto the dirty concrete floor. I don’t remember the fall, but I do remember suddenly having a mouth filled with sand, gravel, and grit. Ugh! I couldn’t get that stuff out of my mouth quickly enough!

I didn’t enjoy what went into my mouth on that embarrassing occasion. But Scripture teaches that it’s more important to guard what comes out of our mouths. When the writer of Proverbs 15 said that “the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness” (v.2), the word translated pours forth literally means “explodes out.” Rash accusations, angry words, and verbal abuse can do immeasurable and lifelong harm. The apostle Paul spoke bluntly about this: “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth” (Eph. 4:29)—no dirty talk. He also said to “[put] away lying” and to “speak truth” (v.25)—no lies. And later, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you” (v.31)—no character assassination. What comes out of our mouths should be wholesome and uplifting.

We guard carefully what goes into our mouths—and rightly so. To honor God, let’s also keep tight control on the words that come out of our mouths.

Lord, help us to control our tongues,

To clean up what we say,

To use words that will edify,

To honor You today. —Sper

Be careful of your thoughts—they may become words at any time.

Proverbs 15:1-7 Reverse The Trend

Researchers at Kenyon College conducted a test in cooperation with the US Navy. The purpose was to discover how the tone of the voice affected sailors when they were given orders. The experiments revealed that the way a person was addressed determined to a large extent the kind of response he would make.

For example, when an individual was spoken to in a soft voice, he would answer in a similar manner. But when he was shouted at, his reply came back in the same sharp tone. This was true whether the communication was given face-to-face, over the intercom, or by telephone.

This study reminds me of Proverbs 15:1, which states, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." What we say and how we say it not only makes a difference in the reaction we'll receive, but it also determines whether conflict or peace will result. Many arguments could be avoided and tense situations relaxed if we practiced the truth of this verse.

The next time someone speaks to you in a harsh or angry tone, reverse the trend by expressing meekness, quietness of spirit, and loving concern. What a difference a soft answer can make in our relationships! —Richard De Haan

So many folks use words that are harsh,

When angry, they speak their mind;

But Christ would have us reverse this trend

With words that are always kind. —D. De Haan

To get out of a hard situation, try a soft answer.

Proverbs 15:1-4 The Power Of Soft Answers

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. —Proverbs 15:1

My car broke down in a tunnel during rush hour in downtown Boston. Angry drivers expressed their frustration as they struggled past me. Eventually, the car was towed to a station for repairs. Later it broke down again, stranding me along the Interstate at 2 a.m. Back to the shop it went.

Unfortunately, the repair shop also doubled as a parking lot during Red Sox baseball games. When I arrived after work the next day to pick up my car, it was hemmed in by 30 other vehicles!

Let's just say I was less than Christlike in my initial reaction. I ranted and raved, and then, realizing it was only making them less willing to help me at the close of their day, I decided to give up. I stormed toward the glass doors and struggled to get them open. My anger increased when the station workers laughed at me.

I had barely made it out when I realized how unlike Christ I'd been. Chastened, I rapped on the locked doors and mouthed "I'm sorry" to the staff inside. They were stunned! They let me back in, and I meekly told them that Christians shouldn't behave as I had. Minutes later, they were shifting cars to free up mine. I learned the truth that soft rather than harsh words can change circumstances (Prov. 15:1).

O may I find in anger's grip

The strength to temper tongue and lip;

But failing that, may God grant me

The courage for apology. —Kilgore

A soft answer has often been the means of breaking a hard heart.

Proverbs 15:1-7,23-28 A Kind Word

A newspaper obituary caught my eye with this statement: "Services for affable fix-it man are today." Instead of focusing on one of the movers and shakers of society, the article told the story of a 79-year-old appliance repairman who was known for his integrity,

character, and unquenchable happiness.

The president of the company for which the man had worked said, "Half of his job was to go to people's houses and fix the appliances, and the other half was to fix the people. We had a lot of people with problems who requested him by name. He was very jovial, very friendly, and always had a kind word."

No matter what our job, perhaps the most important work we do is helping and encouraging people, especially by what we say.

The book of Proverbs speaks often of the tongue's power to hurt or to heal. For example: "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit... A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:4,23).

We will represent Christ today through everything we say. What an honor it would be if we were known as happy people who have a smile and a kind word for everyone. —David C. McCasland

A careless word may kindle strife,

A cruel word may wreck a life;

A timely word may lessen stress,

A loving word may heal and bless. --Anon.

Kind words are always the right kind.

Proverbs 15:1-18

Sinless Anger

When Supreme Court Justice Byron White was in Salt Lake City to give a speech, he was attacked by an angry man. The suspect said he assaulted the respected judge because of his High Court decisions. He said, "Justice White is causing four-letter words to come into my living room through the TV set." Rationalizing his attack, he continued, "The only way I know how to stop it is to go to the source."

That's where the man went wrong. Of course, he had a perfect right to voice his strong opinions. He was even justified in becoming angry if he believed a Court decision encouraged immorality. But the manner he chose to express his indignation was as bad as, if not worse than, a wrong court decision.

Today's Scripture text says, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26). What others say and do may arouse our anger and in some cases should make us angry. But we must be careful we don't overreact and lose control. The apostle Paul reminded us that "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

Should Christians ever become angry? Certainly! But we should never allow our anger to erupt in a sinful response. Two wrongs don't make a right.—Richard De Haan

When anger stirs within our hearts

Because of wrongs we see,

We must with love address the fault

If helpful we would be. —Branon

It's not a sin to get angry when you get angry at sin.

Proverbs 15:1-12

The Critic

When I was a teenager, a family joined our congregation. The wife was quiet, but the husband was loud, critical, and overbearing. I was standing nearby one Sunday morning when he stormed up to the pastor and verbally attacked him for something he had said in the sermon. The man's voice was loud, his tone disrespectful.

The pastor didn't do what I expected. He spoke softly, thanked the critic for his insights, and promised to think through the issue again.

Later, I asked my pastor why he didn't argue right back. He gave me some valuable advice I still try to follow. He said, "Every piece of criticism can be helpful. God may be in it, and if He is, I need to hear what He's saying. The critic just might be right."

When someone criticizes you, here are some biblical principles to follow: First, don't respond in anger (Proverbs 15:1). It will only accelerate the tension between you. Second, realize that you have been presented with a golden opportunity to model Christlike behavior—love, unselfishness, humility, and concern for others (Philippians 2:1-4). Third, the critic may be right; you may need to change. A wise person welcomes advice (Proverbs 9:8-9).

Treat a critic as a friend, and you both win. —David C. Egner

If criticism comes your way,

Consider its intent;

It may be that some truth from God

To you is being sent. —D. DeHaan

Criticism is a good teacher if we are willing to learn from

Proverbs 15:3

He's Watching

In this age of electronics, we have all become aware of bugging devices. A person's office, hotel room, or telephone can be monitored so that every sound is picked up. This is accomplished through highly sensitive microphones that are so small they can easily be hidden. Heads of state, government officials, and business people in strategic positions must be exceedingly careful of what they say, especially when entering a strange setting. The awareness that they might be overheard is sure to make them think twice before they speak.

Did you ever stop to think that God sees everything we do and hears everything we say every moment of the day? Hebrews 4:13 says that "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

This truth is both comforting and sobering--comforting because God stands ready to deliver us when we are in trouble (Ps. 33:18-19), and sobering because "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). What a profound effect this should have on the way we live!

The next time you are tempted or in trouble, remember that God is watching and listening. —Richard De Haan

There is no time of day or night,

No place on land or sea

That God, whose eye is never dim,

Does not see you and me. --DJD

To know that God sees us brings both conviction and comfort

Proverbs 15:3a

The prayer of the upright is his delight.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

We too seldom consider the pleasure that the prayer of his people gives to God. Often we go to Him with no other thought than to find relief from the pressure of anxiety or sin. We hardly realize that He is looking for our coming because He loves us. Thus nothing delights Him more than the time we consecrate for heartfelt fellowship with Him. Think, O child of God, when next the hour of prayer comes round, that God is waiting for you. Would you cause Him disappointment by curtailing it, and by passing cursorily through a form, when He looks for the fellowship of the soul? Remember how Jesus said, "The Father seeketh such to worship Him."

The prayer which gives God delight is one which is characterized thus:— (1) It must be an identification with the prayer of the Lord Jesus. In Him alone can the Father take delight, and in us only as far as we are in the Beloved, and He in us. (2) We must come in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our lives rid of all known inconsistency and impurity. (3) We must give time for God to speak to us. Rev. Andrew Murray says, "Bow quietly before Him in humble faith and adoration. God is.

God is near. God is love, longing to make Himself known." (4) Lie very low before God. Sink down before Him in the lowest dust of self-abasement, reckoning yourself to be nothing. (5) Present yourself to God that He may fulfil through you his own loving purposes.

In the Book of Revelation, we are bidden to behold the Angel of the Covenant mingling much incense with the prayers of all the saints. That incense is the merit of Jesus, which makes our prayers delightful (Revelation 8:3–5).

Proverbs 15:8

Continue Upright

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

THIS is as good as a promise, for it declares a present fact which will be the same throughout all ages. God takes great pleasure in the prayers of upright men; He even calls them His delight. Our first concern is to be upright. Neither bending this way nor that, continue upright: not crooked with policy, nor prostrate by yielding to evil, be you upright in strict integrity and straightforwardness. If we begin to shuffle and shift, we shall be left to shift for ourselves. If we try crooked ways, we shall find that we cannot pray; and if we pretend to do so, we shall find our prayers shut out of heaven.

Are we acting in a straight line and thus following out the Lord's revealed will? Then let us pray much and pray in faith. If our prayer is God's delight, let us not stint Him in that which gives Him pleasure. He does not consider the grammar of it, nor the metaphysics of it, nor the rhetoric of it; in all these, men might despise it. He, as a Father, takes pleasure in the lisplings of His own babes, the stammerings of His new-born sons and daughters. Should we not delight in prayer since the Lord delights in it? Let us make errands to the throne. The Lord finds us enough reasons for prayer, and we ought to thank Him that it is so.

Proverbs 15:12-15

LAUGHTER

"Like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool."-- Ecclesiastes 7:6

Your dog may be a great companion. You may hunt together, play together, eat together, even sleep on the same bed together. Yet, although you and your dog may share life, you will never share a laugh. As far as we know, humans are the only creatures of God who enjoy humor. Laughter is a distinctive of human beings.

Laughter also can tell something about you. Show me what amuses you, and I can make a good guess about the sort of person you are. If you laugh at filthy stories, you give yourself away. If you scoff at virtue, you have embraced vice. If you laugh at another's failure or misfortune, you have a cruel streak inside of you. If you can laugh at your own stupidities and mistakes, you handle life with some skill.

I believe Christians have a greater capacity to enjoy healthy laughter than others. After all, we live with the promise of eternal life and with knowledge that God can use even our setbacks to move us forward.

Proverbs 15:13 tells us that "a merry heart makes a cheerful countenance." But the Bible also says that the laughter of fools who are living only for this life is like the "crackling of thorns" that are burned in a fire (Eccl. 7:6).

Ask yourself, "What makes me laugh?" -- Haddon W. Robinson

To know the Savior brings great joy,

The kind that nothing can destroy;

And though a smile should light your face,

Coarse humor surely has no place.-- Dennis J. De Haan

What we laugh at reveals our character.

Proverbs 15:13-33

Living Every Day

When Tamer Lee Owens celebrated her 104th birthday, she credited "laughter, the Lord, and the little things" for keeping her going. She still finds enjoyment each day in talking with people, taking a walk, and reading the Bible as she has done since childhood. "I don't know how long He'll let me stay here," she said. "I just thank the Lord for what He's given me already."

Most of us won't live 104 years, but we can learn from Tamer Lee how to enjoy each day that we are given.

Laughter—"A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken" (Prov 15:13). True happiness begins deep inside and emerges on our faces.

The Lord—"The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility" (v.33). When God is central in our hearts, He can teach us His way through every experience of life.

The Little Things—"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred" (v.17). Maintaining loving relationships and enjoying the basic things of life are more important than wealth and success.

Not all of us will live a long time, but we can all live well each day—with laughter, the Lord, and the little things in life. —David C. McCasland

The world is filled with so much good—

Little things that bring us pleasure—

But Christ can fill our lives with joy

Beyond all earthly treasure. —Sper

Happiness is not a destination but a day-by-day journey

Proverbs 15:13 Something's Wrong With Harry

Read: 1 Peter 2:9-17

A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance. —Proverbs 15:13

Every morning Harry, a Christian, walked into his office singing a song from the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical Oklahoma: "Oh, what a beautiful morning; oh, what a beautiful day! I got a beautiful feeling, everything's going my way!"

But one morning, he forgot to sing. Harry soon noticed that something was wrong at the office; everyone around him seemed on edge. When he finally asked a co-worker what was wrong, she replied, "You didn't sing this morning, and we thought you were upset!"

Harry had become known for such a cheerful, positive spirit that his co-workers were sure something was wrong with him that morning. Harry hadn't realized how closely people were watching him, and he resolved from then on always to come to work singing.

First Peter 2 reminds us that people are observing our lives (vv.11-12). To be good representatives of Jesus Christ, Peter teaches that we're to be submissive to authority, to live an honorable life, to do good works, to honor all people, and to fear God (vv.12-17).

The testimony of our lives can give us opportunities to share the good news of Jesus. So we might want to ask ourselves, "What do people see in me?"

Help me to sing a joyful song

For those bowed down with care,

A song of hope and freedom

For those in dark despair. —Andrews

Do others see Jesus in you?

Proverbs 15:13-20 Mom's Dream Home

What is a mother's idea of a dream home? A one-story, ranch-style house on a half-acre lot with a fenced-in yard for the children? Three bedrooms, two large bathrooms, a big family room, a modern kitchen, and a two-car garage? Or maybe her dream home would have a beautiful garden and a view overlooking a quiet lake.

As good as these features may be, most mothers know it takes more to make a house a home. The most important characteristics of a home are the spiritual qualities and the love between father, mother, and children.

In Proverbs 15, Solomon said that it is better to live in poverty while fearing the Lord than to possess great treasure and have trouble

because of it (v.16). It is better to eat a dinner of herbs where there is love than to sit around a veal or steak dinner in the presence of strife (v.17). And a dream home is a place where children obey their father and honor their mother (v.20). A loving, spiritual atmosphere is the feature most desired in a home, and that can be found in a simple one-room house or in a spacious mansion.

Yes, I think we would all agree that love for our family and the fear of the Lord can turn any house into a dream home. It's a place where Mom--and the rest of the family--will find true joy. —Mart De Haan

Give me a house to call my own,

Family and friends to make it a home,

Love and kindness that never depart,

Enough to fill a thankful heart. --Anon.

A house is built by human hands, a home by human hearts

Proverbs 15:13-30 A Merry Heart

Are only a few fortunate people born with a bright outlook on life, or is optimism an attitude we can learn?

Susan C. Vaughan, author of *Half Full, Half Empty*, says that seeing life's possibilities instead of its pitfalls is the result of an internal process anyone can follow. One of her conclusions is that "there is a powerful link between facial expression and emotion." She believes that people who begin to act happier actually feel happier.

There is merit in thinking and acting positively, but the Bible declares that true spiritual joy begins deep inside us, then spreads to our faces. A wise man wrote, "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance ... He who is of a merry heart has a continual feast" (Proverbs 15:13,15). When we're happy on the inside, our faces can't help but show it on the outside.

How do we develop a merry heart? We can begin by thanking the Lord for being with us and working for our good in every situation (Romans 8:28). It's not a matter of pretending but of practicing an outlook on life that reflects our faith in Christ. "Rejoice in the Lord always," Paul wrote from prison. "Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4).

That kind of optimism begins with a merry heart and spreads quickly to the face. —David C. McCasland

The smile on the face that reveals true joy

Always comes from deep within;

It springs from a heart that is full of thanks—

That's where our joy must begin. —Fitzhugh

If you have the joy of Christ in your heart, it will show on your face.

Proverbs 15:18-23

Today in the Word

Feb 6, 2014

The book of James gives several memorable pictures of the tongue (James 3:3–12). These include a bit in the mouth of a horse, the rudder of a ship, a spark that starts a forest fire, a spring of water, and a fruit tree. From these images, we learn that though the tongue is small its power is great, that our speech has a high destructive potential and is difficult to control, and that our words indicate the spiritual state of our hearts.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about the tongue and our use of language. This is a specific example of the godly wisdom considered yesterday—the kind of wisdom that knows the right time for doing the right thing. Knowing what to say and how to say it in any given situation is a universal challenge, one that James describes as virtually impossible. But if we could tame our tongues with God's help, how much better our lives would be!

The key proverb for us in today's reading is Pr 15:23: "A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!" Joy here is in part a feeling of happiness or pleasure (Pr 24:26). But it is more than just a feeling. Joy is seen here as a moral quality and a great benefit to the individual and the community. God Himself is often pictured as speaking an apt or timely word to His people.

The proverbs preceding today's verse help give us a fuller picture of wisdom. Godly wisdom includes patience and peacemaking (Pr 15:18), a strong work ethic (Pr 15:19), respect for one's parents (Pr 15:20), finding joy in what is good or right (Pr 15:21), and the humility to listen and receive advice from others (Pr 15:22).

Apply the Word - In order to make progress in growing in wisdom, we encourage you today to choose one of the proverbs from today's reading to apply. Are you hot-tempered or quick to pick a fight? Pr 15:18 is for you. Do you spend too much time as a couch potato? Pr 15:19 can help. Whichever verse you choose, depend on the Lord to cultivate His fruit in your life.

Proverbs 15:21-33 A Man Of Warmth And Wisdom

A word spoken in due season, how good it is! —Proverbs 15:23

When Dr. Vernon Grounds, former president and chancellor of Denver Seminary, went to be with the Lord at age 96, tributes and remembrances poured in from former students, colleagues, and friends. Almost everyone recalled a time when Dr. Grounds had personally encouraged them through his teaching, his counsel, or simply his warm smile. He believed in the value of training pastors, teachers, and counselors who had a vital relationship with Christ and a willingness to serve others.

A vivid portrait of Vernon Grounds is seen in a selection of verses from Proverbs 15: "A man of understanding walks uprightly" (v.21). "A word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (v.23). "The words of the pure are pleasant" (v.26). "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer" (v.28). "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom" (v.33).

Dr. Grounds' counsel grew out of his character, and his wisdom came from God. The warmth of his life was fired by his purity of heart. The result is a model for us from the Word of God and the example of a man who humbly followed his Savior.

Vernon Grounds ran well and finished his race. May his example of wise and compassionate living challenge us as we continue to run.

Life's truest heroes never carve their name

On marbled columns built for their acclaim;

They build instead a legacy that springs

From faithful service to the King of kings. —Gustafson

A good leader is one who knows the way, shows the way, and goes the way.

Proverbs 15:16-23 Many Advisors

Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established. —Proverbs 15:22

The fifteenth-century theologian Thomas à Kempis said, "Who is so wise as to have perfect knowledge of all things? Therefore, trust not too much to your own opinion, but be ready also to hear the opinions of others. Though your own opinion be good, yet if for the love of God you forego it and follow that of another, you shall the more profit thereby." Thomas recognized the importance of seeking the opinions of trusted advisors when making plans for life.

In order to determine God's course for life, the wise person should open up to several avenues of counsel, through which God will bring His guiding wisdom. When a person seeks the wise counsel of others, he shows his realization that he might be overlooking some important factors in his decisions.

Solomon, the wisest man in Israel, wrote about how important it is to have counsel from others: "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (Prov. 15:22).

The Lord is the Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6), and He desires to protect us through wise advisors. Seek them out and thank God for them. Let them help you discover a clearer picture of His plan for your life.

If you seek wise counsel, you multiply your chances for sound decisions.

INSIGHT: Proverbs 15:22 instructs us on the importance of seeking wise counsel. Many of the people in Scripture sought out counsel from wise and trusted advisors. Moses asked advice from his father-in-law Jethro about how to lead and judge Israel (Ex. 18:13-24). Ahithophel was so wise that it was said that his advice "was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God" (2 Sam. 16:23). But the greatest counsel we can seek is from God Himself. James tells us that if we lack wisdom, we can ask of God and He will give it to us because He "gives to all liberally and without reproach" (James 1:5).

Proverbs 15:21 Beware Of Open Doors

Read: Philippians 1:8-11

Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment, but a man of understanding walks uprightly. —Proverbs 15:21

Sometimes Christians follow an “open door” policy. When a door of opportunity opens, they assume that it’s God’s will to go through it.

Bestselling author Terri Blackstock knows this is untrue. She never openly rebelled against God, but she found herself far away from Him after walking through open doors of opportunity. “I had allowed myself to believe that God was blessing my career ... because He had opened all the doors,” she wrote in *Soul Restoration*. Although she got what she wanted—a successful career writing romance novels for Harlequin and Silhouette—she lost what she needed: a close relationship with God.

When she finally admitted that her career was keeping her from God, she turned her back on success and renewed her commitment to the Lord. Since then, her writing career has been revitalized, and she has become an award-winning author of Christian fiction.

Just because the Lord doesn’t stop us from something doesn’t mean He wants us to continue. To discern which opportunities to pursue, we need to “approve the things that are excellent” and to be “filled with the fruits of righteousness ... to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:10-11).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For help with understanding God’s will for your life, read the online study *How Can I Know What God Wants Me To Do?* at

www.rbc.org/bible-study/discovery-series/bookletDetail.aspx?id=47982&Topic=874

The best way to know God’s will is to say “I will” to God.

Proverbs 15:23 A Timely Word

Read: Ephesians 4:17-32

A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is! —Proverbs 15:23

In Liverpool, England, on the eve of the 2006 British Open Championship, professional golfer Graeme McDowell was in trouble. The next day he was going into the tournament clueless about what was causing his struggles on the course.

While he was out for the evening, McDowell got a surprise. A stranger, who was an avid golf fan, recognized him and commented that he had noticed a flaw in his swing. The next day, Graeme tested that advice on the driving range, and to his great shock he discovered that the fan had been correct. Satisfied with the value of the change, Graeme implemented the suggestion and finished the first day of the British Open in first place! All because a stranger took time to speak a word of help.

Words are like that. They are powerful instruments for good or for ill. We can use words in destructive ways, or we can use words to build and encourage. This must be what Solomon had in mind when he said, “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!” (Prov. 15:23).

In a world where words are often wielded as weapons, may we use our words as tools to build up the hearts of others.

Keep my tongue, Lord, bridled well,

Words of truth, oh, may I tell;

Take my heart, its wellspring deep,

Cleanse and purify and keep. —Bosch

Gentle words are more powerful than angry words.

Proverbs 15:27 Grippled By Greed

Read: 2 Kings 5:1,9-27

He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house. —Proverbs 15:27

Advertisers constantly appeal to consumer greed, trying to convince us that we need certain products.

An executive of an electronics firm boasted, "When we introduced pocket radios years ago, nobody needed them, so they didn't sell. We had to convince the consumer that he needed our products. Sales have boomed ever since."

The desire for more and more money, things, or power isn't unique to this century. Thousands of years ago, Elisha's servant Gehazi saw a chance to get money from wealthy Naaman. He would be able to buy clothing, olive groves, vineyards, sheep and oxen, and servants (2 Ki. 5:26). Greed took over.

Greed can quickly tarnish our integrity. I know some Christian business owners who work hard and make lots of money, but they are slow to give raises to their employees. I also know another Christian who earns hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, but some of his practices are unethical. Greed often motivates otherwise good people.

We are all susceptible to the powerful grip of greed. That's why it's good to pray, "Lord, help me to be concerned about how I can please You, not how I can gain more for myself."

If money is your highest goal—

The thing you long to gain—

Its power will enslave your soul

And cause your life much pain. —DJD

Greedy people always lose more than they gain.

Proverbs 15:29 Trust Him With Your Heart

Read: Psalm 34:15-22

The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous. —Proverbs 15:29

Sportswriter Waddy Spoelstra and his wife Jean are both octogenarians who demonstrate each day the importance of a life of faith in Jesus Christ.

Jean has suffered from congestive heart failure for 3 years. After she had a medical checkup last fall, her doctor announced, "Your heart is good and your lungs are clear. It seems that both are in the process of healing." When Waddy responded with "Praise the Lord," the physician replied, "That's it. You two have positive attitudes. You believe in answered prayer. As I've said before, prayer is a big part of medical care."

It's exciting to hear a doctor acknowledging the connection between prayer and patient care. It's not a new idea, though. Studies have shown that prayer can accelerate the healing process, whether it's the patient or others who do the praying.

But we don't really need studies to prove that prayer works. God's Word tells us it does.

Have you spent time talking to the Lord about your trials? He knows how to meet your needs—whether through His direct intervention (Ps. 34:17) or through the comfort of His presence (v.18). Trust Him today with your heart.

Prayer brings us peace and gives us power

To walk the Christian way;

Prayer links us with the living God—

Therefore we need to pray. —Anon.

Daily prayers are the best remedy for daily cares.

Proverbs 15:29

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Proverbs 15:33

Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Humiliation of soul always brings a positive blessing with it. If we empty our hearts of self God will fill them with his love. He who desires close communion with Christ should remember the word of the Lord, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Stoop if you would climb to heaven. Do we not say of Jesus, "He descended that he might ascend?" so must you. You must grow downwards, that you may grow upwards; for the sweetest fellowship with heaven is to be had by humble souls, and by them alone. God will deny no blessing to a thoroughly humbled spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," with all its riches and treasures. The whole exchequer of God shall be made over by deed of gift to the soul which is humble enough to be able to receive it without growing proud because of it. God blesses us all up to the full measure and extremity of what it is safe for him to do. If you do not get a blessing, it is because it is not safe for you to have one. If our heavenly Father were to let your unhumbled spirit win a victory in his holy war, you would pilfer the crown for yourself, and meeting with a fresh enemy you would fall a victim; so that you are kept low for your own safety. When a man is sincerely humble, and never ventures to touch so much as a grain of the praise, there is scarcely any limit to what God will do for him. Humility makes us ready to be blessed by the God of all grace, and fits us to deal efficiently with our fellow men. True humility is a flower which will adorn any garden. This is a sauce with which you may season every dish of life, and you will find an improvement in every case. Whether it be prayer or praise, whether it be work or suffering, the genuine salt of humility cannot be used in excess.

Proverbs 15:33a Is Fear Healthy?

During a severe thunderstorm, a mother tucked her child into bed and turned off the light. Frightened by the tempest, he asked, "Mommy, will you sleep with me?" Hugging him, she replied, "I can't, dear. I have to sleep with Daddy." Stepping out of the room, she heard, "That big sissy!"

Fear is real. But it's not always negative. In 2 Chronicles 17:3-10, we read about a healthy, positive fear that prevented neighboring countries from going to war against Judah. What had caused this fear? We are told that "the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat" (v.10).

A respectful fear of the Lord was also what King Jehoshaphat desired for his own people. So he made it a priority that they be taught God's Word. He knew that if the people were in awe of the Almighty, they would humble themselves and obey Him. Doing what was right would bring prosperity to Judah and respect from neighboring countries.

Proverbs 15:33 declares, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom." Those who fear Him act with wisdom; they walk faithfully before Him as they obey His commands.—Albert Lee

God dwells in light and holiness,

In splendor and in might;

And godly fear of His great power

Can help us do what's right. —D. De Haan

The right kind of fear will keep us from doing wrong.

PROVERBS 16

Proverbs 16:1-9

Plans And Realities

When I went to Moody Bible Institute as an 18-year-old, I enrolled in the pastors program. I could picture myself preaching and leading a church just as my home church pastor was doing. Then, after hearing about the five faithful missionaries to the Auca Indians who were tragically killed in Ecuador, I even considered dedicating my life to missions.

But God had a different course laid out for me. Through His clear leading, and in accordance with the gifts He had given me, I became a teacher, editor, and writer.

Most of us have had similar experiences. We think ahead and carefully work out a plan. We picture in our minds with great detail how our future is going to unfold. But things don't go as planned. Some doors close, while others open. If this happens to you, it may be that God has something completely different in mind.

It's good to plan and dream and think ahead. But we must always be open to God-appointed changes in direction. "A man's heart plans his way," Solomon wrote, "but the Lord directs his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

God will never mislead us. When we trust Him with all our heart, He will direct our paths (Prov. 3:5-6). His way is always best. — David C. Egner

Should mystery enshroud His plan

And our short sight be dim,

We will not try the whole to scan

But leave each thread to Him. —Murray

Where God's finger points, His hand will make the way

Proverbs 16

Today in the Word

April 16, 2013

Saparmurat Niyazov was the proud dictator of Turkmenistan from 1985 until he died in 2006. Cities, buildings, and even months and days of the week were named after him and his family. He wrote a spiritual guidebook and required the nation to read it. Statues and portraits of him were everywhere. One gold-plated 50-foot statue rotated 360 degrees every 24 hours so that the sun always shone on his face.

Today's reading has bad news for such people: "The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished" (Pr 16:5). "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Pr 16:18). "Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud" (Pr 16:19). Because God is the sovereign ruler of all, His justice always prevails. This doesn't always happen when and how we wish, but that's because God's thoughts and plans are incomprehensibly above ours.

God's sovereignty is a running theme through the book of Proverbs. We can make plans, but whether or not they happen is up to the Lord (Pr 16:1, 9). For this reason, we should make our plans in submission to Him (Pr 16:3), especially since He already knows all our thoughts and motives (Pr 16:2). Americans have our own proverb for this: "Man proposes, but God disposes." Since God is the One who sets the standards, He rules over both ordinary citizens and kings (vv. 10–15). Even the wicked are somehow part of God's plan (Pr 16:4), as we see everywhere in Scripture, from Joseph (Gen. 50:20) to Jesus (Acts 2:23–24). This is why nothing that happens is random chance, even if it appears that way. God is always in control (Pr 16:33).

Apply the Word - After reading today's chapter, human planning might appear pointless: "the Lord works everything to its proper end" (Pr 16:4). But there is also advice such as "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans" (Pr 16:3). Wise choices and plans are important, but not as significant as our pride makes them out to be. Humility holds all plans with open hands.

Proverbs 16:1-9 The Unexpected

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

Toni was looking for what wasn't really lost, and she found what she wasn't looking for. As a result, a group of people got a spiritual boost they weren't expecting.

Toni, who conducts a Bible study in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinic in Alaska, was looking for her husband's missing driver's license. As she retraced his steps from the previous day, she visited a hospital. The missing license wasn't there, but a Christian high school chorale was, and Toni was touched by their worshipful singing. She asked the director if the teens could sing for her Bible-study group that evening. They could, and they did—bringing hope, joy, and God's love through music and post-concert conversation to some folks trying to put their lives back together.

Oh, and that driver's license? Toni found it on a chair when she got back home. Apparently, the only reason she went out that day was so God could direct her to hear a bunch of teens who could minister to her rehab group.

When God guides us (Prov. 16:9), He works in ways we can't predict. He can use even our inconveniences to bring honor to His name. When we face a seeming nuisance in our day, perhaps we should look not just for what we think we want but also for what God has for us that day.

Between the circumstance and me,

A Father's loving hand

Is working all things for my good—

All moves at His command. —Anon.

God is behind the scenes and controls the scenes He stands behind.

Proverbs 16:1-9 Right Place

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

They were in the right place, on the wrong day. Or so it would seem.

The Dayspring Chorale, a traveling high school singing group, arrived at a nursing home for a Thursday concert. However, the folks at the home were expecting them on Friday. But they said if the group could get set up fast, they could sing for 20 minutes. Then they'd have to stop for a memorial service for one of the residents.

The chorale hurriedly got ready and sang, and as they did, the son of the man who had died heard them. When they were done, he asked if they could sing at his dad's service. They gladly agreed and ministered hope and truth to all who attended. God used these young people in a special way—all because of a secretarial error. But was it a mistake?

We carefully make schedules so we can be where we think we should be. But we always need to keep in mind the words of Solomon, "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

Do we seek ministry in life's unplanned schedule changes? Do we turn detours into guided tours of what He wants to do through us? If we're doing God's will, we'll be in the right place. Then, wherever we are, we can point people to Him.

Sometimes our plan does not unfold

The way we thought it would;

But God is always in control

To use it for our good. —Sper

Unexpected changes are opportunities in disguise.

Proverbs 16:1-9 Change Of Plans

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

It was Christmas Eve in Oberndorf, Austria, in 1818. Joseph Mohr, the vicar of the church, had written a new song for the Christmas Eve service and the organist Franz Gruber had set it to music. But the organ in the village church broke down. So Gruber grabbed a guitar and accompanied Mohr in the first-ever rendition of "Silent Night."

The story doesn't end there, however. When a man came to fix the organ, Gruber tested it by playing the new song. The repairman liked the song so much that he took a copy of it back to his own village. There, four daughters of a village glovemaking learned the

song and began singing it in concerts all over the region. Because of that faulty organ, this new Christmas song blessed people all over Austria—and eventually the world.

When things break or when plans change, how should we respond? Often we fret and worry because we don't have the control we would like to have. That's when we need to step back, trust God, and wait to see how He is going to use the situation for His glory. The changes in our lives may not give the world something as remarkable as "Silent Night," but because God is in charge we can be sure that "all is calm, all is bright."

Sometimes our plan does not unfold

The way we thought it would,

But God is always in control

To use it for our good. —Sper

In the drama of life, God is the director behind the scenes.

Proverbs 16:1-9a

God's Appointments

Life-changing events do not happen by accident. They are not determined by the stars. They are not by chance. There is no such thing as chance. The Lord uses every situation in life to accomplish His purposes.

Frank W. Boreham (1871-1959), British pastor and essayist, said, "It was not by chance that Elijah and Ahab met on the grassy slopes of Carmel. It was not by chance that Herod and John met on the highways in Galilee. It was not by chance that Pilate and Jesus met in the judgment hall at Jerusalem. It was not by chance that Peter and Cornelius met on the Syrian seaboard. It was not by chance that Philip and the Ethiopian met on the sandy road to Gaza. It was not by chance that Nero and Paul met amid the antique splendors of ancient Rome... No, our meetings are no more by chance than the meeting of Stanley and Livingstone in Central Africa."

We should begin each day with a sincere desire to please the Lord, gladly anticipating His appointments for us. They may be circumstances that are unplanned, or the people we meet unexpectedly. But we should welcome them as opportunities to witness, to serve others, and to grow spiritually.

Recognizing God's sovereign leading, let us rejoice in His appointments.—Richard De Haan

All things work out for good, we know—

Such is God's great design;

He orders all our steps below

For purposes divine. —Peterson

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The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord as well as his steps. —Müller

Proverbs 16:3

Roll thy works unto the Lord, and thy purposes shall be established.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

There are four matters which we are to roll upon God — ourselves, as the Messiah in Psalm 22; our burden; our way; and here our works. The genesis of Christian work is on this wise. We become conscious of the uprising of a noble purpose. We are not sure at first whether it is of God or not, till we have taken time to subject it to the winnowing fan of his good Spirit. It is always wise to subject it to the fire of his criticism before it takes shape. Even then, however, all is not done. We must submit our plans before they are executed, our methods by which they are being executed, and the results of the execution, to the infinite wisdom of our Heavenly Father.

What a comfort it is to roll our works upon God! That servant of God who is carrying the responsibilities of a vast missionary enterprise! That preacher with his church and organizations! That promoter of philanthropic and ameliorative agencies! Let them roll their works upon God, and be content to take the subordinate place of acting as his agents and executors. The heart will be light,

and the hands free, if only we can learn the blessed secret of imposing the responsibility and anxiety of our efficiency, finance, and success on Jehovah. Roll thy works, and see that they do not roll back again. Put on the arrest of faith to make them keep their position. Reckon that God takes what you give; and when you have let your works go, be sure to cast yourself after them on his patient carefulness. Remember that He desires to work in us to will and to work of his good pleasure. Do not worry, nor fret, nor be always looking for results. Do your best, and leave the rest to Him, who is our rearward. He will follow up your efforts and establish the work of your hands.

Proverbs 16:5-19

I'm The Best!

An attorney sued a large corporation, charging its officials with breaking a contract with him. In the courtroom he asked for a huge sum of money to settle the case. In fact, the amount was so unusually high that the judge asked the attorney why he was demanding so much. The lawyer responded, "I'm doing this for one reason." Then with his head held high he proclaimed, "I am, you understand, the best attorney in the world."

When the trial was over, a friend asked him, "Why did you brag about yourself the way you did?"

Without batting an eye, the attorney responded, "There was nothing else I could do. After all, I was speaking under oath. I had to tell the truth!"

That man's opinion of himself made me think about the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 12:3. He said that a Christian should not "think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." The person who becomes so enamored with himself that he thinks he is better than others is headed for a big fall (Prov. 16:18).

As followers of Christ, let's focus on His greatness and not imagine our own. —Richard De Haan

There is a power of selfishness,

The proud and willful I;

Before my Lord can reign in me,

That proud old self must die. --Anon.

When you sing your own praise you are always out of tune

Proverbs 16:7

Enemies at Peace

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

I MUST see that my ways please the Lord. Even then I shall have enemies, and perhaps all the more certainly because I endeavor to do that which is right. But what a promise this is! The Lord will make the wrath of man to praise Him and abate it so that it shall not distress me.

He can constrain an enemy to desist from harming me even though he has a mind to do so. This He did with Laban, who pursued Jacob, but did not dare to touch him. Or He can subdue the wrath of the enemy and make him friendly, as He did with Esau, who met Jacob in a brotherly manner, though Jacob had dreaded that he would smite him and his family with the sword. The Lord can also convert a furious adversary into a brother in Christ and a fellow-worker, as He did with Saul of Tarsus. Oh, that He would do this in every case where a persecuting spirit appears!

Happy is the man whose enemies are made to be to him what the lions were to Daniel in the den, quiet and companionable! When I meet death, who is called the last enemy, I pray that I may be at peace. Only let my great care be to please the Lord in all things. Oh, for faith and holiness, for these are a pleasure unto the Most High!

Proverbs 16:9 God Had Other Plans

Read: 1 Peter 1:1-9

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

My friend Linda grew up planning to become a medical missionary. She loves the Lord and wanted to serve Him as a doctor by taking the gospel to sick people in parts of the world where medical care is hard to find. But God had other plans. Linda has indeed

become a medical missionary, but not the way she expected.

At age 14, Linda developed a chronic health problem that required her to be hospitalized for major surgery several times a year. She survived bacterial meningitis that left her in a coma for 2 weeks and blind for 6 months. She once celebrated two birthdays in a row in the hospital—without going home in between. She has had several experiences when she was not expected to live. But yet Linda is the most vibrant, grateful, and cheerful person you will ever meet. She once told me that her mission field, as she hoped and planned, is the hospital. But instead of serving God as a doctor, she serves Him as a patient. No matter how sick she is, the light of the Lord radiates from her.

Linda exemplifies the teaching of the apostle Peter. Despite her trials, she rejoices, and the genuineness of her faith brings “praise, honor, and glory” to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

Lord, I'm so thankful that no matter where
we are, we can serve You. Help me to reflect
Your image in my current situation, even
if it's not where I hoped I would be.

Write your plans in pencil and remember that God has the eraser.

Proverbs 16:9

Marching Off The Map

Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans. Our lives are subject to detours and corrections that we never expected or imagined.

Abraham and Sarah could testify to that. They were planning for retirement when life "happened" to them. God adjusted their agenda. He told Abraham, "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). So this old couple packed up the tent and headed out to only God knew where.

When Alexander the Great had completed his conquest of Persia, he headed east. Author Halford Luccock said the general "marched off his maps."

That happened to Sarah and Abraham. God gave them marching orders without a map. They needed only enough faith to begin the journey, and they headed out to unknown territories and unimagined adventures. God never told them He would turn them "every which way but loose" before fulfilling His promise of a son who would become a great nation.

Make your plans. But write them on paper, not in concrete. God and life have a way of intruding and leading you on a journey that you might not have anticipated in your wildest dreams.—Haddon W. Robinson

Many things about tomorrow

I don't seem to understand;

But I know who holds tomorrow

And I know who holds my hand. —Stanphill

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A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

Proverbs 16:9 Redirected

Read: Genesis 39:1-10

The Lord was with Joseph. —Genesis 39:2

At the age of 16, pianist Leon Fleisher made his formal debut at Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic. He went on to win prestigious international competitions and played in the world's finest concert halls. But at the age of 37, Fleisher was struck with dystonia, a neurological condition that crippled his right hand. After a period of despondency and withdrawal, he turned to teaching and conducting, because, as he said, he loved music more than he loved the piano.

When our dreams are shattered, how do we react? After Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, was sold as a slave by his brothers (Gen. 37:12-36), he could have given in to self-pity and self-indulgence. Instead, Joseph remained true to the Lord. Four times in Genesis 39, we read that "the Lord was with" Joseph (vv.2-3,21,23), and his actions revealed his own faithfulness to God. By his exemplary life, those he served in Egypt recognized God's presence with him.

Do we love God more than our own dreams? Although Joseph must have grieved the loss of his past and what his life could have been, the Lord led him to a calling he had never imagined. Today, the Lord longs to lead us. Are we willing to be redirected by Him?

My cherished plans may go astray,

My hopes may fade away;

But still I'll trust my Lord to lead,

For He doth know the way. —Overton

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

Proverbs 16:9 "That Ain't It!"

Read: Isaiah 55:6-9

His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps. —Job 34:21

Visiting Alaska for the first time, I was excited that we were staying at the Mt. McKinley Lodge. As we were checking in, I caught a glimpse of a mass of rock through a large picture window, and I hurried out to the deck facing the mountain.

"Wow," I murmured softly as I took in the view.

A man standing a few feet away said, "Uh, ... that ain't it!"

As I discovered that day, visitors to Alaska often miss seeing all of "The Great One." Standing at 20,320 feet, the mountain is so tall that most of it is hidden on cloudy days. I was seeing only a part of the whole.

Often we're satisfied with our limited view of life. But Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us, "'I know the thoughts that I think toward you,' says the Lord, 'thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.'" With God's omniscient, panoramic view, He sees the people He wants us to help, the things He wants us to accomplish, the character traits He wants to develop in us.

Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." Our view of life is restricted by our humanness, but we can trust ourselves to the One who has an unlimited view!

There's so much now I cannot see,

My eyesight's far too dim,

But come what may, I'll simply trust

And leave it all to Him. —Overton

We see in part; God sees the whole.

Proverbs 16:9a

Never Say Never

She made a New Year's resolution never to say never. Janet Kirkman had never intended to marry, have children, work on computers, and live in California. But she did get married, has two wonderful children, worked for a computer giant, and lived in California. God overturned nearly all her planned "nevers."

Such a resolution reminds us that God's plans may be very different from our own. But it can also safeguard us against pride and our vulnerability to temptation under pressure.

As Jesus was teaching His disciples about true service by washing their feet, Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" (John 13:8). But when the Lord told him he could have "no part" with Him without learning that lesson, Peter quickly reversed himself (vv.8-10).

A little later, Peter again tripped over that word never. "Even if all are made to stumble because of You," he said to Jesus emphatically, "I will never be made to stumble" (Matthew 26:33). That never soon melted into bitter tears of shame and remorse (vv.69-75).

Janet recommends: "Watch your nevers! Nevers are 'me' oriented and God is 'He' oriented." Let's keep our focus on God—which is where it belongs. —Dennis J. De Haan

I to Christ my life have given,

Ever His alone to be;

Oh, what peace and blessed assurance,

That He has a plan for me! —Thiesen

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

Proverbs 16:9b

MAN'S WAY! GOD'S DIRECTION

F. B. Meyer. Our Daily Walk

THE WAYS of a man, we justify them to ourselves, and think that they are necessarily right, but we are liable to be self-deceived. We must employ our sanctified common-sense, or, to adopt the phrase of our text, our heart must seriously and thoughtfully devise our way. First pray for direction; then weigh the pros and cons; then view the matter from the standpoint of trusted friends; see that your eye is single to do only the will of God; be sure that no selfish or evil consideration is allowed to bias or divert you: then make your decision, asking God to block you in whatever would be hurtful, foolish, or perilous. You will not make a mistake if you sincerely and prayerfully adopt these rules. If your eye is single (i.e., straight), your whole body will be full of fight.

There is every reason why we should employ the faculties of judgment and choice. When Samuel sent the young Saul away, he said, "Thou shalt do as occasion shall serve thee"; we are also told of Peter, that when the angel left him, he considered the matter, and came to Mary's house.

But God's purpose is behind all human decisions. There must be room for man to devise his steps, else we should become automatons. But all our volitions and choices must be ultimately subjected to the Rule and Will of the Most High. Let us commit our works and ways to God. We must roll our burden and ourselves on our faithful Creator. Of what use is it to worry over past mistakes? We cannot undo them, but we can ask God to bring good out of evil. He will put right the mistakes, and compensate for the failures. Let the Father's hand direct your steps. If with all your devising and planning, you cannot settle the matter, throw the whole responsibility back on Him and ask Him to undertake it.

Let us seek so to live that our ways may please the Lord (Prov. 16:7). "We beseech you," said St. Paul, "that as ye received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, even so ye do walk." We need to wait on God that He may show us the right way, and there is a sure sign—Via Crucis, via lucis. Jesus said, "I am the Way: Follow Me!"

PRAYER - Lead us, O God, by paths we have not known. Make the darkness light before us, the crooked places straight, and the rough places plain. Let Thine Angel lead us forth into the liberty of the sons of God. AMEN.

Proverbs 16:16-20

Listen And Live

The press called him a "fallen power figure" after a scandal forced his resignation from a top political advisory post in Washington, DC. Looking back on how it all happened, the man said: "I started out being excited working for the president. Then I became arrogant, then I became grandiose, and then I became self-destructive. I'm prone to being infatuated with power and believing that the rules don't apply to me." An Associated Press article said that during the months leading up to his resignation, "he ignored his wife, ignored his friends, ignored the rules."

I've fallen into a similar trap, and perhaps you have too. It happens to us all when we allow pride to shape our attitudes instead of embracing humility before God. The book of Proverbs reminds us, "The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding" (Prov. 15:31-32).

Is a friend or family member trying to give you a wise word of correction today? Is there guidance in the Bible that you've been ignoring? Pride says, "I don't want to hear it." Wisdom says, "You're close to the edge. Humble yourself. Stop, listen, and live!" —

David C. McCasland

Refusing to listen to faithful rebuke

Can make you feel haughty inside;

But if you will follow the word of the Lord

You'll conquer your self-centered pride. --Hess

Knowing God makes us humble; knowing ourselves keeps us humble.

Proverbs 16:16-32

This Is Better

People all over the world are constantly looking for the better item, whether buying fruit in a market or choosing a place to live. We examine, ponder, compare, and finally make a choice based on what we believe is better. I can't imagine anyone saying, "I'm convinced this one is worse, so I'll take it."

The book of Proverbs is filled with comparisons that point us toward the right pathway in life. Because the book's purpose is to give the reader knowledge and wisdom based on the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:2,7), it's not surprising to find statements saying, "This is better than that."

In Proverbs 16, we read that it is better to get wisdom than gold or silver (Pr 16:16); better to be humble among the poor than to be proud among the wealthy (Pr 16:19); better to control our temper than to rule a city (Pr 16:32). Some people have the ability to be both wise and wealthy. But when faced with a choice between the two, Proverbs says wisdom is the better alternative.

As we read the book of Proverbs, let's look for those signs that say, "This is better!" When God's Word shapes our thinking and guides our choices, we'll discover that His way is always better. —David C. McCasland

Not what we have, but what we use,

Not what we see, but what we choose—

These are the things that mar or bless

The sum of human happiness. —Anon.

A little wisdom is better than a lot of wealth.

Proverbs 16:16-22

Our Daily Bread

Theodore Roosevelt and a friend engaged in a nighttime ritual to keep themselves humble.

Author Leslie B. Flynn tells about it:

"After an evening of conversation they would go outside on a clear night and search the skies until one or the other found a faint speck of light-mist in a certain spot in the sky. Then he would recite, 'That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. That speck is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of a hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun.' Then he would conclude, 'Now that we have our perspective, let's call it a day!'"

Pride is the constant enemy of the Christian. From deep within come subtle reminders of "how important" we are, how "great" are our achievements, or how much "better" we are than others. We need to keep alert to the sin of pride so that we can immediately reject these suggestions. Through prayer, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and continual study of the Scriptures, we will gain heaven's perspective, which will help us maintain a realistic opinion of ourselves.

Believers who strive to walk in Christian maturity will avoid dwelling on thoughts of great accomplishments and spiritual superiority. Paul, a man who had more reason than any of us to be proud, re-minded us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Roosevelt's example is a good one to follow. The "Andromeda perspective" will help us win the battle against pride. —D. C. Egner.

We see our true selves when we stand in the shadow of Christ.

Proverbs 16:16-20 Listen And Live

The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. —Proverbs 15:31

The press called him a “fallen power figure” after a scandal forced his resignation from a top political advisory post in Washington, DC. Looking back on how it all happened, the man said: “I started out being excited working for the president. Then I became arrogant, then I became grandiose, and then I became self-destructive. I’m prone to being infatuated with power and believing that the rules don’t apply to me.” An Associated Press article said that during the months leading up to his resignation, “he ignored his wife, ignored his friends, ignored the rules.”

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Is a friend or family member trying to give you a wise word of correction today? Is there guidance in the Bible that you’ve been ignoring? Pride says, “I don’t want to hear it.” Wisdom says, “You’re close to the edge. Humble yourself. Stop, listen, and live!”

Refusing to listen to faithful rebuke

Can make you feel haughty inside;

But if you will follow the word of the Lord

You’ll conquer your self-centered pride. —Hess

Knowing God makes us humble; knowing ourselves keeps us humble.

Proverbs 16:16-33

How to Be Free

The human spirit longs for freedom. But for many people, its pursuit actually leads to greater bondage.

Bible teacher Henrietta Mears once told her students, “A bird is free in the air. Place a bird in the water and he has lost his liberty. A fish is free in the water, but leave him on the sand and he perishes... The Christian is free when he does the will of God and is obedient to God’s command. This is as natural a realm for God’s child as the water is for the fish, or the air for the bird.”

Although King Solomon didn’t use the word freedom in Proverbs 16, he understood that it comes only within the sphere of honoring God and His Word. By contrast, bondage comes to those who ignore God’s truth. Liberty results from practicing humility, trust, careful conversation, and self-control (Proverbs 16:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24). But bondage inevitably enslaves those who are governed by willful rebellion, pride, arrogance, strife, and malicious trouble-making (Proverbs 16:8,27, 28, 29, 30).

Do you want to be free? Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:31, 32). Jesus is the ultimate source of true freedom. —Mart R. De Haan II

(Below is an older version of this same devotional)

He is caught in the cords of his sin (Proverbs 5:22).

Everybody longs for freedom. But for many people its pursuit leads to bondage. Beloved Bible teacher Henrietta Mears knew the secret of true freedom, and she wanted her students to know it too. With young people in mind, she said, “A bird is free in the air. Place a bird in the water and he has lost his liberty. A fish is free in the water, but leave him on the sand and he perishes. He is out of his realm. So, young people, the Christian is free when he does the will of God and is obedient to God’s command. This is as natural a realm for God’s child as the water is for the fish, or the air for the bird.”

Wise King Solomon urged his son to understand that true freedom is possible only within the sphere of God-centered living, for which He created us. By contrast, bondage predictably and inescapably comes to anyone who ignores God’s truth. Proverbs 16 describes the liberty and satisfaction that come from practicing humility, trust, careful conversation, and self-control. But it also warns about the inevitable bondage that comes into the lives of people governed by willful rebellion, pride, arrogance, strife, and malicious trouble-making.

The New Testament introduces us to Jesus—the ultimate source of our freedom. He, our Creator and Redeemer, said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31, 32). —M. R. De Haan II

True freedom is not having our own way, but yielding to God's way.

Proverbs 16:16-23

Listen And Learn

A wise man will hear and increase learning. --Proverbs 1:5.

After receiving my letter, she responded, "Thank you for your answer. It was information that I didn't know. I just took for granted what I had learned in childhood. But it is a poor day when one doesn't learn something new--so at 84 I am still learning."

A willingness to learn is a mark of growth and wisdom. Proverbs 1:5 states, "A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel." The Hebrew word for learning in this verse means "a taking in."

If we desire to grow in our knowledge of God and learn to please Him, we need not fear discarding old ideas and taking in new ones that more adequately explain the Scriptures. People who are seeking wisdom will welcome new ideas. They will test them by the truths of the Bible, either to confirm what they already believe or to enlarge their knowledge and understanding.

We must be open to God's truth as He teaches us through His Word and the people around us. Are we listening, testing, and learning? --D J De Haan

Think About It

When was the last time you admitted you were wrong?

Why is it so hard to do? What have you learned

recently from another believer?

To make room for wisdom, get rid of pride.

Proverbs 16:18

Today in the Word

March 12, 2014

In the story of Icarus, his father created wings attached by wax in order to escape their unjust imprisonment by the king of Crete. When they reached Greece, his father landed and told his son to do the same. But Icarus, full of pride that he could fly like a bird, soared further away from earth, ignoring the wisdom of his father. The sun melted the wax, he lost his wings, and the young man fell to his death because of his pride.

Proverbs 16:19

People Pressure

The desire for the approval of others makes us do strange things. We wear clothing that is fashionable whether we like it or not, we accept invitations we'd rather decline, and we work much harder than we want to for a level of financial success we don't need. Most regrettably, however, we sometimes choose to follow a crowd that encourages us to do what is wrong.

In 1 Kings 12, we read about King Rehoboam, who also succumbed to people pressure. He rejected the good advice of older wise men who had known his father Solomon and the mistakes he had made as king. Rehoboam listened instead to the counsel of his peers, younger advisors with whom he had grown up. They were probably motivated by pride and a desire for power, and he was obviously swayed by their influence. How dearly he paid for his mistake!

People pressure—we are all influenced by it. It bears down on us from all directions. But we can choose the path we will take. If we are swayed by the proud or by those who love money, live for pleasure, or long for power, people pressure will lead us down the path that ends in destruction. But if we heed the counsel of those who are humble, good, and godly, we will follow the way that pleases God. —Herbert Vander Lugt

"Seek ye first" not earth's aspirations,

Ceaseless longings, vain desirings,

But your precious soul's requirings—

"Seek ye first!" —Anon.

Those who follow the crowd soon become part of the crowd

Proverbs 16:20

Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Wisdom is man's true strength; and, under its guidance, he best accomplishes the ends of his being. Wisely handling the matter of life gives to man the richest enjoyment, and presents the noblest occupation for his powers; hence by it he finds good in the fullest sense. Without wisdom, man is as the wild ass's colt, running hither and thither, wasting strength which might be profitably employed. Wisdom is the compass by which man is to steer across the trackless waste of life; without it he is a derelict vessel, the sport of winds and waves. A man must be prudent in such a world as this, or he will find no good, but be betrayed into unnumbered ills. The pilgrim will sorely wound his feet among the briars of the wood of life if he do not pick his steps with the utmost caution. He who is in a wilderness infested with robber bands must handle matters wisely if he would journey safely. If, trained by the Great Teacher, we follow where he leads, we shall find good, even while in this dark abode; there are celestial fruits to be gathered this side of Eden's bowers, and songs of paradise to be sung amid the groves of earth. But where shall this wisdom be found? Many have dreamed of it, but have not possessed it. Where shall we learn it? Let us listen to the voice of the Lord, for he hath declared the secret; he hath revealed to the sons of men wherein true wisdom lieth, and we have it in the text, "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." The true way to handle a matter wisely is to trust in the Lord. This is the sure clue to the most intricate labyrinths of life, follow it and find eternal bliss. He who trusts in the Lord has a diploma for wisdom granted by inspiration: happy is he now, and happier shall he be above. Lord, in this sweet eventide walk with me in the garden, and teach me the wisdom of faith.

Proverbs 16:20-30 Free Compliments

Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. —Proverbs 16:24

During a time of economic crisis and depressing news, two students at Purdue University decided to lift the spirits of people on campus with some encouraging words. For two hours every Wednesday afternoon, Cameron Brown and Brett Westcott stood along a busy walkway holding a large "Free Compliments" sign and saying nice things to everyone who passed by. "I like your red coat." "Cool snow boots." "Very nice smile." Some students said they deliberately walked past "the compliment guys" every Wednesday just to hear a kind word.

I was struck by these two young men who looked at people with the goal of commending them, rather than finding fault or being critical. Is that how I, as a follower of Christ, view others each day?

Instead of being like the person who is focused on evil and whose speech is "like a burning fire" (Prov. 16:27), we can take a different approach, knowing that what we say begins deep inside us. "The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips. Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Pr 16:23-24).

Kind words may be free, but they give a priceless lift of spirit. Why not encourage someone today?

The power in words can build up or tear down—

Create a big smile or produce a sad frown;

So in all your contacts with people each day,

Be sure to encourage in all that you say. —Fitzhugh

A gentle word of compliment falls lightly but it carries great weight.

Proverbs 16:20a

HAPPY INSIDE

My 6-year-old son Steven and I were sitting beside his bed reading a book one evening when he suddenly whispered in my ear, "I want to know how to be a Christian."

Steven's first-grade teacher had been talking about salvation at school, and he wanted to get the matter settled. So we put aside the book and got down to business.

Since he had heard the story of Jesus all his life, it wasn't hard to explain salvation. Soon he was praying and asking Jesus to save him.

A little later, after he had run and told Mom the good news, we resumed our reading. Suddenly he looked up and said, "I feel all happy inside."

That's a good way to describe the peace and contentment that Jesus gives to us as Christians. It's a peace that comes from knowing that the penalty for our sin has been taken care of (Eph. 1:7). We have the assurance that we have been chosen and predestined to eternal life (vv. 4-5, 10-11). We have the seal of the indwelling Holy Spirit who guarantees our future (vv. 13-14). And nothing can take us out of God's hand (Jn. 10:28). When bad times hit, we can call out for God's help as one of His children (Ro 8:15-17).

What else do we need to be happy inside!-- J. David Branon

O God, we thank You for the peace

And happiness You give

Because we've trusted in Your son

Who died so we could live.-- Sper

To know happiness, get to know Jesus.

Proverbs 16:20 How To Be Happy

Read: Psalm 146 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 27-28; Matthew 8:18-34

Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help. —Psalm 146:5

Everyone wants to be happy. But many fail in their quest to find that elusive prize because they are looking in the wrong places.

Proverbs 16:20 tells us, "Whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he." And Psalm 146:5 indicates that happiness comes to those who find their help and hope in God.

The foundation for happiness is a proper relationship with the Lord. But to fully experience that happiness, we must build on that foundation in practical ways. I found this list of Ten Rules for Happier Living:

Give something away.

Do a kindness.

Give thanks always.

Work with vim and vigor.

Visit the elderly and learn from their experience.

Look intently into the face of a baby and marvel.

Laugh often—it's life's lubricant.

Pray to know God's way.

Plan as though you will live forever—you will.

Live as though today is your last day on earth.

These are excellent ideas for living a happy life. Undergird each of these rules with praise, and your happiness will be complete. "Praise the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord" (Ps. 146:1-2).

Trusting and obeying the Lord brings true happiness.

Proverbs 16:20-25 My Way?

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. —Proverbs 16:25

Think about the worst intellectual matchups possible. For instance, what if we put Albert Einstein in a room with a first-grader to debate the theory of relativity? Or how about George Washington Carver versus a middle-schooler discussing biochemical engineering?

It's silly to think of putting these pairs together for discussions. One is the ultimate expert; the other would know little if anything

about the topic.

Here's another one: God versus anyone arguing about His plan for mankind. Now we're talking mismatch! Yet we often hear of people trying to explain away God's matchless wisdom and how their way is better than His.

I received a letter from a man in prison who said: "I came to the point in my life where I finally accepted the fact that God is real and the Creator of everything. I grew tired of trying to do things my way. When I started humbling myself and accepting God's Word, I found the answer."

How ridiculous to reject God's plan of salvation because we think we know better! Only by placing our trust in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins can we be reconciled to God (John 14:6; Rom 3:23; 6:23). Are you still trying to do things your own way, thinking you know best? (Prov. 16:25). Agree with God and go His way.

There aren't many ways into heaven;

The Bible says there's only one:

Confessing Christ Jesus as Savior,

Believing in God's only Son. —Sper

Jesus is not one of many ways to approach God, nor is He the best of several ways; He is the only way. —Tozer

Proverbs 16:20-31 The Beautiful Years

The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness. —Proverbs 16:31

The changing seasons here in Michigan can be absolutely stunning. The vivid hues of autumn that adorn the landscape are a glorious sight. During spring and summer, the color in the leaves is not visible because of the presence of chlorophyll. But in those last weeks before winter, the green fades and the hidden color is revealed.

We often think of the springtime of youth as the most beautiful time of life. The body is strong, the mind is sharp, and there's an insatiable desire to learn. Yet the sixties, seventies, and eighties are even more beautiful— that is, for those who are "found in the way of righteousness" (Prov. 16:31).

In his book *The Best Is Yet To Be*, Henry Durbanville tells about a woman who displayed so much charm and grace that others couldn't help but notice. One day a younger woman said to her, "I think you are perfectly beautiful!" The woman quietly replied, "I should be, my dear. After all, I'm 74 years old!"

So it is with those who know the Lord and have allowed Him to lead them throughout their lives. When we walk with God, the years have a way of refining us. The sufferings of a lifetime mellow us and reveal what we really are in Christ. The later years are the beautiful years!

As sunset falls upon one's life,

Its golden rays reveal

The inner traits of faith and love

The years have made so real. —DJJ

There's nothing like the beauty of a loving heart shining through a seasoned face.

Proverbs 16:21-33 Ike's Anger Problem

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. —Proverbs 16:32

On June 6, 1944, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, was the most powerful man on earth. Under his authority, the largest amphibious army ever assembled prepared to liberate the Nazi-dominated continent of Europe. How was Eisenhower able to lead such a vast army? Part of the answer can be linked to his remarkable skill in working with different kinds of people.

What many do not know, however, is that Ike hadn't always gotten along with others. As a boy, he often got into fistfights at school. But fortunately he had a caring mother who instructed him in God's Word. One time, when she was bandaging his hands after an angry outburst, she quoted Proverbs 16:32, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." Years later, Eisenhower wrote, "I have always looked back on that conversation as one of the most valuable moments of my life." Undoubtedly, by learning to control his anger, Eisenhower was able to work effectively with others.

Inevitably, each of us will at times be tempted to lash out in anger. Yet through God's work in our lives we can learn to control our anger. What better way to influence people than through a gentle spirit.

Thinking It Over

Do you struggle to control your anger?

For help, read Moses: His Anger And What It Cost Him at www.discoveryseries.org/q0716

He who conquers his anger conquers himself.

Proverbs 16:23 A Wall Of Words

People often hide their feelings behind a wall of words. They use a kind of double-talk in which words and feelings do not agree. A communications consultant who holds workshops on this subject says that many people are afraid that honesty in speech will cost them friendships, love, or respect. So they either keep their lips zipped or say something other than what they mean.

Other factors that may impede straight talk are shyness, lack of confidence, fear of displaying ignorance, trying to avoid criticism, and not wanting to hurt someone's feelings.

Believers in Christ are not exempt from this problem. Trying to be both loving and truthful can be difficult, but the Bible tells us how to deal with this dilemma. The book of James teaches us that we need the wisdom that comes from God above. The Lord will enable us by His Holy Spirit to speak effectively and honestly. His wisdom is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (Jas 3:17).

Let's govern our speech with these qualities from God's Word. Then we will not have to hide behind a wall of words. —Mart De Haan

How easy it is to use many words

And yet be unwise in the things that you say;

So willingly yield your speech to the Lord,

And hearts will be blest by you every day. --DJD

Wisdom is knowing when to speak your mind and when to mind your speech.

Proverbs 16:23a

Our Daily Bread

Experts tell us that people often hide what they are trying to say behind a wall of words. This is a kind of doubletalk in which their words do not coincide with their feelings. Gerald Nierenberg, a New York lawyer, wrote a book about this problem called *Meta-Talk: Guide to Hidden Meanings in Conversation*. In it he gives 350 examples of verbal distortion.

A communication consultant who holds workshops on this subject says many people fear that honesty in speech will cost them friendships, love, or respect. So they either keep their lips zipped or say something other than what they mean. Shyness, lack of self-worth, fear of displaying ignorance, fear of criticism, and fear of hurting someone's feelings also may impede honest communication.

Christians are not immune to this problem. Trying to be both loving and truthful can be extremely difficult. The Bible, however, provides a balanced and optimistic approach to this dilemma. Being honest with people may hurt, but if we speak kindly and with compassion we give them the support they need to face reality.

The third chapter of James indicates that divine wisdom can help us talk effectively, for it is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (Jas 3:17). Believers who let these characteristics govern their speech will not have to hide behind a wall of words. —M. R. De Haan II

Gentle words fall lightly, but they have great weight.

Proverbs 16:24

"INSENSITIVE THOMAS"

Some people are good at popping the balloon of those who are feeling the excitement of a new experience. And their negative spirit

tends to discourage others.

A new convert was excited about an answer to prayer. "I had a flat tire and couldn't make my jack work," he told his pastor. "I prayed that someone would stop to help me, and within a minute a man came along and had me on my way in no time." The pastor replied, "Now, don't get too excited. He might have stopped even if you had not prayed!"

Jesus' disciples were excited. They had talked with the risen Lord and were filled with joy and confidence. But Thomas, who wasn't with them on that first Easter evening, was skeptical. He said, "Unless I see ... I will not believe" (Jn. 20:25). Yes, it was astounding news. Yet Thomas could have responded positively if he had recalled what Jesus had promised. He might have said, "I'm having a hard time believing you, but I can see how excited you are, and I really want to see Jesus myself." Instead, he blurted out his unbelief, and I can't help but feel that this dampened the joy of the other disciples.

Lord, help us to respond to people with words that are kind and sensitive - even when we have doubts. -- Herbert Vander Lugt

Beware of those who stand aloof

And greet each venture with reproof;

The world would stop if things were run

By men who say, "It can't be done!"- Anonymous

Work at building people up, not tearing them down.

Proverbs 16:25 Which Wisdom?

Read: James 3:13-18

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield. —James 3:17

Is it wise to be bitterly envious of other people's possessions, talents, or good looks? Is it wise to be selfishly ambitious—and then brag about what your ambition brings you?

A passage in the Bible actually seems to call such attitudes wise. James used the word wisdom to describe "bitter envy and self-seeking" (3:14-15). That's surprising, because we normally equate wisdom with something good. But James used the word in a specific context. The source of this wisdom, he pointed out, is evil. It doesn't come "from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic." It is the wisdom that leads to immoral decisions about how life should be lived.

This kind of "wisdom" is all around us. Bitter envy and selfish ambition threaten many of our institutions and destroy relationships. Society pays the price for this twisted thinking at all levels, for it always leads to "confusion and every evil thing" (v.16).

The prophet Isaiah said, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes" (Isa. 5:21). As believers in Christ, we must pursue a higher wisdom—the wisdom that comes from God. It is pure, peaceable, and gentle. It is merciful and without hypocrisy (Jas. 3:17). Ask God for that kind of wisdom. Is there any doubt which wisdom is better?

The wisdom from above flies in the face

Of what the world holds in death's embrace;

Willing to yield, yet resolutely pure

And peaceable, God's wisdom will endure. —Gustafson

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. —Proverbs 16:25

Proverbs 16:27

FIERY WORDS

Few crimes are as senseless as arson. In late 1993, portions of the Southern California landscape were blackened by a rash of brushfires set by arsonists. Woodlands vanished, homes were reduced to ashes, animals and human beings lost their lives.

Slander is verbal arson. Lies about a person's character or actions are extremely destructive. They consume reputations and destroy relationships.

In Shakespeare's play "Othello", the character Iago mapped out the damage slander does:

Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing. 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands. But he who filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him and makes me poor indeed.

King Solomon warned that a scoundrel has evil "on his lips like a burning fire" (Pr 16:27). In contrast, he said that pleasant words are instructive and soothing, promoting spiritual health (Pr 16:21-24).

When you're tempted to set a match to your brother's reputation with fiery words, stop! Ask God to help you speak words that build up instead of destroy. Don't be a verbal arsonist.-- Haddon W. Robinson

Guard well your lips, for non can know

What evils from the tongue may flow;

What guilt, what grief may be incurred

By one uncautious, evil word!-- Elliott

Like fire, words can either burn or warm.

Proverbs 16:28

It Takes Just One

In 1520, one person stepped off a Spanish ship in Mexico and caused the deaths of thousands of people. The man was a soldier under the leadership of Pánfilo de Narváez, and he had smallpox. The soldier didn't know it, but wherever he went he exposed the citizens to a new disease. As a result of the ensuing smallpox epidemic, many thousands of Mexican citizens died.

One man. That's all it took. His contact with the unsuspecting Mexican people led to a horrible, painful scourge. The devastating effects of that disease traveled from one person to another, infecting a large segment of the population.

The spread of any deadly disease is similar to the spread of a spiritual sickness that sometimes strikes churches—the disease of gossip and unedifying words (Ephesians 4:29, 30-note, Ep 4:31, 32-note).

It's not unusual for a happy and well-adjusted congregation of people to be infected after just one person introduces gossip. Soon dissension is running rampant among people who had been eagerly working together, and the church finds itself spending more time on damage control than on ministry.

Each of us should be careful not to spread the sickness of gossip. Instead, let's use our words to strengthen and encourage one another.—Dave Branon

A careless word may kindle strife,

A cruel word may wreck a life;

A timely word may lessen stress,

A loving word may heal and bless. —Anon.

To silence gossip, refuse to repeat it

Proverbs 16:31

Growing Old; Growing Up

Old age is the season when we can give ourselves to "soul-making," as the Quakers say. We can concentrate on getting to know God better and cultivating character traits that make us more like Him. Age breaks down our strength and energy and strips us of our busyness. It's God's way of getting us to slow down so we'll take more time for Him. We can think more deeply about life, about ourselves, and about others.

Change is an inevitable part of life. We're being shaped every minute we live. Every thought, every decision, every action, every emotion, every response is shaping us into one kind of person or another. Either we're moving toward likeness to Christ or away from Him into some sort of caricature of the person God intended us to be.

It's true, we lose some things as we age: physical strength, quickness, agility. But think of the calm God gives us, the peace He leaves us, the benefits of His salvation, and His faithfulness to us (Psalm 71:15).

Old age is the best time to grow in grace and godliness, in inner strength and beauty of character. "The silver-haired head," the wise man said, "is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31). —David H. Roper

When wrinkles and weakness come with age

And life with its stress takes a toll,

Yet beauty and vigor can still be seen

When Jesus gives peace to one's soul. —D. De Haan

"Grow up" is what the young are told—"age gracefully" when growing old.

Proverbs 16:32

Today in the Word

June 29, 2013

Novak Djokovic has long been a star tennis player, but in 2011 he changed his diet, and his tennis improved even more. Djokovic had been diagnosed with celiac disease, a condition that makes a person unable to tolerate gluten. He stopped eating pizza, pasta, and bread and admits, "It's helped me because my movement is much sharper now and I feel great physically."

Paul uses the analogy of physical competition to emphasize the need for self-control in the Christian life. He talks about a race and a boxing match, and he's taken obvious inspiration from the Isthmian Games, an athletic festival held in Corinth every two years. For those who set out to win their race, Paul noted that they endured stricter training. For foot races, this would probably include the regimen of logging endurance miles, performing speed and agility exercises, eating healthy food, and getting enough sleep. It's a competitive spirit that drives their physically punishing rituals: they want to win the crown, which in the case of the Isthmian Games was a victory wreath made out of withered celery. If this token of victory meant so much for the athletes in the Isthmian Games, imagine what it means for us as Christians to receive a crown that will last forever!

Self-control is always hard in the moment: it's never easy to say no to a momentary pleasure for a future gain. But athletes do this all the time, forsaking the pleasures of junk food and lazy days on the couch so that they can be in shape to win their race. Christians can be equally self-controlled for the sake of their calling. Paul describes his commitment to strict training as a preacher of Christ, and he's unwilling to disqualify himself.

Apply the Word

Sometimes our Christian life centers around the question, "Can I do this or that?" We want to know whether our actions are permissible (and we like to push the boundaries as far as we can)! But our readings on self-control have taught us that we shouldn't simply ask, "Can I do this?" but "Is this beneficial?" and "Will this help me in my calling?"

Proverbs 16:33a

He Is In Control

Flipping a coin, drawing straws, or taking a number out of a hat have long been ways of resolving disputes. I once read of an election in an Oklahoma town where the two leading candidates each received 140 votes. Rather than go through the expense of another election, city officials used a chance method to decide the winner, and everyone accepted the outcome. What the writer of Proverbs said proved to be true: "Casting lots causes contentions to cease, and keeps the mighty apart" (Prov. 18:18).

Many people view all of this as nothing more than a matter of chance. But the amazing thing about what the Word of God calls "casting lots" is that the Lord is ultimately the One who controls the outcome. This was true in the story of Jonah, where God showed Himself to be Lord even through the actions of superstitious, unbelieving sailors.

So, what does all of this say to us as believers? From the Christian's perspective, there is no such thing as chance. God is either directly or indirectly involved in everything that happens to us. He can therefore be trusted and obeyed in any circumstance, because even the smallest details are under His control. —Mart De Haan

Things don't just happen to those who love God,

They're planned by His own dear hand,

Then molded and shaped, and timed by His clock;

Things don't just happen--they're planned. --Fields

God is behind the scenes and controls the scenes He is behind.

Proverbs 16:33

Spurgeon - Morning and evening

If the disposal of the lot is the Lord's whose is the arrangement of our whole life? If the simple casting of a lot is guided by him, how much more the events of our entire life—especially when we are told by our blessed Saviour: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered: not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father." It would bring a holy calm over your mind, dear friend, if you were always to remember this. It would so relieve your mind from anxiety, that you would be the better able to walk in patience, quiet, and cheerfulness as a Christian should. When a man is anxious he cannot pray with faith; when he is troubled about the world, he cannot serve his Master, his thoughts are serving himself. If you would "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," all things would then be added unto you. You are meddling with Christ's business, and neglecting your own when you fret about your lot and circumstances. You have been trying "providing" work and forgetting that it is yours to obey. Be wise and attend to the obeying, and let Christ manage the providing. Come and survey your Father's storehouse, and ask whether he will let you starve while he has laid up so great an abundance in his garner? Look at his heart of mercy; see if that can ever prove unkind! Look at his inscrutable wisdom; see if that will ever be at fault. Above all, look up to Jesus Christ your Intercessor, and ask yourself, while he pleads, can your Father deal ungraciously with you? If he remembers even sparrows, will he forget one of the least of his poor children? "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved."

PROVERBS 17

Proverbs 17:14

History Of A Murder

The newspaper reported a tragic incident of violence that took place in a South American country. A peasant killed his best friend while they were arguing about political differences. When asked why he did it, he replied with these chilling words: "We began peacefully, and then we argued. I killed him when I ran out of words."

This tragedy calls to mind Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 about the close connection between anger and murder. First He stressed the seriousness of anger (Mt 5:21, 22-note). He warned that malicious anger, like murder, would be punished by God. Then He gave practical advice designed to defuse anger in a person who has something against another (Mt 5:23, 24, 25, 26-note).

We should all take a close look at our inner rage. We might think we can control it. Unfortunately, though, our feelings of hostility often control us and cause us to do things we would never do while thinking clearly. That's why unresolved anger needs to be seen as a time-bomb that can explode, destroying ourselves and doing irreparable damage to others. True, not all anger is wrong. But all wrong anger needs to be acknowledged and confessed before it leads to "murder." —Mart De Haan

When I have lost my temper,

I've lost my reason too;

I'm never proud of anything

Which angrily I do. --Jackson

He who conquers his anger conquers a strong enemy.

Proverbs 17

Today in the Word

April 17, 2013

For thousands of years, gold and silver have been refined through a process called cupellation. Metal ore is placed in specially-designed dishes called cupels and heated in a furnace to temperatures exceeding 1,760 degrees Fahrenheit. Base metals and impurities are oxidized, while the pure gold and silver remain.

Pr 17:3 in today's reading compares this refining or purifying process to how God works in our hearts. This type of proverb makes use of metaphor, a figure of speech that uses one realm to signify another. In this case, the material realm of metals and furnaces

stands in for the spiritual realm and God's testing (cf. 1Th 2:4). Since our hearts are sinful, they need purifying, just as gold and silver need to be separated from baser metals. This purifying process can be painful, but the results are worth it. The Lord is actively working in us to cleanse us from sin.

Another type of proverb you've no doubt noticed makes use of simile, which is similar to metaphor but uses "like" or "as" to make the comparison. Pr 17:14, for example, says, "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out." The simile speaks for itself, indicating a relatively small action with escalating consequences. The first-half comparison is then the basis for the second-half advice, which amounts to "so don't do it" or "you should know better."

Still another type of saying found in Proverbs 17 is the ironic observation. In this kind of parallelism, both halves of the proverb say essentially the same thing (as opposed to comparing, contrasting, or developing an idea). Irony is a kind of dry humor that notices gaps between expectations and reality. Today's verse is a well-known and amusing example!

Apply the Word - "Drop the matter before a dispute breaks out" (Pr 17:14) is good advice, but what if it's too late? Can the relationship be restored? Yes, because God's love is greater than human foolishness and sin (Pr 17:9; cf. Pr 10:12). To "cover over an offense" is not to cover it up or just forget about it—this phrase means to blanket the offense with true forgiveness.

Proverbs 17:17-22 Good Medicine

In a Better Homes and Gardens article titled "Laugh Your Way to Good Health," Nick Gallo made an observation that echoes what Solomon wrote thousands of years ago: "A merry heart does good, like medicine" (Proverbs 17:22). Gallo said, "Humor is good medicine—and can actually help keep you in good health." He quoted William F. Fry, M.D., who describes laughter as "inner jogging" and says that it's good for a person's cardiovascular system.

Comparing laughter to exercise, Gallo pointed out that when a person laughs heartily several physical benefits occur. There's a temporary lowering of blood pressure, a decreased rate of breathing, and a reduction in muscle tension. He said that many people sense a "relaxed afterglow." He concluded, "An enduring sense of humor, especially combined with other inner resources such as faith and optimism, appears to be a potent force for better health."

Christians, above all others, should benefit from laughter because we have the greatest reason to be joyful. Our faith is firmly rooted in God, and our optimism is based on the assurance that our lives are under His wise control.

Don't be afraid to enjoy a good laugh—it's good medicine.—Richard De Haan

Laughter is a remedy

For sorrow and for care;

It brings joy to troubled souls,

To damaged hearts, repair. —Sper

He who laughs, lasts.

Proverbs 17:17

FRIENDS

A widower and a widow I know are both aged, shut-in, quite alone, and on the prayer list at their church. And they both have a true friend. The widower, who loves classical music, looks forward to alternate Tuesdays because a young man comes with a couple of tapes and spends the evening visiting, and they enjoy the music together.

The widow, who is diabetic and has a very limited income, receives visits regularly from a woman who is very kind to her. Recently she bought her a blood-testing device that greatly helps her control her diabetes. It's something the diabetic woman could not afford to buy for herself.

Both the widower and the widow are fortunate to have at least one person who really cares about them. There are many people who are friendless, and no one ever visits them. There's a tragic shortage of those who will take the time to be a friend.

Even Paul, who knew the reality of Christ's presence, needed friends as he awaited execution in a Roman dungeon. He longed for flesh-and-blood companionship. He wanted a heavy garment and some books. He could get these only from friends.

Lord, help us to be a friend to someone in need. Herbert Vander Lugt

To those in darkest night,

Go be a kindly friend;

Pour love and sunshine on their cares --

And broken lives you'll mend.--Zimmerman

A true friend will not let you stand alone.

Proverbs 17:17a

Friendship with God

Page through an old-time hymnal and notice how often the songwriters referred to the blessing of God's friendship. Stop and think about what that really means. Yes, it's a blessing to have human friends who enrich our lives. A devoted friend, as Proverbs 17:17 tells us, "loves at all times," standing with us steadfastly through life's sunshine and storm.

Indeed, some of us know gratefully by our own experience that "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). We identify with David and Jonathan when we read about the bond between them (1 Samuel 18:1).

Friendship on a human level is wonderful, but what about friendship with God? It's an incredible blessing to have the Creator and Sustainer of our universe as a friend. Although worshiped by countless heavenly hosts, He takes great joy in His relationship with us.

Are we neglecting the privilege of walking with God, the greatest of all friends? Today, with gratitude and awe, let's spend time with Him in prayer and in reading His Word.

Remember that Jesus called His followers friends (John 15:15). What an honor that we can enjoy friendship with God!—Vernon C Grounds

I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend!

He loved me ere I knew Him;

He drew me with the cords of love,

And thus He bound me to Him. —Small

When you spend time with God, you invest in a forever friendship.

Proverbs 17:17 Friendship

Read: 1 Samuel 23:14-18

A friend loves at all times. —Proverbs 17:17

Friendship is one of life's greatest gifts. True friends seek a special kind of good for their friends: the highest good, which is that they might know God and love Him with all of their heart, soul, and mind. German pastor and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The aim of friendship is exclusively determined by what God's will is for the other person."

Jonathan, David's friend, is a sterling example of true friendship. David was in exile, hiding in the Desert of Ziph, when he learned that "Saul had come out to seek his life" (1 Sam. 23:15). Jonathan went to Horesh to find David. The significance of this scene lies in Jonathan's intent: He helped David find strength in God or, as the text puts it, he "strengthened his hand [grip] in God" (v.16).

That is the essence of Christian friendship. Beyond common interests, beyond affection, beyond wit and laughter is the ultimate aim of sowing in others the words of eternal life, leaving them with reminders of God's wisdom, refreshing their spirit with words of His love, and strengthening their grip on God.

Pray for your friends and ask God to give you a word "in season" to help them find renewed strength in our God and His Word.

Dear Lord, thank You for loving us. May Your love

compel us to show love to others. Give us

sensitivity to Your Spirit that we might know how

to encourage them in their walk with You.

A true friend is a gift from God and one who points us back to Him.

Proverbs 17:17b

Time For Friendship

We really can't make more time. There are only 24 hours in a day, and no matter how frantically we try it's impossible to stretch those 24 into 25. So our problem isn't how to increase time but how wisely to use our daily allotment of those 1,440 minutes as they steadily tick away.

Stop, then, and think about this vital issue. Apart from eating, sleeping, doing necessary tasks, and working at income-earning jobs, how are we spending that precious commodity we call time? Whatever else we're doing, are we giving time to relationships?

Well-known author Les Parrott III points out that few things are more conducive to our well-being than investing time in friendships. Research shows, he reports, that "ignoring friendship not only diminishes your quality of life but could also be a health hazard." Parrott says that close friendships can reduce the risk of illness.

If investing time in strengthening our friendships is so essential to our well-being, what about our relationship with Jesus? He said to His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, ... but I have called you friends" (John 15:15).

If you have trusted Him as Savior, are you devoting time to deepen your relationship with the best of all friends? —Vernon C Grounds

Our life can be so very busy

That we have no time for friends;

But we must spend more time with Jesus,

For His friendship never ends. —Fitzhugh

Time is a friend when you use it to strengthen your friendship with Jesus!

Proverbs 17:17c

A Faithful Friend

After one of my relatives had a stroke, she needed help to get around and could no longer remember recent events. One day, my wife Ginny suggested that we take her out to dinner. I wondered if we should, because afterward she wouldn't even remember what we had done. Ginny responded, "While we are with her she will know we love her." How true!

All of us need to know we are loved. I recall the answer I received when I asked a 90-year-old shut-in how his grandchildren were doing. He said, "I don't know. I never see them."

The apostle Paul was locked in a damp Roman dungeon, awaiting execution. He couldn't help but feel hurt that many former friends had deserted him. How grateful he was for the friendship of Onesiphorus!

This man left his family and an active ministry in Ephesus to befriend Paul. When he arrived in Rome, he searched diligently to find where Paul was imprisoned (2Ti 1:17-note). And he courageously visited the apostle again and again. Paul said of Onesiphorus, "He often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain" (2Ti 1:16-note).

Remember, "A friend loves at all times," especially in adversity (Proverbs 17:17). Like Onesiphorus, let's commit ourselves to being faithful to our friends.—Herbert Vander Lugt

Someday I hope with you to stand
Before the throne, at God's right hand,
And say to you at journey's end,
"Praise God, you've been to me a friend." —Clark

Adversity is the test of true friendship

Proverbs 17:17d

What is a Friend

Socrates once asked a simple old man what he was most thankful for. The man replied, "That being such as I am, I have had the friends I have had."

Some "friends" are fickle. In the book of Proverbs we read, "Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend" (Pr 19:4). A true friend, however, "loves at all times" (Pr 17:17) and "sticks closer than a brother" (Pr 18:24).

Our English word friend comes from the same root as the word freedom. A genuine friend sets us free to be who and what we are. We can pour out our doubts and talk freely about the wolves howling at the door of our life.

A faithful friend also affirms our worth. Queen Victoria said of William Gladstone, "When I am with him, I feel I am with one of the most important leaders in the world." But of Benjamin Disraeli she said, "He makes me feel as if I am one of the most important leaders of the world."

Christians have an inside track on making and being friends because we are part of one family. Haven't you felt that family tie while talking with a stranger--only to discover that you had Christ in common? And no wonder--He is the truest Friend anyone can have. — Haddon W. Robinson

A friend accepts us as we are

Yet helps us be what we can be;

A friend affirms us when we're weak--

A friend gives strength to set us free. --DJD

Our best friends draw us closer to Christ

Proverbs 17:17 Be A Stander

Read: 2 Timothy 4:9-18 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 20-21; 2 Timothy 4

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. —Proverbs 17:17

Western novelist Stephen Bly says that in the days of America's Old West there were two types of friends (and horses): runners and standers. At the first sign of trouble, the runner would bolt—abandoning you to whatever peril you were facing. But a stander would stick with you no matter the circumstances. Unfortunately, you wouldn't know which kind of friend you had until trouble came. And then it was too late—unless your friend was a stander.

Rather than being concerned with what kind of friends we have, however, we ought to consider what kind of friends we are. In the final days of Paul's ministry, as he awaited death, some who had ministered with him turned into runners and abandoned him to face execution alone. In his last letter, he listed some (like Demas) who had run off, then simply stated, "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11). Luke was a stander. While undoubtedly disappointed by those who had deserted him, Paul must have been deeply comforted to know he was not alone.

Proverbs tells us that "a friend loves at all times" (17:17). During times of adversity, we need friends we can rely on. When the people we know face trouble, what kind of friend will we be—a runner or a stander?

Dear Lord, help us to be the kind of friend who doesn't run when our friends are in need. Give us the courage to stand by them, the wisdom to know what to say, and the ability to serve them. Amen.

A true friend stands with us in times of trial.

Proverbs 17:17e

Three Friends

The Old Testament characters Job and Daniel had much in common. Both went through serious trials and challenges. Both had great success because of the blessing of God's presence in their lives. Both are viewed as giants of the faith, one for his patience in suffering and the other for his purity in an impure culture.

Job and Daniel had something else in common—each had three significant friends. Here, however, the similarities end. Job's friends became a thorn in his flesh, offering him condemnation when he needed compassion and companionship. As Job struggled with loss and grief, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar seemed bent on intensifying his pain rather than helping him in his adversity.

Daniel's three friends were very different. Taken captive together, Daniel and his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, supported and strengthened one another in difficult times. They stood together in honoring God (Daniel 1) and in prayer (Da 2:17-18), and in refusing to bow before the king's image (Da 3:16-18). That's the kind of friend we need.

So what kind of friend am I? Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times." Who needs you to be a friend today? —Bill Crowder

Lord, help me be the kind of friend

That makes my friend secure,

So he can find new strength and hope,

His trials to endure. —D. De Haan

A true friend is like support to a leaning wall.

Proverbs 17:22-28 Cooler Heads

A man of understanding is of a calm spirit. —Proverbs 17:27

A Christian I know was angry with someone at his workplace over a perceived injustice. A colleague listened to his grievance and sensed that his temper still ran high. He gave him this wise advice to consider before confronting those involved: "Cooler heads prevail."

As we interact with others, disagreements are inevitable. The discerning believer understands his own heart and takes steps to deal with conflict diplomatically.

Proverbs 17:27 tells us: "He who has knowledge spares his words." This means keeping in check a multitude of opinions that could ignite further anger in others. Someone who displays wisdom will think before speaking, and then will share only insights likely to be helpful.

The Proverbs also give us wise counsel on the emotional side of controlling our frustrations. "A man of understanding is of a calm spirit." A mature person exhibits understanding by keeping cool in conflict. Problem-solving is enhanced by an even-tempered approach.

The next time you become angry, stop and prayerfully reflect for a moment. Ask God for a calm spirit and the right words to say.

Remember, cooler heads prevail.

For Further Study

It's important to handle anger in constructive ways.

Visit www.discoveryseries.org/cb942 on the Web

and read *When Anger Burns*.

The best time to stop an argument is before it starts.

Proverbs 17:22

A Reason For Optimism

The Bible isn't a psychology textbook, but it gives us the wisest counsel for experiencing happiness here and now. Proverbs 17:22, for example, assures us that "a merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones."

That simple statement was recently corroborated by the extensive research of Dr. Daniel Mark, a heart specialist at Duke University. The New York Times article that reported his findings carried this headline: "Optimism Can Mean Life for Heart Patients and Pessimism Death." The article begins with these words: "A healthy outlook helps heal the heart."

But Dr. Nancy Frasure-Smith, a heart specialist who has studied the effect of depression, anxiety, and anger, admitted, "We don't know how to change negative emotions."

Faith in God, however, can produce that change. People who look beyond their present difficulty and put their trust in God's goodness cannot help but be joyful.

It's significant that our Savior said on several occasions, "Be of good cheer" (Matthew 9:2,22; 14:27; Acts 23:11). Knowing that life is filled with many crises, He encourages us with this word of reassurance: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).—Vernon C Grounds

All your anxiety, all your care

Bring to the mercy seat, leave it there;

Never a burden He cannot bear,

Never a friend like Jesus. —Joy

No matter what happens, you can find joy in the Lord

Proverbs 17:22a

CULTIVATING CHEERFULNESS

F. B. Meyer. Our Daily Walk.

A HAPPY AND cheerful heart is a matter of cultivation. We cannot afford to abandon ourselves entirely to our moods. There are times when we feel depressed and sad, for no special reason, except that a mood is on us! It is at such times that we need to anoint our heads, and wash our faces, that we may not be consumed by our fretfulness, or impose our depression upon others, for nothing is worse than to be a wet blanket! (Matt. 6:16-18.)

On the other hand, there is nothing more objectionable than to be always in the presence of a comic person who thinks that every occasion must serve for frolic. After a time one gets as tired of funny stories and perpetual punning as of gloom, but while avoiding this extreme, we must not fall into the other of wearing a lugubrious expression and giving way to a moodiness of spirit, which cannot be accounted for.

We may alter our dispositions and moods by a resolute action of the will. We can refuse to look miserable, to speak mournfully, to be pessimistic, to pass on depression. In a spirit of unselfishness we can put on a cheerful courage, array ourselves in the garments of joy, anoint ourselves with the spirit of praise and thankfulness, and go forth into the world to shed sunbeams rather than shadows on the path of life. Do not nurse your sorrow of heart, lest your spirit and the spirits of others be broken.

We can promote a cheerful heart by dwelling on the bright things of our lot; by counting up the mercies which are left, rather than dwelling on what we have lost. When the heart is full of the light and love of God, can it be other than cheerful? How can this be obtained except by a living union with Jesus Christ. In Him there is an infinitude of supply of peace and joy, sunshine and light. Let us open our hearts to him, and put on these things as we array ourselves each morning in our garments (Isa. 61:3-10).

PRAYER

Through all the changing scenes of life,

In trouble and in joy,

The praises of my God shall still

My heart and tongue employ. AMEN.

Proverbs 17:22b

After Rufus Mosley became a Christian, he fairly bubbled with irrepressible joy. A few dour souls even doubted his sanity. However, a man who observed him closely for a week said to his wife, "There may be someone 'crazy' around here, but it isn't Brother Rufus!"

Mirth has become a commercial commodity. Entertainers who can make people hilarious with their humor draw fabulous salaries. Laugh meters register the success of a performer, and millions subscribe to the old axiom, "Laughter is the best medicine." We who know the Lord recognize that the adage just quoted contains a good deal of truth. However, we also realize that the world's gaiety is usually shallow, because it does not come from within, nor arise from true contentment of spirit. What men really need is the "deep-down laughter of the heart." Therefore the writer of Proverbs says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Physicians will confirm that people with true faith in God and a real "will to live" have a much better rate of survival than downhearted, depressed individuals. Yes, "laughter of the heart" is a splendid "medicine"!

The words "rejoice" and "joy" appear in the Bible hundreds of times. Think of Paul writing his epistles from a Roman prison and saying, "Rejoice, and again I say rejoice!" Yet, when we think it through, this is not so strange, for believers should be the most contented of all people, knowing that their Savior has forgiven their sins, given them peace with God, and that He constantly guides their feet. Then, to crown it all, eternal glory also awaits them at the end of their earthly road. No wonder the Psalmist exclaims, "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous" (Ps. 97:12).

Yes, the Christian faith provides God's children with true happiness and the invigorating "laughter of the heart"!

I came to Jesus as I was,

Weary, and worn, and sad;

I found in Him a resting place,

And He has made me glad. — H. Bonar

Some people carry religion on their backs like a burden, while true Christians carry it in their hearts like a song!

Proverbs 17:27

He that spareth his words hath knowledge.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

THE a.v. and r.v. marg. suggest a better rendering, "He that hath knowledge spareth his words." It is a wise thing to say as little as possible to man, and as much as possible to God. The ultimate test of friendship has always seemed to me to be in the ability of true friends to be silent in each other's presence. In silence we best may open the heart to receive the infillings of the Divine Spirit. When people are always talking to one another, even though they talk about God, they are liable to lose the first fresh sense of God's presence.

Ordinary conversation greatly weakens character. It is like the perpetual running of a tap which inevitably empties the cistern. It seems to me disastrous when the whole of a summer holiday is spent in contact with friends, however dear, who leave no time for the communing of the soul with itself, nature, and God. We cannot be perpetually in society, speaking to the nearest and dearest, without saying things which will afterwards cause us regret. We shall have spoken too much of ourselves, or too little of Christ, or too much about others; or we shall have allowed the things of the world and sense to bulk too largely. Besides, it is only in silence and thought that our deepest life matures, or the impressions of eternity are realized. If we are always talking, we give no opportunity for the ripening of the soul. Nothing makes the soul more fruitful than to leave it fallow. Who would pick a crop of fruit when first it began to appear on the trees? Live deep. Speak as little as you may. Be slow to speak, and swift to hear.

"Not seldom ceases outward speech awhile,

That the inner, isled in calm, may clearer sound.

Proverbs 17:27 Careless Speech

Read: James 3:1-12

He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. —Proverbs 17:27

When my wife and I were visiting a church for a special musical program, we arrived early to get a good seat. Before the program began, we overheard two members seated behind us complaining about their church. They criticized the pastoral staff, leadership, music, ministry priorities, and several other things that made them unhappy. They were either unconcerned about or oblivious to the presence of two visitors in their midst.

It occurred to me that their unfortunate conversation could have pushed us away if we were there looking for a new church home. Worse, what if we were seeking God and their disgruntled opinions had driven us away? Their careless speech was not just a matter of the words they used or attitudes they displayed, it also demonstrated their lack of concern for the impact those words could have on others.

A better approach to the use of words is reflected in Proverbs 17:27, where Solomon said, "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit." Most often, we would do better not to say all we think or know (or think we know), but instead seek to use words that promote calm and peace. You never know who may be listening.

Lord, I need Your help that I might control

my thoughts and words today. I want to be a

blessing to others, to lift them up that they might

see Your goodness. Amen.

Discretion of speech is better than eloquence with words.

Proverbs 17:28

Our Daily Bread

In 1972, two oil tankers collided under the Golden Gate Bridge, spilling 840,000 gallons of crude oil into the bay. Dying birds, fish, and seals began washing up on the shore. The tragedy prompted a man who lived near the bridge to live a simpler life that would use less natural resources. First, he began walking everywhere. A year later, he decided to stop talking in an attempt to call attention to what was happening to the environment. During the next thirteen years, he talked only once: he called his parents to tell them his plans to begin a walking pilgrimage. Through nonverbal communication, he conveyed the idea that the longer he maintained silence, the more he could listen to what other people were saying. Furthermore, as a result of his silence, the press began to take note of his cause and his message.

What this man discovered holds true for us. Talking less can help us not only to hear more but also to be heard more. Often our silence on a subject is more eloquent and noteworthy than any words we could say.

Solomon emphasized this truth repeatedly. The wise person hears and is heard because he knows both when to talk and when to remain silent. And he has a way of speaking even when he says nothing. There is wisdom in talking less in order to say more. — M.R.D.II

Silence can be beautiful; don't break it unless you can improve it.

PROVERBS 18

Proverbs 18:1-8

A Stone In The Mouth

We would all cringe at the thought of a mouth full of gravel. But a stone in the mouth can actually be desirable—at least that seems to be true for the cranes that inhabit the Taurus mountains of southern Turkey.

These cranes tend to cackle a lot, especially while flying. All that noise gets the attention of eagles, who swoop down and seize them for a meal. The experienced cranes avoid this threat by picking up stones large enough to fill their mouths. This prevents them from cackling—and from becoming lunch for the eagles.

People have a problem with their mouths too. The writer of Proverbs said, "He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (13:3). "A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows" (18:6). How many of our troubles could be prevented if we would learn to control our tongues! How much of the heartache we cause others could be avoided if we would guard our speech!

Are you having a problem with your tongue? Try this: Ask the Lord for His help. Think before speaking. Let your words be few. Following that formula can be as effective as a stone in the mouth.—Richard De Haan

Lord, help me watch the words I say

And keep them few and sweet,

For I don't know from day to day

Which ones I'll have to eat. —Anon.

Mind what you say, or you might say whatever comes to mind

Proverbs 18

Today in the Word

April 18, 2013

Proverbs from around the world convey wisdom about relationships: "It is better to weep with wise men than to laugh with fools" (Spanish). "Tell me who your friend is, and I will tell you who you are" (Turkish). "A man should choose a friend who is better than himself" (Chinese). "A friend in need is a friend indeed" comes to us in English from Latin.

Relationships and especially friendships are recurring themes in the book of Proverbs (Pr 18:24). So we suggest a third overall question for this month's study. The first is, "What does this tell me about godly wisdom?" The second is, "What does this tell me about God?" The third is, "What does this tell me about godly relationships?"

Proverbs 18 gives half a dozen negative and positive proverbs on this issue. Negatively, the chapter begins by observing that an “unfriendly person pursues selfish ends” (Pr 18:1). The word “unfriendly” is quite strong, suggesting “antisocial.” To cut oneself off from community leads to self-centeredness. Another proverb warns against gossip (Pr 18:8). Talking behind people’s backs, while pleasurable or addictive in a perverse way, is mean-spirited and harmful to all involved. A third saying describes a “brother wronged” as “more unyielding than a fortified city” (Pr 18:19). The implied advice is to avoid giving offense or to be quick to settle conflicts.

Positively, we’re reminded again that humility is better than pride (Pr 18:12). Wise friends enjoy the freedom to correct and rebuke one another. Another maxim promotes attentive listening (Pr 18:13). It is both wise and respectful to treat people as though their words have value. A final proverb testifies that to find a good spouse is to receive a gift from the Lord (Pr 18:22). “Marriage should be honored by all” (Heb. 13:4).

Apply the Word - Following up on verse 19 and yesterday’s “Apply the Word,” do you need to be reconciled to any brother or sister in Christ with whom you have unfinished business? Is there a sin that needs forgiving, anger to be repented of, or a wrong to confess? Don’t wait. We all need to do our best to make matters right as soon as possible (Matt. 5:23–24).

Proverbs 18:1-7

Grumblers

Mrs. Grumpy complained bitterly because her friends seemed to avoid her, and she just couldn’t understand why. If only she could have heard a recording of her own voice, she would have known the reason for her unpopularity. She always talked about her complaints, weaknesses, aches and pains, and insisted on relating in wearying detail her stay in the hospital.

If you want to keep friends, don’t be a grumbler. Most people have enough problems of their own and don’t need to hear all of yours.

In one of the churches I pastored, a dear old soul expected me to visit her at least once a week. I don’t know of a visit in my entire ministry that I dreaded as much as that one. Every week she insisted on entertaining me with a recital of her five surgeries. She never expressed happiness and joy for her current good health or her wonderful recovery, but she always went back to her days of suffering. She seemed to “enjoy” poor health. Incidentally, she lived many more years. She reminds me of the saying: “A creaking wagon will last the longest.”

Today, fix your eyes on the doughnut, not on the hole. Share your joys with others, and leave your troubles with the Lord. —M. R. De Haan, M.D.

Go bury your sorrow, the world has its share;

Go bury it deeply, go hide it with care,

Go think of it calmly, when curtained by night,

Go tell it to Jesus, and all will be right! —Bachelor

Spend your time counting your blessings, not airing your complaints.

Proverbs 18:9 No Vacancy

ancy

Read: Ephesians 6:5-9

He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer. —Proverbs 18:9

Fred, a clerk in a retail store, was rude to the customers and lazy. On several occasions his boss was about to fire him. But he didn’t follow through because of his concern for Fred’s wife and children, who would suffer from his dismissal.

One day a regular customer stopped in and noticed that Fred wasn’t there. He asked the manager about him and was told that he had taken another job. The customer asked, “Are you planning to replace him?” The manager replied, “No, it isn’t necessary. Fred didn’t leave a vacancy.”

Fred’s work was of such poor quality that the business was better off without him. That should never be true of any employee, especially a Christian.

The apostle Paul told servants to be obedient to their masters “with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Ephesians 6:7).

God expected Christian servants in Paul's day to work diligently for their masters, and we too should give our employers an honest day's work. It's the right thing to do, and it strengthens our witness for Christ.

One good way to test the value of your work is to ask yourself this question: If I left my job, would it create a vacancy?

Some people stop looking for work when they get a job.

Proverbs 18:10 Taking Refuge

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. —Proverbs 18:10

In the medieval world, farmers would care for their crops until an enemy appeared on the horizon. Then they would flee with their families to their fortified city for protection from the marauders.

The city of Carcassonne has been a refuge for generations. Built in the 5th century bc, this stone fortress has provided protection for Romans, Gauls, Visigoths, Franks, and French. Its sprawling size and majestic watchtowers and battlements gave confidence to those hiding inside its protective walls.

As believers, we can take refuge in the presence of the living God. The book of Proverbs tells us: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Prov. 18:10). "The name of the Lord" refers to God's character—abounding with faithfulness, power, and mercy. The term safe means "set on high out of danger."

We all face threats at times that make us want to run for cover. Some seek security in material wealth or relationships. But the Christ-follower has a more secure refuge. Because of who God is and what He can do for us, our best protection ultimately rests in Him. If you are facing a threat today, go to the Lord, who is a strong tower. You will find refuge in His care.

In the times of greatest struggle,

When the angry billows roll,

I can always find my Savior,

Christ, the Refuge of my soul. —Woodruff

In good times and bad, God is our safe resting place.

Proverbs 18:10 True Shelter

The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. Proverbs 18:10

In March 2014 a tribal conflict broke out in my hometown area, forcing my father's household, along with other refugees, to take cover in the region's capital city. Throughout history, people who have felt unsafe in their homelands have traveled to other places searching for safety and something better.

As I visited and talked with people from my hometown, I thought of the cities of refuge in Joshua 20:1-9. These were cities designated as places of safety for those fleeing from "relatives seeking revenge" in the case of an accidental killing (v. 3 nlt). They offered peace and protection.

We can always seek refuge in our savior Jesus Christ.

People today still seek places of refuge, although for a variety of reasons. But as needed as these sanctuaries are, supplying shelter and food, they cannot completely meet the needs of refugees and fugitives. That rest is found only in God. Those who walk with God find true shelter and the safest protection in Him. When ancient Israel was sent into exile, the Lord said, "I have been a sanctuary [safe haven] for them in the countries where they have gone" (Ezek. 11:16).

With the psalmist, we can say confidently to the Lord, "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" (32:7).

Father, thank You for being a rock to which we can flee and that no matter where we are or in what circumstances we find ourselves, You are there with us. Help us to remember that even in the darkest of nights, You are our strong tower.

Nothing can shake those who are secure in God's hands.

INSIGHT: In the law of Moses premeditated murder was punishable by death but accidental killing was not (Ex. 21:12–14). It was common for the nearest relative to avenge the dead person. Six Levitical towns (Num. 35:6–34; Deut. 4:41–43; 19:1–13) were designated "cities of refuge" so that anyone who killed a person accidentally could flee there for protection (Josh. 20:2–3; see Num.

35:12).

Proverbs 18:9-12 Safe Room

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. —Proverbs 18:10

In some homes, owners have built safe rooms—special places where they can go for protection should someone break into the house.

In Proverbs 18:10, Solomon reminded God's people that God is their "safe room" and that they could find total security in Him.

In verses 10 and 11, he described two types of security to which some people run: the name of the Lord and wealth. The name or character of God is described as a "strong tower." As a captured city might take refuge in a fortified tower, so the righteous could run to the Lord and find complete safety.

On the other hand, the wealthy imagined their riches as a high point of safety. Solomon sought to tell his readers that money might give a sense of security but it would be a false security that could lead to laziness, pride, and destruction. Yet people who are humble and find their complete security in the unchanging and holy character of God will find true safety.

Wealth may not be your particular "safe room." You might tend to run instead to something or someone else when adversity comes. But we all need to learn to depend daily on the Lord and find a high point of safety in the safe room of His name.

It's often easier to trust

In what our eyes can see,

But God asks us to look to Him

For our security. —Spier

The name of the Lord is our safe room.

Proverbs 18:12

Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

It is an old and common saying, that "coming events cast their shadows before them;" the wise man teaches us that a haughty heart is the prophetic prelude of evil. Pride is as safely the sign of destruction as the change of mercury in the weather-glass is the sign of rain; and far more infallibly so than that. When men have ridden the high horse, destruction has always overtaken them. Let David's aching heart show that there is an eclipse of a man's glory when he dotes upon his own greatness. 2 Sam. 24:10. See Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty builder of Babylon, creeping on the earth, devouring grass like oxen, until his nails had grown like bird's claws, and his hair like eagle's feathers. Dan. 4:33. Pride made the boaster a beast, as once before it made an angel a devil. God hates high looks, and never fails to bring them down. All the arrows of God are aimed at proud hearts. O Christian, is thine heart haughty this evening? For pride can get into the Christian's heart as well as into the sinner's; it can delude him into dreaming that he is "rich and increased in goods, and hath need of nothing." Art thou glorying in thy graces or thy talents? Art thou proud of thyself, that thou hast had holy frames and sweet experiences? Mark thee, reader, there is a destruction coming to thee also. Thy flaunting poppies of self-conceit will be pulled up by the roots, thy mushroom graces will wither in the burning heat, and thy self-sufficiency shall become as straw for the dunghill. If we forget to live at the foot of the cross in deepest lowliness of spirit, God will not forget to make us smart under his rod. A destruction will come to thee, O unduly exalted believer, the destruction of thy joys and of thy comforts, though there can be no destruction of thy soul. Wherefore, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Proverbs 18:12a

Our Daily Bread

The poem "Invictus" says, in part,

"I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul."

This may make good poetry, but it is dangerous theology. If we try to control our own lives, they will end in disaster.

A boy who became a sailor while very young rose rapidly in the profession and was soon made captain of a ship. At the end of one voyage, he was approaching land when a passenger who was familiar with maritime procedures asked if he intended to anchor the

ship and call for some help in entering the harbor.

"Anchor? Not!! I expect to be in dock with the morning tide." The passenger persisted, urging him to signal for a pilot. "I am my own pilot," came the abrupt reply. Determined to reach port by morning, he took a narrow channel to shorten the distance. His crew of weathered seamen just shook their heads. Passengers said that they were in no hurry and hoped he would take the wider course. He laughed at all of them and repeated his prediction to be on land by daybreak. Indeed, he was on land before daybreak. But his vessel was wrecked, and his own life was lost because of his willful pride.

Our voyage through time and into eternity is too treacherous to attempt without God's help. Unless the Lord Jesus is our Captain, we will never make it safely to the heavenly shore. —P. R. V.

Those who guide themselves have a fool for a follower.

Proverbs 18:13

As Howard Hendricks says, "Marriage is sometimes the dialogue of the deaf." The Harvard Business Review says 65 percent of an executive's time should be spent listening. So much more so in our most intimate relationships. "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame" (Proverbs 18:13).

Proverbs 18:13a

A Way Of Loving

In her book *Listening To Others*, Joyce Huggett relates her experiences of listening to suffering people. She says they often raved about all she had done for them. "On many occasions," she writes, "I had not 'done' anything. I had 'just listened.' I quickly came to the conclusion that 'just listening' was indeed an effective way of helping others."

This was the help that Job's wordy, preachy friends failed to give him. He complained that they were "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2) and was so distraught that he even accused God of not listening. He cried out, "Oh, that I had one to hear me!" (Job 31:35).

What does active listening accomplish? Listening is a way of loving others. It says, "I want to understand and know you." It comforts the brokenhearted, builds relationships, and encourages faith in God. Listening is also a means of learning the facts. Solomon, in Proverbs 18:13, warned that it is folly to answer a matter before hearing it.

Most of all, listening to others should reflect our attentiveness toward God and His Word. He has so much He wants to teach us and tell us. As you take a moment of stillness today and give Him a listening ear, you'll be better able to listen to the hurting people around you. --J E Yoder

A caring heart, a listening ear,

A thoughtful word, a loving tear

Will help to lift the heavy load

Of hurting people on life's road. --DJD

You can win more friends with your ears

than with your mouth.

Proverbs 18:14-24

A Friend To The End

Traditionally, medical schools have trained their students to help patients live, while offering little instruction in helping them face death. But that is changing with the addition of courses in end-of-life care. Physicians are now taught that when they have used all their medical expertise without achieving a cure, they should seize the opportunity to stand compassionately beside their dying patients and be a friend.

Death frightens many of us and makes us feel awkward in the presence of a terminally ill person. But our greatest opportunities to help someone in Jesus' name may come during a person's final days on earth.

The Bible speaks of a friendship that knows no limits. "A friend loves at all times," said the wise man (Proverbs 17:17). And "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (18:24). Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Jesus is both our Great Physician and our Friend, and He promised that He would never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He calls us to stand with our friends and family in His name as their earthly journey nears its end. That's what a true friend would do. — David C. McCasland

A friend is he who always knows

When the cold wind of trouble blows,

Who comes in dark and stormy night

With friendship's glowing lamp alight. —Mason

A true friend stays true to the end

Proverbs 19:15-25 What's At Stake?

Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days. —Proverbs 19:20

To stake or not to stake? That's the question Marilyn faced when she planted a tree sapling last summer. The salesman said, "Stake it for one year so it will be supported in strong winds. Then remove them so it can grow deep roots on its own." But a neighbor told her, "Staking may cause more harm than good. The tree needs to start building strong roots right away, or it may never. Not staking is best for long-term health."

We wonder about that question in relationships too. For instance, if someone has gotten himself into trouble, do we "stake him down" by rescuing him, or do we let the person "grow strong roots" on his own by allowing him to face the consequences of his choices? Obviously it depends on what seems best for the person's long-term spiritual health. What does love do, and when does it do it? Proverbs 19 gives opposite thoughts: We are to have "pity" and lend our assistance (v.17), yet there are dangers in rescuing another because you might need to do it again (v.19). Providing the right help requires wisdom beyond our own.

God hasn't left us on our own. He will give us the wisdom when we ask Him. And as we lean on Him, our own roots will grow deep in Him as well.

We lack wisdom, Lord, in many situations.

We know we'll make mistakes, but teach us to

be dependent on You. Thank You that You will

be faithful. Grow our roots deep in You.

Real wisdom is looking at the world from God's point of view.

Proverbs 18:17

His neighbour cometh and searcheth him out.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

It is easy to boast of what we are or are not; but the real question is as to what others think of us. A Christian lady told me that a little time ago she went to a meeting where one after another arose to say how long they had been without sin. When an opportunity was given, she asked simply if they might be allowed to hear something from those who had lived with the persons that had been so loudly expressing themselves; because she said that she had observed that the opinions of those who shared the same room or home as Christian professors were apt to vary greatly from those of the professors themselves.

It is a grave question for us all — what do our neighbors and associates think of us? Would they credit us with the highest attainments in Christian living? Would they concede the reality and beauty of our characters? After all, may not we be mistaking our ideals for our attainments, and judging ourselves by a lower standard than we apply to others? Might not our wives and sisters, our husbands and brothers, search us! It is so much easier to plead our own cause in a meeting than to stand clear in the searching scrutiny of the home.

And if our neighbors search us, what does God think of us as the fierce light of his eyes scans us and reads our deepest secrets? What should we do were it not for the Blood of Christ? I used to hesitate once to call myself a miserable sinner; but as I know myself better, I begin to feel that it is a reasonable designation. That is what we are by nature, though we have been made by divine grace, children, heirs, joint-heirs with Christ. Job, the righteous man, confessed himself vile when God's light revealed him.

Proverbs 18:19-24

A Sticky Friend

The word friend is defined as "one attached to another by affection, regard, or esteem; an intimate acquaintance." Jesus defined friendship this way: "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you... I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:14-15).

A friend is one to whom we can tell everything and who will never betray a confidence. A true friend will not say anything that injures us. When we hear a group of Christians finding fault with other believers, we may wonder what they say about us when we're not present.

A true friend is one who knows all about us and loves us just the same. A young boy defined such a friend as "somebody who sticks to you after he has found you out."

A friend is one in whose presence we can be ourselves without the fear of being misunderstood. That person will not talk behind our back but is one to whom we can bare the secrets of our heart, knowing that we will not be betrayed. Such a friend is Jesus, the One who perfectly fulfills Solomon's words: "A friend loves at all times" (Prov. 17:17).

What kind of friend are you? —M. R. De Haan

The kindest Friend I've ever had

Is One I cannot see,

Yet One in whom I can confide,

Who loves and blesses me. --Shuler

The best friends are like Jesus--they stick with you

Proverbs 18:21

Life Words

Words of encouragement can be "life words," bringing new motivation to our lives. Mark Twain said that he could live for a whole month on one good compliment.

Christian encouragement, however, is more than a compliment or a pat on the back, valuable as these can be. One writer described it as "the kind of expression that helps someone want to be a better Christian, even when life is rough."

As a youth, Larry Crabb had developed a stutter that humiliated him in a school assembly. A short time later, when praying aloud in a church service, his stutter caused him to get both his words and his theology mixed up in his prayer. Expecting stern correction, Larry slipped out of the service, resolving never to speak in public again. On his way out he was stopped by an older man who said, "Larry, there's one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I'm behind you one thousand percent." Larry's determination never to speak in public again dissolved instantly. Now, many years later, he addresses large crowds with confidence.

Paul told us to season our speech "with grace" (Colossians 4:6). Then we will speak "life words" that bring encouragement. —Joanie Yoder

It may seem insignificant

To say a word or two,

But when it is encouragement,

What wonders it can do! -K. De Haan

Correction may mold us, but encouragement will motivate us.

Proverbs 18:21a

Small Thing, Big Impact

Are most people truth-tellers? Can what they say be taken at face value? Or are they like the ancient Cretans, whose reputation was that they were "always liars"? (Titus 1:12).

Lies, of course, are communicated by the tongue. That small part of the human body can make a powerful impact. It can ruin a reputation. It can destroy a friendship. It can cause lasting heartache.

On the other hand, the tongue can give comfort and hope in time of bereavement. It can shine the light of saving truth into the mind of someone wandering in spiritual darkness. It can praise and glorify God.

We shouldn't be surprised, then, that Scripture repeatedly urges us to exercise great wisdom and care in how we use this small part of the body. Proverbs 18:21 is not exaggerating when it warns us that "death and life are in the power of the tongue." David was not indulging in pointless poetry when he denounced "men ... whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psalm 57:4). And the apostle James said that the tongue can be as destructive as a fire (James 3:1-12).

By the Holy Spirit's power, may we use our tongues to bless our hearers, build up one another, and glorify our Creator in prayer and praise. —Vernon C Grounds

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,

My tongue control today;

Help me evaluate each thought

And guard each word I say. —Hess

The tongue is a small organ that creates either discord or harmony.

Proverbs 18:24

Shallow Friendliness

Recently I received a phone call from a friendly-sounding person who told me she wanted to make my life easier. She called me by my first name and warmly asked how my day was going. Then she informed me that she could help me save thousands of dollars a year if I would simply refinance my home with a particular mortgage company. But once she understood that I really wasn't interested, her friendliness evaporated.

Such insincere friendliness is often just a culturally correct attitude that some people use to impress others or to get something from them.

Contrast that self-serving attitude with the genuine friendship Jesus showed us. He said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Then He demonstrated self-sacrificing love for us by dying on the cross to forgive our sins.

When we trust Jesus as our Savior and learn to obey Him, we experience a deep friendship that gives reality and sincerity to the friendliness we show to others.

Lord, help us to avoid the shallow friendliness that uses others to get what we want. Teach us instead to radiate the warmth of genuine Christlike friendliness to everyone we meet.—David C. Egner

If friendliness is genuine,

It surely will convey

A warm and caring attitude

In all we do and say. —D. De Haan

True friendliness can be a magnet that draws people to Christ.

Proverbs 18:24

Today in the Word

In J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, Frodo and Sam work together to bring the one ring of power back to Mordor in order to destroy it—and with it, the reign of evil. They face foes and obstacles and nearly die. Through thick and thin, Sam stood by Frodo as his loyal friend, encouraging him to complete his arduous task.

Proverbs 18:24a

To Have One, Be One

All of us need at least one or two close friends. A small boy defined a friend as "someone who knows all about you and likes you just the same." Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature." Henry Durbanville made this observation about friendship: "A friend is the first person to come in when the whole world goes out."

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 17:17, "A friend loves at all times." We can't improve on that definition. To have someone who remains true to us under all circumstances is one of life's choicest blessings. The support and encouragement that only an intimate friend can offer is sorely needed when the burdens of life weigh heavily upon us. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate friend, for He laid down His life for His friends (John 15:13).

Proverbs 18:24 makes an important point and takes us beyond a description of what it means to be a friend. It says that "a man who has friends must himself be friendly." The implication is clear: Friendliness must begin with us. We must take the initiative in developing relationships with others. Let us be to others what we desire for ourselves. When it comes to friends, to have one you must be one! —Richard De Haan

I went outside to find a friend

But could not find one there;

I went outside to be a friend,

And friends were everywhere! —Anon.

Friends are seldom found; they are made. —Wentworth

PROVERBS 19

Proverbs 19:1-9

Nothing But The Truth

A 12-year-old boy was a key witness in a lawsuit. One of the lawyers, after intense questioning, asked, "Your father told you what to say, didn't he?"

"Yes," answered the boy.

"Now tell us," pursued the lawyer, "what were his instructions?"

"Well," replied the boy, "Father told me the lawyers would try to tangle me in my testimony; but if I would just be careful and tell the truth, I could say the same thing every time."

A truthful person has nothing to hide, but the person who lies pays an awful price for his dishonesty. One lie leads to another to cover up the previous one, and eventually the liar is caught in his own web of deceit. Proverbs 19:5 says, "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape."

For a follower of Christ, however, the most important consideration is that truthfulness reflects our relationship with the Lord. Lying is the language of the devil (Jn. 8:44), but those who belong to Christ are to be known as people of truth (Eph. 4:15; Col. 3:9).

Lying may seem like a convenient way out, but it's really a dead-end. The right and sensible choice, therefore, is to speak the truth--and nothing but the truth. —Richard De Haan

Tell the truth and tell it right,

A lie will never do;

The Bible says that God is truth--

He wants the truth from you. --JDB

Those who cook up stories will get into hot water

Proverbs 19

Today in the Word

April 19, 2013

Certain stock characters are found throughout many kinds of narratives. No doubt we have all read stories or seen movies with a gallant hero, a damsel in distress, a star-crossed lover, a traitorous friend, a stingy rich man, an evil stepmother, a jolly fat man, or a noble outlaw (think Robin Hood). We know what to expect from these predictable characters.

As you've probably already noticed this month, stock characters are found in Proverbs as well. They include the sluggard, the adulteress, the quarrelsome wife, the noble wife, the disobedient son, and the wise king. These predictable figures are part of how the moral and spiritual lessons are taught.

The Literary Study Bible suggests that Proverbs 19 and 20 may be seen as "an extended description of how to fail at life—a composite portrait of the archetypal loser." In today's reading, what does this portrait include? What qualifies one as a fool? For starters, evil and perverse speech (Pr 19:1). A loser's words are dishonest (Pr 19:5, 9, 28), pathetic (Pr 19:7), quarrelsome (Pr 19:13), or mocking (Pr 19:25, 29). He acts hastily rather than considering his ways (Pr 19:2). She doesn't listen to others (Pr 19:20, 27). He is impatient and takes offense easily (Pr 19:11). She is lazy (Pr 19:15, 24). If a parent, a fool fails to discipline his children (Pr 19:8); if a child, she fails to respect or obey her parents (Pr 19:26). A loser is unkind to the poor (Pr 19:17). Finally, rather than taking responsibility, a fool blames God for everything (Pr 19:3).

This portrait includes consequences and contrasts, as seen in today's verse (Pr 19:8). To get wisdom is to love your own life, so by implication to live as a fool is a kind of irrational self-hatred. How much better it is to live in the fear of the Lord (Pr 19:23)!

Apply the Word - What does it mean to love your own life? The greatest commandment says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). If we trust Him with all we are and do, and believe that His love and wisdom know what's best, then faith-in-action ends up being love for our own lives.

Proverbs 19:11

Danger: Explosives

A man from Michigan had an idea for removing a tree stump from the yard of a friend. He decided to use some dynamite he had stored away in his house. It did the trick. The explosion turned the stump into an airborne missile that traveled 163 feet downrange before crashing through a neighbor's roof. The stump opened a 3-foot hole in the roof, split the rafters, and pushed through the ceiling of the dining room.

If we are honest, we can see ourselves in the actions of the dynamite user. We have used explosive words and actions to try to solve problems, which only made things worse. We get action, but we leave much damage in our wake.

We are not the first to let anger make trouble for us. It happened to people in the Bible too. Moses, for instance, became extremely frustrated with his murmuring followers (Numbers 20:10). So, instead of speaking to the rock to get water, as the Lord had instructed him, he angrily struck it twice (v.11). He did get water from the rock, but there was a problem--Moses had disobeyed God. Because of this, God told him he could not enter the Promised Land (v.12).

Anger, like dynamite, is explosive. Unless it is handled with wisdom and self-control, it can do great damage. —Mart De Haan

Angry words take just one moment

And bring forth a flood of tears,

But the wounds they have created

Linger on for months and years. --Stairs

When a person's temper gets the best of him, it reveals the worst of him.

Proverbs 19:11 - "No Grace"

The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression. —Proverbs 19:11

I have nicknamed our car "No Grace." Sunday mornings are the worst. I load the car with all the stuff I need for church, get myself in my seat, close the door, and Jay starts backing out of the garage. While I am still getting settled, the seat belt warning starts buzzing. "Please," I say to it, "all I need is another minute." The answer, apparently, is no, because it continues buzzing until I am buckled in.

This minor annoyance is a good reminder of what life would be like if indeed there were no grace. Each of us would immediately be

called to account for every indiscretion. There would be no time for repentance or change of behavior. There would be no forgiveness. No mercy. No hope.

Living in this world sometimes feels like falling into a no-grace sinkhole. When minor flaws are blown up into major indiscretions or when people refuse to overlook the faults and offenses of others, we end up burdened by the weight of guilt that we were never meant to carry. God, in His grace, sent Jesus to carry the burden for us. Those who receive God's gift of grace have the privilege of offering it to others on Christ's behalf: "Above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Peter 4:8).

Father God, the culture around us can seem so harsh and hard on people when they fail. Help me to show grace and patience, because You have been gracious to me and have forgiven my sin.

When we gratefully acknowledge the grace we've received, we joyfully give it to those in need.

Proverbs 19:17

God Repays

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

WE are to give to the poor out of pity. Not to be seen and applauded, much less to get influence over them, but out of pure sympathy and compassion, we must give them help.

We must not expect to get anything back from the poor, not even gratitude; but we should regard what we have done as a loan to the Lord. He undertakes the obligation; and, if we look to Him in the matter, we must not look to the second party. What an honor the Lord bestows upon us when He condescends to borrow of us! That merchant is greatly favored who has the Lord on his books. It would seem a pity to have such a name down for a paltry pittance; let us make it a heavy amount. The next needy man that comes this way, let us help him.

As for repayment we can hardly think of it, and yet here is the Lord's note of hand. Blessed be His name, His promise to pay is better than gold and silver. Are we running a little short through the depression of the times? We may venture humbly to present this bill at the Bank of Faith. Has any one of our readers been a bit of a screw to the poor? Poor soul. May the Lord forgive him.

Proverbs 19:17a

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

What a revolution would be wrought among us if we really believed this! We are glad to lend to our friends in a temporary strait, especially when we know that our money is safe and will come back to us with a substantial increase. To have an I O U is quite sufficient. But in the light of this test we are taught to look on God as the great Borrower. He comes to us, asking that we will lend to Him. In every needy one who deserves our aid the request of the Almighty may be heard asking a loan.

What mistakes we make! We think we keep what we hold and invest well. But we really keep what we give away. The best investments are the heavenly shares and stocks, which are found in the needs and sorrows of the poor. Will you not, my reader, resolve that you will begin to lend to the Lord in the person of those who need your help, whether for their personal necessities or the work in which they are interested? You are called to be a steward of God's free gifts to you. You must be ready, as his almoner, to deal out his wealth. He will pay you for doing it, by giving you your own present maintenance; and one day He will say, "I was hungry, and you fed Me; thirsty, and you gave Me drink: inherit the place prepared for you."

Just ponder the magnificence of this promise: "His good deed will He pay him again." God will never be in your debt. He is exact and punctilious in his repayment. No man ever dared to do his bidding in respect to any case of need, and found himself the poorer. "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down and running over shall they give into your bosom." Was not Ruth's love to Naomi well compensated?

Proverbs 19:17-22

What Would You Do?

I will never forget being in the "big blackout" of November 9, 1965. This widespread power outage darkened eight states in the northeastern US, and portions of Ontario and Quebec in eastern Canada—covering 80,000 square miles and affecting 30 million people.

With no electric lights, candles were in great demand. An announcer on a New York radio station that stayed on the air because it had auxiliary power reported, "An interesting drama is being unfolded on our streets. The price of candles in many stores has doubled. On the other hand, some good-hearted merchants are offering their candles at half price, or even giving them away."

Some store owners let their concern for others in the hour of emergency outweigh their desire for personal gain. Others, however, took advantage of the situation and put their personal gain ahead of their concern for others. The very same circumstances produced both self-seeking opportunists and selfless philanthropists.

How would we react? Would we have pity on those in need and show kindness to them? (Proverbs 19:17,22). The words of Galatians 6:10 are the only fitting response: "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all." —Richard De Haan

Do a deed of simple kindness,

Though its end you may not see;

It may reach, like widening ripples,

Down a long eternity. —Norris

Opportunities to be kind are never hard to find.

Proverbs 19:21

Pluck out the peacock feathers

J. C. Philpot. RICHES.

"The counsel of the Lord" is that Christ should be all in all—that He should stand exalted upon the wreck and ruin of the creature. "The counsel of the Lord," then must stand, whatever be the devices in man's heart. And this counsel is to bring the creature low, that He may exalt Jesus high—to strip the creature of all its attainments—to pluck out the peacock feathers—that it may be poor and needy and naked and empty and bare. "The counsel of the Lord" is that the creature should learn its weakness—that 'creature helplessness' should not be a mere doctrine received into the judgment—but that it should be a solemn truth which is experienced in a man's soul.

This weakness a man can only learn by being placed in that position, where, when he would make use of his strength, he finds it is all gone, and has become total weakness. "The counsel of the Lord," is this—to exalt Christ upon the abasement of the creature—to make the strength of Christ perfect in our weakness—and the wisdom of Christ perfect in our folly—and to establish Christ's righteousness upon the ruin of the creature's righteousness.

Proverbs 19:21a

There are many plans in a man's heart

J. C. Philpot. RICHES.

The plans of our heart are generally to find some easy, smooth, flowery path. Whatever benefits we have derived from affliction, whatever mercies we have experienced in tribulation, the flesh hates and shrinks from such a path with complete abhorrence. And, therefore, there is always a secret planning in a man's heart—to escape the cross, to avoid affliction, and to walk in some flowery meadow, away from the rough road which cuts his feet, and wearies his limbs.

Another "plan in a man's heart" is, that he shall have worldly prosperity—that his children shall grow up around him, and when they grow up, he shall be able to provide for them in a way which shall be best suited to their station in life—that they shall enjoy health and strength and success—and that there shall not be any cutting affliction in his family, or fiery trial to pass through.

Now these plans the Lord frustrates. What grief, what affliction, what trouble, is the Lord continually bringing into some families! Their dearest objects of affection removed from them, at the very moment when they seemed clasped nearest around their hearts! And those who are spared, perhaps, growing up in such a searedness of conscience and hardness of heart, and, perhaps, profligacy of life, that even their very presence is often a burden to their parents instead of a blessing—and the very children who should be their comfort, become thorns and briars in their sides!

Oh, how the Lord overturns and brings to nothing the "plans of a man's heart" to make a paradise here upon earth. When a man is brought to the right spot, and is in a right mind to trace out the Lord's dealings with him from the first, he sees it was a kind hand which "blasted his gourds, and laid them low"—it was a kind hand that swept away his worldly prospects—which reduced him to natural as well as to spiritual poverty—which led him into exercises, trials, sorrows, griefs, and tribulations—because, in those trials he has found the Lord, more or less, experimentally precious.

There are many plans in a man's heart. Now you have all your plans—that busy workshop is continually putting out some new pattern—some new fashion is continually starting forth from the depths of that ingenious manufactory which you carry about with you—and you are wanting this, and expecting that, and building up airy castles, and looking for that which shall never come to pass—for "there are many plans in a man's heart; but the Lord's counsel will prevail." And so far as you are children of God, that counsel is a counsel of wisdom and mercy. The purposes of God's heart are purposes of love and affection toward you, and therefore you may bless and praise God, that whatever be the plans of your hearts against God's counsel, they shall be frustrated, that He may do His will and fulfill all His good pleasure.

Proverbs 19:22

A Wonderful Pair

An honest and kind man drove the streets of San Francisco for more than an hour to find the woman who had left her purse with \$1,792 in cash on the back seat of his cab. I like what he said when some of his fellow drivers ridiculed him for not pocketing the money. He responded, "I am a card-carrying member of the Christian faith, and what good is it to go to church if you don't practice what you preach?"

In Exodus 23, the principles of honesty and kindness were brought together for the Israelites in the laws God gave them. They were to be honest enough to return a straying animal to its owner, even if that person were an enemy (v.4). They were to be kind enough to a foe to help him get a stubborn donkey to its feet (v.5). They were to be so concerned about making sure that a poor person got fair treatment that they would help him, even when it was a costly thing to do (vv.6-9). Landowners were to let their farm lie idle every seventh year and allow the poor to glean freely from it (vv.10-11).

Honest people can be cruel. Kind people may be soft and not concerned enough about righteousness. But when you put honesty and kindness together, you have a wonderful pair that honors God and blesses others. —Herbert Vander Lugt

When others view our lives today,

Our honesty is on display;

Lord, help us point the way to You

By doing what is kind and true. —Branon

Tact is the ability to make a point without making an enemy./p>