

Sermons on Proverbs-Lowell Johnson

PROVERBS SERMONS

1. Proverbs: Christianity In Overalls Proverbs 1:1-5 1-6
2. The Men of Proverbs: The Wise Men
3. The Men of Proverbs: The Simple Man
4. The Men of Proverbs: The Prudent Man (Wise)
5. The Men of Proverbs: Slothful Man vs Diligent Man 19-23
6. The Men of Proverbs: The Fools
7. The Fear of the Lord Proverbs 1:7
8. Solomon's First Lesson to His Son – Listen to Your Parents Proverbs 1:8-10; 2:1; 3:1, 11; 4:1-4;5:1; 6:1-2
9. Solomon's Second Lesson to His Son – Constantly Seek and Search for Wisdom Proverbs 2:1-22
10. Solomon's Third Lesson to His Son – Trust and Obey Proverbs 3:1-8
11. Solomon's Fourth Lesson to His Son – The Blessing of the Belt
12. Solomon's Fifth Lesson to His Son – The Value of Wisdom Proverbs 3:21-35
13. Solomon's Sixth Lesson to His Son – Learning Wisdom Through Repetition Proverbs 4:1-9
14. Solomon's Seventh Lesson to His Son – Shun Evil Paths Proverbs 4:10-19
15. Solomon's Eighth Lesson to His Son – Keep Your Heart Proverbs 4:20-27
16. Solomon's Ninth Lesson to His Son – Sexual Relationships: Graze In Your Own Pasture Proverbs 5:1-23
17. Solomon's Tenth Lesson to His Son – The Chords of Sin Proverbs 6:1-19
18. Solomon's Eleventh Lesson to His Son – Beware of Adultery Proverbs 6:20-35
19. Solomon's Twelfth Lesson to His Son – Wisdom: The Companion of God Proverbs 8:22-36
20. Solomon's Thirteenth Lesson to His Son – The House That Wisdom Built Proverbs 9:1-18
21. Solomon's Evaluation of the Home
22. The Home and Its Discipline
23. Positive Principles for Parenting Proverbs 22:6
24. Honor the Lord with Your Possessions Proverbs 3:7-10
25. God's Financial Counsel Proverbs 22:1-2; 30:7-9
26. The Friendship Factor Proverbs 17:17; 18:24
27. A Tribute to Mother Proverbs 31
28. The Traps of Temptation Proverbs 1:10
29. Don't Wait too Late Proverbs 1:24-28; 27:1 1
30. The Graduate Proverbs 3:5-7
31. Trust and Obey Proverbs 3:1-10
32. Wholesome Hate Proverbs 6:16-19
33. Indecent Proposal Proverbs 7:1, 5-22a, 27
34. The Dignity of Work Proverbs 10:4
35. Gossip is Ear Pollution Proverbs 11:13; 13:3; 18:8; 20:19; 21:23; 26:20-28 185-189
36. The Backslider Proverbs 14:4
37. The Destiny of America Proverbs 14:34
38. Grace for Growing Old Proverbs 16:31; 20:29
39. Marvelous Marriage Proverbs 18:22; 5:18
40. A Cadillac Marriage Proverbs 18:22; 24:3-4
41. Cool It, Brother Proverbs 22:24-25; 29:22;14:29; 15:18
42. Watch What is Eating You Proverbs 28:13
43. The Way Up is Down Proverbs 29:23
44. The Problem of Gossip Assorted Proverbs
45. Our Mouths, Our Lips, Our Tongues, Our Words Assorted Proverbs
46. The Heart Assorted Proverbs
47. God's Overruling Providence Assorted Proverbs
48. The Difference Christ Makes Assorted Proverbs
49. Drunkenness: The Problem of Intoxication Beverage Assorted Proverbs

PROVERBS: CHRISTIANITY IN OVERALLS

Our world desperately needs the wisdom of Proverbs. In an age when seduction, domestic conflict, financial mismanagement, substance abuse and dishonesty often seem to be behavioral norms, we must allow the Spirit to transform us with truths from biblical wisdom.

William Bennett was the Secretary of Education during the Reagan-Bush years. After that he was the drug czar, and then went into private consulting practice. He wrote a book entitled *The Book of Virtues* which is a book of stories arranged around nine virtues or characteristics of a good or wise or virtuous person. The book is over 700 pages long. Here's an article he wrote in the September 1994 issue of *Ladies Home Journal* entitled "How to Teach Children Values."

"We live in an era that almost seems dedicated to the corruption of the young, to assuring the loss of children's innocence before their time."

Then he goes on to give some statistics in the very first paragraph. He says, "Since 1960, there has been more than a 500 percent increase in violent crime, more than a 400 percent increase in out-of-wedlock births, tripling of the percentage of children living in single parent homes, tripling of the teenage suicide rate, doubling of the divorce rate, a drop of almost 75 points in the SAT scores of our students. In comparison with the other nations of the industrialized world, the U.S. ranks at or near the top in the rate of abortion, divorce, and unwed births. We lead the industrialized world in murder, rape, and violent crime. We need to recognize that many of the problems afflicting society today are moral problems, and therefore remarkably resistant to government cures."

There has been a fraying of the moral fabric of America. In America today we no longer believe anything is right, we no longer believe anything is wrong, therefore we're not sure what's virtuous and what's not virtuous.

Chuck Colson said, "That America now has gone down to such a point that we basically have done something that has never happened in the whole history of America. Because we have moved away from a moral, spiritual foundation, we have now at the end of the 20th century, for the first time raised an entire generation of young people who have no conscience." He said we have a whole generation of teenagers, pre-teens, and young adults who have no conscience because their parents have no sense of morality or right and wrong. Since the parents had nothing, they had nothing to pass along to their teenagers. So we are raising a group of young people today who know not the difference between what is right and what is wrong. If America is going to change, the hearts of people have to change one by one.

So now I start this sermon series on the Book of Proverbs. From Proverbs we will learn what God has said about what is right and wrong. Practical, down to earth teaching about what is right and wrong, and how we ought to treat people and how we ought to live, how our behavior ought to be different if we call ourselves a believer in Jesus Christ. For a world that has lost its way, God wrote the Book of Proverbs through Solomon, to bring us back to "The Way."

What are Proverbs anyway?

We have all used proverbs. Like:

- "Early to bed, early to rise makes one healthy, wealthy, and wise."
- "An apple a day keeps the doctor away."
- "Look before you leap."
- "A stitch in time saves nine."

Someone has said:

- "Proverbs are short sentences drawn from long experiences."
- "Proverbs are vertical wisdom for horizontal living."
- "Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth." William Arnot

From the Book of Proverbs we learn the Art of Skillful Living. Proverbs were given to help us live smart in life.

A proverb is a concentrated kernel of truth. It takes time to think through a proverb: both when you write one and when you read one.

These wisdom proverbs were given to us from God: (Proverbs 1:2-6)

- To equip us and enable us to live as we ought.

- To help us look at life from God's point of view.
- They give insight and ability to distinguish between truth and error.

Every waking moment of our lives, we operate from one of two viewpoints: human or divine. The more popular of the two is human. We had much rather think, maintain our attitudes, and conduct our lives independently of God. Human opinions influence us more than God's commands and principles. Listen to James 3:13-18 (Living Bible) describe the difference between Heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom: "If you are wise, live a life of steady gladness, so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about them, then you will be truly wise! And by all means don't brag about being wise and good if you are bitter and jealous and selfish; that is the worst sort of lie. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, inspired by the devil. For wherever there is jealousy or selfish ambition, there will be disorder and every other kind of evil. But the wisdom that comes from above (Heaven) is first of all pure and full of quiet gentleness. Then it is peace-loving and courteous. It allows discussion and is willing to yield to others; it is full of mercy and good deeds. It is whole-hearted and straight-forward and sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness."

Now, before we get into the Book of Proverbs, it is important to keep in mind that Proverbs must be interpreted with special care. Proverbs presents GENERAL TRUTH that may not be taken literally IN EVERY SITUATION. They do not state EVERYTHING about a given truth. They point to a general truth that may not be absolutely true if applied to ALL situations. Proverbs are NOT promises, but PRINCIPLES or general statements of truth. They must be understood as general guidelines for living a successful life. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (I remind you that when Solomon was young, He loved the Lord, but during mid-life he went after many women, who turned his heart from God?) Many broken-hearted parents have trained up their children in the way they should go, and when their children grew up, they abandoned Christianity. I have known some godly homes where the parents have done the best they could; and yet, three of their children grew up to be committed Christians and one turned away completely from God. We need to remember that we can teach the best we know how, but each person has a free will and may choose the wrong over the right. The Lord Jesus had twelve disciples, eleven were faithful and one betrayed Him. If Solomon were here, he would likely explain that he did not intend these proverbs as having no exceptions. In this opening message I want to share three things with you:

I. The Author of Proverbs Proverbs 1:1

Solomon was the son of King David, Israel's greatest king and a man after God's own heart. By the time Solomon was born, David had thoroughly repented of his terrible sins of adultery, deceit, and murder, and had written many of the Psalms, including the Psalm where he confessed his sins to the Lord and was thoroughly forgiven.

In I Kings 3:4-15 the Lord told Solomon to ask for anything he wanted and he would receive it. He asked for wisdom and an understanding heart and God gave him His wisdom – plus wealth and honor that he did not ask for.

In I Kings 4:32 we are told that Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. We only have about 850 of the proverbs and these were written for Scripture approximately 225 years after the death of Solomon by the godly King Hezekiah when he ascended to the throne of Judah.

One of the ways Hezekiah sought to return the nation to God's Word was by commissioning a group of men to study the Proverbs of Solomon and to actually copy a number of Solomon's Proverbs in that day and time. Proverbs 25-29 contain these selected proverbs.

We are told that Agur wrote Proverbs 30. We do not know who Agur was, but the Talmud suggest that Agur was one of the six names by which Solomon was called.

Many believe King Lemuel was Bathsheba's pet name for Solomon in Proverbs 31. Proverbs 31 contains two poems: (1) The Wise King (Proverbs 31:2-9, and (2) The Excellent Wife (Proverbs 31:10-31). Both are the teachings of a godly mother. That means that Proverbs 1 is the teaching of a father to his son and Proverbs 31 ends with the teaching of a mother. We need to note that Solomon's tutor and friend was the wise prophet, Nathan.

II. The Aim of Proverbs Proverbs 1:2-6

The Book of Proverbs was not mainly written to take us to church. Instead, it takes us to our jobs, to our schools, to our homes, and to personal relationships with others.

Let me remind you that these wisdom proverbs helps us to look at life from God's point of view. They give us insight and the ability to distinguish between truth and error; between right and wrong. Christianity is a way of life. It is something we live every day; not something we reserve for the church house.

Solomon put the key to the purpose of Proverbs right at the front door of the book. The purpose of the book is simply and clearly stated in these opening verses:

1. To Teach us Wisdom or The Art of Skillful Living Proverbs 1:2

Biblical wisdom is not just a high IQ. Wisdom here does not mean to just get smarter. The word wisdom means “to be skilled in living.” Skillful living is the ability to make wise choices and to live successfully according to the moral standards of God. It is acquired learning that helps one know what to do in a given situation. It is being skillful and successful in one's relationships and responsibilities. It is the skill of living a godly life as God intended man to live.

The word wisdom is used of craftsmen who built the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:6); (God said that He put wisdom in chosen men that they might make the furniture of the Tabernacle and in the carvings of gold.) It could refer to a composer who could take notes and put them together to make beautiful music; or it could refer to a mechanic who could put an engine together so that it runs perfectly.

Wisdom is the ability to live skillfully from God's point of view. Wisdom is firstly a divine attribute. One gets wisdom only as a gift of God. Proverbs 2:6-7

Wouldn't it be wonderful if God said to us, “If you want the same wisdom I gave Solomon, all you have to do is ask Me for it and I will give it to you.” Well, God has given us that promise!

See James 1:5-8. God promises His wisdom in the midst of our problems and trials and hardships.

See I Corinthians 1:30-31.

Ephesians 1:7-8 says that God has “lavished” His grace upon us in all wisdom and insight.

Colossians 2:3 says that in Christ are hidden “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

The only way to have godly wisdom is through a personal saving experience with the

Lord Jesus Christ.

“To perceive the words of understanding” tells us that wisdom also involves instruction or discipline. Godly, successful living requires more than skill; it also requires instruction or discipline. Discipline is an exercise of control, either by self or by an outside source. Through wisdom we also gain mental alertness and insight. We will have the ability to distinguish between truth and error, right from wrong, good from evil.

2. To Develop Moral Insight Proverbs 1:3

One will know how to handle himself and how to do things that are right, just, and fair.

3. To Help one Grow Up Proverbs 1:4

To give “subtlety,” (KJV) – “prudence”, (NKJV) – craftiness and shrewdness to make wise choices in the midst of our daily affairs. Shrewd and clever in a positive sense. It means possessing street smarts. Notice the two groups Solomon targets:

a. The Simple

The word “simple” here does not mean one that is intellectually limited or stupid, rather, it refers to one who is untaught and naive. Or one who is inexperienced, simply because he has not lived long enough or who has not been instructed in wisdom.

It means unsuspecting or gullible. What are the signs that a person is naive or gullible? They are easily tricked, they are a sucker for a sob story, they are easy prey for a con-man. They make the same dumb mistakes over and over again. They keep getting into the same bad relationships over and over again. They often bite off more than they can chew and they have to back off over and over again.

b. The Young

In the biblical sense, the young are people who are not old. The young are the ones who need the Book of Proverbs for the simple reason that the young have not had enough experience to know what life is all about. Proverbs helps the young know how to grow up morally, ethically, and spiritually. But notice: The young are to be a Teachable Hearer. Too many youth are not teachable and they grow old, still gullible. People who have the most trouble in life are those who are unteachable. You may have known a know-it-all or two. You can't teach them anything because they won't listen. They know it all! They have all the answers. No one should feel he has arrived, no matter what his age.

c. The Wise Proverbs 1:5-6

The wise listen, learn, and get guidance. They want to learn more. They seek advice and counsel when making decisions.

III. The Acquisition of Wisdom Proverbs 1:7

“The fear of the Lord” doesn’t mean to be frightened of God. Rather, it means to respect Him, to revere Him, to honor Him, to obey Him, to give Him His proper place in our lives. It is a life-long process.

The word “beginning” means first in order of priorities, the central truth, the ultimate goal of something. “Fools despise wisdom and instruction.” There are five different words in the Book of Proverbs translated by the word fool. So when you see the word “fool” you have to find out which Hebrew word is being used because they all have different meanings. There is the young fool, the naive fool, the gullible fool, the angry fool and the arrogant, stubborn, hard-headed fool who will not listen to anybody’s advice. This is the most extreme form of the word and it’s the word used here.

Here is a two-way test to spot a fool: (1) A fool doesn’t know what he is doing, (2) He doesn’t care. He doesn’t even care enough to wise up and figure it out. The wise says, “I don’t know, would you teach me? I don’t know, but I’d like to learn. Can you help me?” There’s nothing wrong with saying, “I don’t know.” But the fool says, “I don’t know, I don’t want to learn anything, and you can’t teach me anything.” I want God to teach me as we study the Book of Proverbs and I hope you do too.

THE MEN OF PROVERBS: THE WISE MEN

We are going to be looking at the characteristics of five men often referred to in the Book of Proverbs.

- The Wise Man
- The Simple Man
- The Prudent Man
- The Slothful Man vs The Diligent Man
- The Fool

First, the Wise Man.

Proverbs 1:5: “A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel.”

Here are the wise man’s attributes:

1. Wise people have teachable spirits – Proverbs 1:5a
2. Wise people continue to grow – Proverbs 1:5b
3. Wise people seek good, godly advice – Proverbs 1:5c

I. The Conduct of the Wise Man

A. Listens Proverbs 1:5

Wise men want to learn and improve. They seek counsel from other wise men.

B. Accepts Correction

Proverbs 9:8: “Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.”

A scorner is one who is unteachable and filled with pride. How a person responds to correction or reproof tells you a lot about a person.

Jesus said the same thing to His followers. Matthew 7:6: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and tear you to pieces.”

Proverbs 9:9: “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.”

A wise man doesn’t feel he’s arrived at the pinnacle of wisdom.

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

The wise genuinely want to know all that is pleasing to God in their lives.

Proverbs 17:10: "Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool."

Discipline yields results for the wise, but not for fools.

Proverbs 29:15: "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

No matter what the latest child-rearing philosophy or fad, children arrive in this world with a human nature. They inherit a nature that will, at times, behave selfishly, rebel, become angry, and commit a host of other mischievous and sometimes harmful acts.

Only discipline can unbind children from their foolishness and make room in their hearts for wisdom. The "Rod" refers to physical punishment or spanking. "Reproof" is verbal correction.

C. Prepares

Proverbs 10:5: "He who gathers in summer is a wise son; he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame."

The wise take full advantage of opportunities to work. Crops must be harvested in the summer when they are ripe. They don't grow year round. The wise reap and gather into their barns so they will have food for the cold winter months. They may be tired, and may not feel like working every day, but they still get out of bed and do what needs to be done while it can be done.

Parents must teach their children a strong work ethic. The sinful nature tends to be lazy and undisciplined. We must teach our children that there is dignity and respect in working hard and doing a good job, but that there is shame in laziness and poor work. Teach them initiative – to be self-starters – and to be completely honest and fair in all their dealings.

D. Follows Instruction

Proverbs 13:1: "A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke."

Wise children obey their parents instructions. The word "scorner" means "to make mouths." In other words, they mouth off at their parents when asked to do something.

E. Gains Knowledge

Proverbs 10:14 (LB): "A wise man holds his tongue. Only a fool blurts out everything he knows; that only leads to sorrow and trouble."

- The mouth of the foolish is a close relative of destruction.
- Practice integrity in everything you say and do.
- Uplift others with the things you say, use edifying, encouraging words to build people up rather than tear them down.
- Do not bring up past problems, offenses, or hurts to others. When you dig up something dead and buried, it only creates a stink. Forgive, and leave the past in the past. Do not use it as a weapon.

F. Refrains his Tongue

Proverbs 10:19: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise."

When people talk too much about others, sin is usually involved. The lips of the wise are closed. The lips of the fool are open.

Proverbs 17:28 (LB): "Even a fool is thought to be wise when he is silent. It puts him to keep his mouth shut."

Even fools can fool people when they are silent.

G. Wins Souls

Proverbs 11:30: "All who wins souls are wise."

Not only is a soul forgiven and a new eternal home gained, but the saved man becomes more enjoyable to be around.

H. Harkens to Counsel

Proverbs 12:15 (LB): "A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others."

Woe to those who believe their way is the only way. Arrogant people think they know it all and never make mistakes.

I. Walks with Wise Men

Proverbs 13:20 (LB): “Be with wise men and become wise. Be with evil men and become evil.”

God places wise men and women in our lives for a very good reason: to impart wisdom to us. A person is influenced by the people with whom they associate.

J. Departs from Evil

Proverbs 14:16 (LB): “A wise man is cautious and avoids danger; a fool plunges ahead with great confidence.”

The wise fear sin and its deadly consequences. The foolish are reckless and self-confident.

K. Abstains from Liquor

Proverbs 20:1 (LB): “Wine gives false courage; hard liquor leads to brawls; what fools men are to let it master them, making them real drunkenly down the street.”

Drinking people often intimidate people and some become violent. It often changes the personality of people. It is a common way people inflict pain on themselves.

L. Obeys God's Law

Proverbs 28:7 (Message): “Practice God's law – get a reputation for wisdom; hang out with a loose crowd – embarrass your family.”

Avoiding the wrong crowd will help us to be faithful to God and will keep us from disgracing our parents and family.

M. Gets Understanding

Proverbs 10:23 (LB): “A fool's fun is being bad; a wise man's fun is being wise.”

N. Fears God

Proverbs 9:10 (LB): “For the reverence and fear of God are basic to all wisdom. Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding.”

O. Shows Respect for Others

Proverbs 11:12 (LB): “To quarrel with a neighbor is foolish; a man of good sense holds his tongue.”

How many people begin a destructive statement about someone by saying, “I don't have anything against this person ...” or “I like this person ...” or “It's nothing personal ...” and then follow-up with, “but ...” – and then they belittle or tear down those folks?

P. Knows Prudence (Discretion)

Proverbs 14:8 (Message): “The wisdom of the wise keeps life on track, the foolishness of fools lands them in the ditch.”

Fools deceive themselves and others. Prudent people look at themselves in the mirror of God's Word and see themselves as they really are.

II. The Characteristics of the Wise Man

A. Fair and Just

Proverbs 10:31 (Message): “A good person's mouth is a clear fountain of wisdom; a foul mouth is a stagnant swamp.”

The wisdom spoken by the righteous is the fruit of the fear of the Lord: their reverence for Him, their relationship with Him, their submission to Him, and their knowledge of His Word.

Proverbs 24:23: “It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.”

This proverb is directed specifically to those who serve as legal justices and officials.

Legal judges and officials must not let personal relationships, feelings, fear, favor, or bribery influence their decisions. God has delegated His authority to them; they rule in God's stead. They need to practice integrity by rendering their judgments in complete objectivity and truth.

B. Patient

Proverbs 29:8 (LB): "Fools start fights everywhere while wise men try to keep peace."

Foolish people start and spread a fire of strife while wise men try to smother the fire by bringing calm to the situation before it bursts out and does great damage. The wise are peacemakers.

C. Humble

Proverbs 11:2: "When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom."

People who are truly wise – those who fear God and keep His commandments – are humble people. They have demonstrated their humility by placing themselves under God's authority. They realize that they are bankrupt of wisdom on their own.

III. The Consequences of the Wise Man

A. Receives Honor

Proverbs 3:16-17(LB): "Wisdom gives: A long, good life, riches, honor, pleasures, and peace."

Proverbs 3:35 (LB): "The wise are promoted to honor, but fools are promoted to shame."

B. Has a Glad Father

Proverbs 10:1 (LB): "Happy is the man with a level-headed son; sad is the mother of a rebel."

Proverbs 15:20: "A wise son makes a glad father; but a foolish son despiseth his mother."

Proverbs 23:15: "My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice."

C. Has Length of Days

Proverbs 3:16 Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor.

D. Has Ways of Peace and Pleasantness

Proverbs 3:17 Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace.

E. Is Protected

Proverbs 4:6 Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you.

THE MEN OF PROVERBS: THE SIMPLE MAN

The dictionary says the word "simple" means "low in intelligence, not wise , or silly." The Hebrew word for simple means "seducible, deceivable, persuadable, silly."

I. The Conduct of the Simple Man

A. Believes Every Word

Proverbs 14:15: "The simple (one easily deceived) believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps."

The wise give thought to their actions. The simple believes and follows anything. The word "simple" here means foolish, simpleminded, naive concerning the challenges of life, inexperienced, lacking insight. The simple is gullible and are prone to fall into traps because they are easily deceived by the talk of another. They are not discerning and believe everything they are told because they do not consider the facts of the matter. Millions of people will spend eternity in hell because they blindly believe everything they are told or taught. The simple believe they are on the right path when in fact the path leads to death.

B. Learns from the Punishment of the Scorer

Proverbs 19:24: "Strike (smite) a scoffer, and the simple will become wary (will learn from his example); rebuke one who has understanding, and he will discern knowledge."

Notice three of the four main characters of Proverbs and how they respond to chastening in Verse 25.

Scorners or mockers are unaffected when they are strongly disciplined for their misbehavior. They defy their parents or other authorities who punish them and continue in their disobedient ways. The scorner is a bold sinner and is often the ring-leader of a mischievous group. He will not learn from correction (Proverbs 13:1), but they should be punished since the correction will help the simple learn.

The simple have the good sense to learn from the mistakes of others. When they see a scorner punished, they change their behavior before they too are chastised.

The wise or understanding require only reproof – scolding or verbal correction – to bring about change. When they are corrected, they change their behavior before severe discipline becomes necessary. Because of their nature, the wise take advantage of every opportunity to grow in wisdom and knowledge.

Proverbs 21:11: “When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: And when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.”

Mockers are usually past the point of being taught righteousness, but sometimes observe and learn from the punishment suffered by the mockers.

II. The Characteristics of the Simple Man

A. Without Understanding

Proverbs 7:7: “I beheld among the simple, I perceived among the youths, a young man devoid of understanding.”

The simple one in Proverbs are not dim-witted or senseless; they are naive, gullible, and prone to fall into traps. They live for the moment and fail to look ahead and to weigh the consequences of their actions. They are not scorners who mock God's law or fools who totally disregard and disobey God's commandments. Neither are they wise sons who keep God's law and follow the path of life. The simple ones can go either way: they need to be trained and instructed in wisdom so that they can recognize the snares of sin and make wise choices.

Solomon saw among the crowd, one young man who stood out. He walked past a lustful woman's house and indulged in lustful thoughts of sexual pleasures with the women. He continued to flirt with temptation and imagined in his mind what it would be like to fulfill his lustful thoughts. Eventually, he went in unto her. The danger started when he started flirting with the temptations in his mind. Because he had no self-control, he yielded.

“He who would not fall down should not walk in slippery places.”

III. The Consequences of the Simple Man

A. Inherits Folly

Proverbs 14:18: “The simple inherit folly, but the prudent (careful) are crowned with knowledge.”

The simple inherit folly because they fail to seek wisdom. They are unlearned in the ways of wisdom and they do not fear the Lord.

B. Does Evil and Is Punished

Proverbs 22:3: “A prudent man foresees evil and hides, but the simple pass on and are punished.”

Prudent people – people who are wise and discerning – recognize the dangers of sin and go out of their way to avoid these dangers. Simple people are blind to Satan's traps and fall into them, where they suffer the painful consequences of sin.

THE MEN OF PROVERBS: THE PRUDENT MAN (WISE)

The dictionary says the word “prudent” means “cautious, circumspect, careful of the consequences or actions.”

The Hebrew for the word “prudent” means cunning, to separate mentally, beware, intelligent, crafty, subtle.

I. The Conduct of the Prudent Man

A. Controls His Temper

Proverbs 12:16 (LB): "A fool is quick-tempered; a wise man (prudent) stays cool when insulted."

The prudent man is a model of self-control; he ignores an insult. The wise control their emotions and tightly seal their lip. They conceal their emotions.

B. Conceals Knowledge

Proverbs 12:23 (LB): "A wise man doesn't display his knowledge, but a fool displays his foolishness."

The wise person is a model of restraint and humility, speaking what he knows at the appropriate time. They think before they speak and are very careful with their words. It is impossible to overestimate how important our speech and words are to our success. The gossip demonstrates how foolish they are. Other people judge us according to what we say, and one day we must account to God for every word we have spoken.

C. Gathers Knowledge

Proverbs 13:16 (LB): "A wise (prudent) man thinks ahead; a fool doesn't, and even brags about it."

The truth of this proverb is that a person behaves according to his or her character.

Proverbs 18:15 (LB): "The intelligent man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them."

Wise people are on a never-ending quest for knowledge. They know they need to grow in wisdom day by day.

D. Takes Heed to Reproof

Proverbs 15:5 (LB): "Only a fool despises his father's advice; a wise son considers each suggestion."

E. Foresees Sin

Proverbs 22:3: "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished."

The wise stay alert and avoid danger. The simple are blind and suffer the consequences.

II. The Characteristics of the Prudent Man

A. Understands His Way

Proverbs 14:8 (LB): "The wise man looks ahead. The fool attempts to fool himself and won't face facts."

The context of this proverb is dealing with our speech. The wise protect themselves by guarding their words. The foolish speak pridefully and freely and are punished.

Proverbs 14:15: "The simple believe every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going."

B. Has Wisdom

Proverbs 8:12 (LB): "Wisdom and good judgment live together, for wisdom knows where to discover knowledge and understanding."

When you choose wisdom, you also receive her companions: prudence, knowledge, and discretion.

Proverbs 16:21: "The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increase learning."

Solomon is talking about developing a reputation for wisdom. People who are wise are generally highly regarded and respected by others. They are known for their common sense and good judgment; therefore, people value their insight and understanding.

"Sweetness of lips" or "pleasant words" means they have mastered the art of speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Through their words, they spread God's grace to others (Ephesians 4:29). People will listen to them and learn from them, not only because of what they teach, but also because of the way they teach it. They do not allow any corrupt communication to pass through their lips; rather, they speak only that which builds others up.

Dictionary: "Slothful" means "inactive, sluggish, lazy, idle."

Hebrew: "slothful" means "indolent (making little effort), sluggard, idle, lazy."

I. The Conduct of the Slothful Man

A. Makes Excuses

Proverbs 22:13; 26:13 (LB): "The lazy man is full of excuses. I can't go to work, he says. If I go outside I might find a lion in the street and be killed."

Laziness is a problem within society. Lazy people are inefficient, less productive, more likely to have accidents, and fail to contribute all they can to society. Lazy workers produce less; lazy students learn less; and lazy property owners have unkempt, unattractive, and deteriorating properties.

The excuses sluggards dream up to avoid work are preposterous. As believers, we certainly do not want our work ethic to be ridiculed, mocked, or laughed at. It was highly unlikely that a person living in Jerusalem or any town of Israel would be mauled by a lion because they were not found among people. Believers should be diligent and build a reputation for being one of the best on the job.

Proverbs 20:4: "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing."

Laziness often leads to poverty. The lazy man was not willing to work in unfavorable conditions, he takes short-cuts, does not do the work properly, exerts very little effort and wonders why he sees little results.

B. Sleeps

Proverbs 6:9-11: "How long will you slumber (sleep), O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber a little folding of the hands – so shall your poverty come to you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man."

From the LB – " 'But you – all you do is sleep. When will you wake up?' 'Let me sleep a little longer. Sure, just a little more!' And as you sleep, poverty creeps upon you like a robbery and destroys you; want attacks you in full armor."

Solomon's disgust with lazy people is impossible to overlook. He has no patience with those who will not work. Laziness is a telltale sign of a destructive character flaw.

Solomon is directing these proverbs to his son. As parents, we need to begin instilling a strong work ethic in our children during their early years. We have a responsibility to teach our children diligence, discipline, and pride in their work. We do this by setting a good example.

Proverbs 19:15: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger."

The consequence of laziness is lost time and money (hunger). "Deep sleep" describes the fact that slothful people waste the time God has given them.

They sleep their life away. They do nothing productive or profitable with their lives. They sleep through life like a person who is in a coma. They accomplish nothing and they contribute nothing. The word translated as idle or shiftless carries the idea of deceit and fraud. Lazy people live dishonestly and fraudulently off the fruit of other people's labor.

Proverbs 26:14 (LB): The lazy man "sticks to his bed like a door to its hinges!"

Like a door swinging back and forth – open and shut – on its hinges is a sluggard turning over and over – from side to side – on his bed.

II. The Characteristics of the Slothful Man

A. Is Wasteful

Proverbs 12:27 (LB): "Lazy people don't even cook the game they catch, but the diligent makes use of everything they find."

Lazy people are wasteful and do not value what they have. The man in this proverb is too lazy to cook his food and lets it spoil. This is symbolic of a person who does not follow through with a project, of not seeing it through to the end. This does not mean that the lazy person does not work, just that he does not care or does not value what he has enough to finish what he has started.

Diligent, hard-working people are not wasteful. They would never allow valuable resources to spoil or be thrown away. They always follow through to the end.

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

These people are intentionally destructive. They purposely tear down and waste, rather than build and preserve.

B. Is Lazy

Proverbs 26:15 (LB): “Some people are so lazy that they won't lift a finger to feed themselves.”

Solomon offers a humorous and sarcastic proverb about the slothful man who dips his hand in a bowl of food and leaves it there in the bowl because he is actually too lazy to take his hand out of the bowl to lift it to his mouth.>

C. Will Not Work

Proverbs 24:30-31 (LB): “I walked by the field of a lazy person, the vineyard of one lacking sense. I saw that it was overgrown with thorns. It was covered with weeds, and its walls were broken down.”

THE DILIGENT MAN

Dictionary and Hebrew – determination, eager, quick, skillful, ready

I. The Conduct of the Diligent Man

A. Works Hard

Proverbs 10:4: “He becomes poor that dealeth with a slack hand, but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.”

The person who deals with a slack hand is not one who will not work at ALL, but one who is negligent and careless in his or her responsibilities. People who work with a diligent hand labors wholeheartedly, with all their strength.

B. Is Prepared

Proverbs 22:29: “Do you see a competent worker? He will serve kings.”

Solomon is referring to the worker who has management ability. As believers, we are to set the example of being hard workers.

Proverbs 27:23 (LB): “Know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds.”

Wealth in the Old Testament era consisted mostly of livestock: sheep, goats, and cattle.

The lesson: We must be diligent to oversee our investments and assets. To the farmer, this means to keep a close watch on your animals. Supervise carefully; count them frequently; regularly check them for injuries or diseases. Always know what's going on with your holdings.

II. The Characteristics of the Diligent Man

A. Is Not Wasteful

Proverbs 21:5 (LB): “Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.”

Wise people are diligent: They invest the time and energy necessary to do a job correctly.

Their plans are thorough and carried out completely. They do not cut corners and take hasty shortcuts that result in expensive problems.

B. Plans Things Out

Again Proverbs 21:5.

III. The Consequences of the Diligent Man

A. Has Riches

Proverbs 10:4: “He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.”

Hard workers will be rewarded for their productive labor.

B. Is Satisfied

Proverbs 13:4 (LB): “Lazy people want much but get little, but those who work hard will prosper and be satisfied.”

Lazy people have few desires fulfilled and achieve very little in life. It is the diligent, the hard workers who set the goals and make the plans, and put forth the effort needed to satisfy their desires.

C. Has Plenty

Again Proverbs 21:5. The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.

D. Is in a Place of Authority

Again Proverbs 12:24. The hand of the diligent will rule, But the slack hand will be put to forced labor.

THE FOOL

Two words serve as the foundation for understanding Proverbs. The word “wisdom” and the word “fool.” The New Testament quotes Proverbs over 20 times. Solomon uses eight words in Hebrew for wisdom and three for fool.

The style of poetry most often used when using these two words is the “style of contrast” – things that are alike are compared, and things that are not alike that are compared. These contrast focus on the way of the Lord or the way of Satan – the way of righteousness or the way of sin.

Proverbs is a book about morality. If you want to know what wisdom is, it is primarily learning to walk with God and staying away from sin.

Proverbs is a book that should be taught to young children and teens, because its messages are addressed to young people. If there ever was a book that a student ought to study and master, it is the Book of Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs is what God has to say to people who have their whole life ahead of them. There is also a degree of sadness for those who have lived long and messed up their life by not walking with the Lord. Proverbs tells us why that has happened. But there is also a sense of hope for those in despair, for in Proverbs there is the clear hope that if one would begin to follow the principles of Proverbs, life could be different. Proverbs applies to all ages!

But Proverbs is like a protective covering for the young to say, “If you want your life to be blessed, ‘this is the way of the Lord – walk ye in it!’”

Psalms 14:1 pretty well sums up what Solomon says about the fool: “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.” If you read this verse in the KJV, you will notice the words “there is” is in italics, meaning that these words were added by the translators to make it read more smoothly, but in this case it weakens what the Psalmist is saying. It should read, “The fool has said in his heart, No God.” No God for me in my heart and life. If you look at Psalm 14:1-3 you will see the indictments against the person who says, “I don’t want God in my life.” They are corrupt, which means decay, ruin, spoil, rotten. They have done abominable, loathsome, detestable works. They have all turned aside to become corrupt, filthy, morally rotten, and are workers of wickedness.

Three things I want to share with you about fools:

I. The Conduct of Fools

A. He Gets into Arguments Easily.

Proverbs 18:6 (LB): “Fools get into constant quarrels; they are asking for a beating.”

Fools bring most of their problems on themselves because they cannot or will not control their speech. They constantly use unwise or insulting words that provoke others against them.

Proverbs 20:3 (LB): Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor, ONLY fools insist on quarreling.”

B. He Treats Sin Lightly.

Proverbs 10:23: "To do evil is like sport to a fool, but a man of understanding has wisdom."

Fools find pleasure in acts of extreme wickedness. They commit heinous sins just for sport and fun.

Proverbs 14:9 (LB): "Fools make fun of guilt, but the godly acknowledge it and seek reconciliation."

The KJV says, "Fools mock at sin," think it's funny when others sin.

C. A Fool Responds to Seduction Easily and Quickly.

Proverbs 7:21-23 (LB): "So she seduced him with her pretty speech. With her flattery she enticed him. He followed her at once, like an ox going to the slaughter or like a trapped stag, awaiting the arrow that would pierce its heart. He was like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life."

D. He Squanders Money.

Proverbs 21:20 (LB): "The wise have wealth and luxury, but fools spend whatever they get."

The future is uncertain; therefore, those who are wise will prepare and save for the unexpected. Foolish people consume everything they have and spend everything they earn. They do not Practice self-discipline or good stewardship.

Here's a good formula for handling your paycheck: 10 – 10 – 80. Tithe the first 10 percent; save the next 10 percent; live on the 80 percent.

E. He Harbors Anger and Resentment.

Proverbs 12:16 (LB): "A fool is quick-tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted."

The wise control their emotions and tightly seal their lips when they are upset or offended. The wise wait until their emotions have stabilized before responding.

Proverbs 14:29 (LB): "Those who control their anger have great understanding; those with a hasty temper will make mistakes."

Solomon is proclaiming the virtue and wisdom of self-control. Quick-tempered people show no self-restraint, they disregard the feelings of others and the accepted standards of right and wrong.

F. He Practices Deceit and Lying.

Proverbs 14:8 (LB): "The wise look ahead to see what is coming, but fools deceive themselves."

The wise give thought to their conduct.

G. Always Thinks He's Right.

Proverbs 12:15: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise."

Arrogant people who think they know it all and never make mistakes are fools. The wise, on the other hand, are willing to seek advice from others and follow sound counsel.

H. Doesn't Respond to Reproof or Correction.

Proverbs 17:10: "A single rebuke does more for a person of understanding than a hundred lashes on the back of a fool."

I. Spreads Slander.

Proverbs 10:18 (LB): "To hide hatred is to be a liar; to slander is to be a fool."

Those who are foolish cover their hatred for other people by lying about them and slandering their names. People who hate others will spread evil reports about them, reports that are malicious and untrue.

J. Speaks Without Listening.

Proverbs 18:13: "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him."

Don't jump to conclusions. Gather all the information you can and consider it carefully before drawing a conclusion.

II. The Characteristics of a Fool

A. A Fool Brings Heartache to his Parents.

Proverbs 10:1 (LB): "A wise child brings joy to a father; a foolish child brings grief to a mother."

Proverbs 15:5 (LB): "Only a fool despises a parent's discipline; whoever learns from correction is wise."

Proverbs 15:20: "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother."

Proverbs 17:21 (LB): "It is painful to be a parent of a fool; there is no joy for the father of a rebel."

A foolish child grieves and disappoints his parents.

Proverbs 17:25: A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him."

Proverbs 19:13: "A foolish son is the ruin of his father ..."

B. Problems Trying to Confront a Fool.

Proverbs 23:9 (LB): "Don't waste your breath on fools, for they will despise the wisest advice."

There are some people who are just unwilling to be helped. Therefore, do not waste your precious time and resources on fools, people who have willfully rejected the Lord and His commandments.

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

These seemingly contradictory proverbs work together to make a point: there is a Time to answer a fool, and a Time not to answer. There is a Right Way to answer a fool as well as a Wrong Way. Wise people need to discern When and How to answer fools and when to ignore them. Before answering a fool's Ridiculous arguments, remember (Verse 4):

- Responding to a fool regarding pointless or absurd matters can make you look foolish.
- Don't stoop to a fool's level by arguing with him.
- Answering a fool is often a waste of time and breath – it accomplishes absolutely nothing.

Sometimes, however, fools must be silenced (Verse 5). Sometimes a fool's statements and actions are so dangerous that they have to be challenged and refuted. If not, other people may be deceived into believing the fool is right and end up being harmed themselves.

Proverbs 29:9 (LB): "If a wise person takes a fool to court, there will be ranting and ridicule but no satisfaction."

Wise people know there is no point in trying to resolve a conflict with fools. Fools are unreasonable; they are unwilling to compromise or to acknowledge they are wrong. Note how fools respond to matters serious enough to require legal action: they either rage, becoming intensely angry, or make light of the situation by laughing or mocking. It is useless to seek negotiation or compromise with them. They will never put the matter to

rest.

III. The Consequences of Fools

Proverbs 10:14: "Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin (destruction)."

Proverbs 18:7 (LB): "The mouths of fools are their ruin; their lips get them into trouble."

The speech of fools is their biggest problem.

Proverbs 13:20: "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."

Those who want to be wise or to grow in wisdom will surround themselves with people who are wise. Over time, they will benefit greatly from simply observing the lives of wise individuals, and they will learn much through the experiences and counsel of their godly friends.

A person is influenced by the people with whom they associate. Attitudes, mannerisms, speech patterns, philosophies – all of these are transferred by association. People feed off those who they are around. People can bring great harm to themselves by walking with fools.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Proverbs 1:7: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instructions."

If there is a key verse that unlocks the power and purpose of this great book (Proverbs), it would be Proverbs 1:7. If we are going to learn wisdom and knowledge, it must begin with the fear of the Lord. This is a subject that isn't preached about much in our day, but it is still vital to the Christian faith. We need to know what the fear of the Lord is all about. Some 18 times in the Book of Proverbs and some 27 times in the Bible, this phrase is found. If so much emphasis is placed on fearing the Lord, then I believe we need to know what it means and how we go about doing it.

I. The Definition of the Fear of the Lord

A. What does the phrase, "the fear of the Lord" refer to?

When we think of fear, we associate the word with terror. Webster's Dictionary defines "fear" as "a feeling of anxiety and agitation produced by the presence or nearness of danger, evil, pain, etc. " For many, this would describe the fear you get when you see a snake, or when you go to the dentist, or when you find yourself in a time of extreme danger. It is dread of the unknown. Surely, this is NOT the sensation the writer of Proverbs is referring to. In our modern vernacular, the word fear, in the context in which it is used by Solomon, has been replaced with reverence, awe, and great respect. What the writer of Proverbs is saying is that we are to have a deep reverence and respect for the Lord. We are to be awed and humbled by His presence.

B. What, then, does it mean to fear the Lord?

When we truly fear the Lord, we will recognize that He is the Creator and we are the creatures. He is the Master, we are the servants. He is the Father and we are the children. This attitude will manifest itself in our having respect for God, His Word and in our having a desire to do what He tells us to do in His Bible. We can relate this kind of fear to that which a child has for his parents. If the right kind of fear is present, the child knows that his parents can hurt him if there is disobedience, but overriding that fear is the knowledge that disobedience hurts the parents and the child loves and respects his parents and does not want to hurt them. To put it simply, the fear of the Lord is a deep seated reverence for God that causes man to want to please Him at all cost.

Genuine fear of the Lord is always seen in obedience to the Word of God.

Proverbs 8:13 says, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil."

People who do not walk in line with God's Word do not fear the Lord, regardless of what they profess with their lips. For one who fears the Lord, nothing else matters but doing that which pleases the Lord.

Oswald Chambers says, "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."

II. The Dividends of the Fear of the Lord

The fear of the Lord is:

A. It is the Beginning of Wisdom Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33

Well, what is wisdom? Wisdom is NOT the same as I.Q. You can be smart and still lack wisdom. You can be well educated without having wisdom. Wisdom in Scripture has a moral connotation. Some of the smartest people in any community, those who get the promotions, and accumulate the wealth, are often ignorant of the Word of God. Wisdom in the Bible has to do with making the right decision. It has to do with discerning between right and wrong, between righteousness and unrighteousness. No one can be considered wise who lives a morally Perverted and Corrupt life. The first step toward wisdom is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Lord who gives wisdom.

B. It Motivates People to Holiness

Proverbs 3:7: "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil."

Believers should acknowledge God in all their ways. We should consult Him when making plans and seek His counsel in every matter.

Proverbs 16:6: "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."

Jesus, God's Son, paid for man's sin on the cross. Because of our relationship with Jesus, God changes our lives and we depart from evil.

C. It Prolongs Life

Proverbs 10:27: "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of wicked shall be shortened."

This is not a blanket promise because a number of things can happen along the road of life that can take us out of here in an instant. But generally speaking, those who fear the Lord enjoy more days because they do not engage in the sinful activities and behaviors that tend to shorten people's lives.

D. It Produces a Sense of Security

Proverbs 14:26: "In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence. And His children will have a place of refuge."

Those who are in Christ are safe from the storms of God's judgment and wrath. The person who fears and obeys God can be confident that he or she will be spared the horrible consequences of sin.

E. It Produces Life

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

The fear of the Lord brings satisfaction to life. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life that provides living water to satisfy the thirsty soul. This enables the Christian to walk cleaner and closer, thus avoiding the temptations and traps of the devil.

F. It Makes all of Life Better

Proverbs 15:16: "Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith."

The wise choose to value God's love over the world's riches. Nothing is more valuable than a relationship with the Lord Jesus. Jesus said that the things of the world and the deceitfulness of riches would prevent God's Word from bearing fruit in many people's hearts (Matthew 13:22). But those who fear the Lord would not trade that relationship for all the world's wealth. In fact, they would unanimously choose to be materially poor rather than spiritually poor.

G. It Produces Satisfaction and Safety

Proverbs 19:23: "The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil."

The fear of the Lord brings satisfaction, safety, and peace to a person's life. In the fear of the Lord is a life lived in freedom.

H. It Brings Great Blessings

Proverbs 22:4: "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life."

The person who chooses to walk in the fear of the Lord can rest assured that this decision will bring great blessing into his life. There will be spiritual riches beyond belief, (peace, joy, hope, security, the promises of God), there will be honor from the Lord, and there will be abundant life (John 10:10). The fear of the Lord produces the greatest possible life that any person can ever live. There is no better life upon this earth than a life lived in the will of the Lord.

III. The Decisions Related to the Fear of the Lord

A. To put it simply, walking in the Fear of the Lord is going to have to be your individual decision.

No one can make you walk in the fear of the Lord and no one can do it for you. The decision to live a life that is ordered around a holy, reverential respect for God is a decision that you must make for yourself. All I can do is tell you that deciding to walk in the fear of the Lord will produce a better life down here and result in a life greatly blessed by the Lord. A decision to live outside the fear of the Lord, that is, living as you please and for yourself, will bring not the blessings of the Lord, but God's judgment to bear in your life. If you are saved, you will never be able to get away with sin (Revelation 3:19).

B. A life lived in the fear of the Lord will tell on you.

If you fear Him, then you will want to honor Him in everything. He will come first and His will will be paramount in your life. It is easy to see those who walk in the fear of the Lord. His House is a priority, prayer and the Scriptures are priorities, everything God says in His Word take priority and precedent over one's personal will and desires. The Lord's way becomes the only way.

C. By the same token, a life lived outside the fear of God is easy to pick out as well.

The things of God will be secondary. Other matters will consistently be placed ahead of the Lord and His will and His work. This kind of life is usually filled with trouble and trial. There is more heartache and disaster in a life lived outside the fear of the Lord., This is not the way God intended the Christian life to be lived.

The Lord help us to walk in reverential awe before Him. May His people always be a people who fear the Lord and prove it by living by His Word.

SOLOMON'S FIRST LESSON TO HIS SON LISTEN TO YOUR PARENTS

Proverbs 1:8-10; 2:1; 3:1, 11; 4:1-4; 5:1; 6:1-2

We are told in I Kings 3 that God said to Solomon shortly after being placed on the throne of Israel as King, "Ask! What shall I give you?" It was a blank check. The Almighty God, who has complete control over all resources, said to Solomon, "Ask for whatever you want from Me and I will give it to you!" The Bible says that it pleased God that Solomon did not ask for wealth or power; rather he asked for wisdom and an understanding heart that he might lead or govern the people of God.

God granted his request AND more! In I Kings 4 we are told that Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs. Two hundred years after Solomon's death, Israel had drifted far from God. It was then that good King Hezekiah, one of the most godly kings of Judah, came to the throne. He wanted revival to come to Judah and he wanted the people to commit to reading the Word of God again. He commissioned a group of men to study, copy, and arrange the proverbs so they could put them in a book for the people to read. Some 225 years after the death of Solomon, what we call The Book of Proverbs was produced. About 850 of the 3,000 proverbs were placed in the Book of Proverbs. The young, ages one to 13, was his target audience in the first nine chapters. And so, Chapters 1-9 is a guide for parents in rearing and instructing their children to be skillful and successful in their lives at home, in business, in the community, in their relationships, and in their occupations.

There are 13 lessons Solomon said all parents had the responsibility to teach their children by age 13, when they were considered sons of the Law and adult males. Over 20 times Solomon will say, "My son, listen ..."

You will notice in Proverbs 1:8 that both father and mother have the responsibility of teaching their children the ways of the Lord.

Let me paraphrase Proverbs 1:8-9: "My son: Hear my instructions: Forsake it not. Put on now, O son! Daughter! Put on these beautiful garments and ornaments: love, obedience, respect, and honor for your parents. These jewels from heaven should be set deep within your soul. These ornaments will not be out of date, even when worn on the golden streets of the New Jerusalem."

1. The Father's Instruction Proverbs 1:8a

Fathers, you have the responsibility to instruct your child. And you have a short period of time to instruct them and that time is so swiftly gone.

The Hebrew word Solomon uses for "son" means "one before hair is on the chin."

Fathers must begin to train their children from the earliest time that they are able to understand. At the most you have ten to twelve years to instill in them godly principles. After then, they will be listening to other voices they deem more significant than yours – friends, peers, etc.

The word "instruction" means "to son train." That is, to train the son in everything that is related to being a godly male. That includes what he believes about God. If he doesn't do it, he fails miserably. (Most fathers think, "Oh, if I could just do it again!")

2. The Mother's Teaching Proverbs 1:8b

The mother's responsibility is to teach the child the Word of God. You say, "I thought it was the father's responsibility to instruct." It is, but the mother usually has more time to spend with the child than does the father. The father's responsibility is to instruct and the mother's responsibility is to see to it that the child hides away the Word of God in their hearts.

Moms, before you can teach the things of God to your children, you must take care to put godly things into your own life first.

There's a lot of criticism today about how unruly and rebellious youth are today. Why is that? We say, "Listen to Your Parents," but

before the children can hear, the parents must be saying something.

Maybe the children are not listening because the parents are not saying anything – or at least, they are not saying the right things.

What are the parents suppose to be saying to their children? See Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

Young people, the Bible says, “Children Obey ... and Respect your parents.” Why? Well, first, they are your parents. They gave you life. Second, they are older and have experienced more of life than you have. Third, Son, daughter, no one loves you and wants the best for you more than your parents.

Fourth, God has delegated His authority to the parents; and so, when your parents speak to you, they are speaking in God's stead.

Parents, understand that children normally pass through four stages with their parents:

1. They Idolize them.

Dad can do no wrong. Mom is the greatest mom in the world. They can do anything!

2. They Demonize them.

Mom and dad are the source of all miseries and all of the troubles in the world. They don't understand anything. They are so out of touch with the way the world is today.

They are so dumb!

3. They Utilize them.

“Dad, can I have the keys to the car?” “Mom, would you do the dishes for me?”

4. They Humanize them.

They begin to realize that their parents are neither God nor demons. They are not just people to be used, but are human s who have both their weak and strong points, but they love you more than they can tell you. And, parents and children can be good friends.

Mark Twain said: “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.” His father had not gotten smarter, he just realized how smart his father had been all along!

Well, what is it that Solomon said parents should teach their children, BEFORE they are teens?

A. Teach Them to Resist Peer Pressure Proverbs 1:10-16

The invitation seems harmless at first: Only “come with us” (Verse 11). Soon the demand rises: “Cast in thy lot with us” (Verse 14). That's the intimidating force of peer pressure.

The ungodly like to draw as many innocent folks in as they can to their ungodly ways. They promise excitement. They promise them they'll become part of the group; they'll belong and have something in common.

It's interesting that almost as soon as Satan rebelled against God and God kicked him out of Heaven, that he became a tempter. First he said to his fellow angels, “Come with me ... cast in your lot with me,” and a third of the angels of Heaven rebelled against God and followed Satan; now, with no hope of redemption.

Then as soon as he could he said to Eve, “Forget what God said. Eat the fruit. It will make you wise.

Come with me!” She did and man has been ruined every since, but God made a way for mankind to be redeemed! Alleluia!

For every proverb there is a Bible character. Potiphar's wife tried to get Joseph to lie with her. Joseph refused and ran. He did not consent.

B. Avoid the Immoral Proverbs 2:16-20

Four times in the first nine chapters Solomon told his son to stay away from the woman who is not his wife, and of course, for the wife to stay away from the man who is not her husband.

The man or woman who traffics in sex outside of marriage loses something he or she can never regain.

Something irreversible happens in that action. Something irreplaceable is lost. Forever the body is soiled. Memory and conscience

awakens and will never be quieted until it is silenced in the precious blood of Christ. When someone cheats on their mate, they cheat themselves far more.

1 Corinthians 6:18. Sexual immorality is the only sin that we are told if we commit it, we're sinning against our self.

2 Timothy 2:22 Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

C. Take God Seriously Proverbs 3:5-6

God is to be trusted entirely (with all your heart) and exclusively (acknowledge Him and Him alone).

God can be trusted. He is utterly dependable. He never makes a mistake. We must trust Him with all our heart. Anything less would be an insult to God.

D. Honor the Lord and He Will Honor You Proverbs 3:9-10

I'm so glad Solomon taught his son to honor the Lord by giving to the Lord. And notice, he said honor the Lord "with the firstfruits of ALL your increase." All belongs to Him, but He asks for the first and the best; not the scraps or "if anything is left over." This is God we're giving to! He deserves the first and the best!

E. Learn Through God's Corrections Proverbs 3:11-12

Why do you discipline your children? Because you're mad and want to hurt them? I hope not. You correct them because it is beneficial to them. You want them to do right. Chastening is a tool for their good. Don't be angry at God when discipline comes. He wants us to increase in wisdom and blessings.

F. Learn to Treat Others Right Proverbs 3:27-30

Don't do evil to folks; don't harm folks. Show that you are one of God's children. Take every opportunity to do good, to help, to be merciful. Don't act cold toward those in need.

G. Avoid Excess Debt Proverbs 6:1-3

The word "surety" means "to make yourself responsible for another's debt and pledging to pay if the other person defaults." It means that we should not co-sign a loan for anyone.

What about co-signing for your children? It would not be wise unless you are willing and able to give your children (or parents) all of the money anyway. Many family problems and hurt feelings are caused by co-signing loans. Some times parents go out on a limb through student loans and the child cannot or will not pay back the loan. Don't loan what you cannot live without.

Don't use credit cards unless you can pay off the bill each month. Don't pay the interest to make your banker richer and yourself poorer.

H. Submit to God While You Are Young Proverbs 1:24-30

Don't wait too late to trust your soul to God. If He is speaking; if He is drawing you to Himself, submit to Him while He's speaking to you – Before it's too late!

SOLOMON'S SECOND LESSON TO HIS SON CONSTANTLY SEEK AND SEARCH FOR WISDOM

Proverbs 2:1-22

The entire chapter of Proverbs 2 is one long sentence in the Hebrew, with its twenty-two lines corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Let me sit this second chapter of Proverbs up by calling your attention to two words: Diligence and Persistence. "Persistence" means "to refuse to give in, even when faced with opposition or difficulty;" "to continue to endure." Diligence" means "hard-working;" "to do something with a careful, steady effort;" "perseverance."

When I think of persistence and diligence, I think of Thomas Edison. Thanks to the genius of Thomas Edison, we enjoy the

microphone, the phonograph, the incandescent light, the storage battery, talking movies, and more than a thousand other inventions. Edison was a diligent man who refused to be discouraged or overwhelmed by his circumstances. His contagious optimism affected all those around him.

Thomas Edison discovered 1,800 ways NOT to make a light bulb before he succeeded. Edison's son relates an insightful story about his famous father. One freezing December night in 1914, Edison was still working on the development of the nickel-iron-alkaline storage battery. He had already invested two years of his life on this new invention. His repeated failures had placed him on the brink of financial ruin. Had it not been for royalties from his other inventions, he would have already been bankrupt.

On that December evening, the cry "Fire!" echoed through the plant. Spontaneous combustion had broken out in the film room. Suddenly all of the chemicals, celluloid films and records ignited. Firefighters from eight surrounding towns arrived to help, but the heat was so intense, and the water pressure was so low, that all attempts were rendered useless. That night Edison lost everything. Edison's son recalls the panic he experienced as he searched for his father. Was he still alive? If so, would he be so devastated by the loss that he would never work again? Then, out of the darkness he saw his father running toward him. "Where's Mom?", his father shouted. "Go get her, Son. Tell her to hurry up and bring her friends. They'll never see a fire like this again."

Early the next morning, long before dawn, with the fire barely under control, Edison called his employees together and made an incredible announcement, "We're rebuilding!" He told one man to lease all the machine shops in the area. He told another to obtain a wrecking crane from the Erie Railroad Company. Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "Oh, by the way, does anybody know where we can get some money?"

Afterwards Edison said, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up. They quit too soon."

The Book of Proverbs was written for the purpose of imparting wisdom. Wisdom begins with the fear of God – a submissive, obedient relationship with Him. Wisdom calls and offers herself to all who will choose to receive her. We call this salvation.

Does everyone who accepts Christ as Savior find wisdom? The answer to that question is "Yes" and "No." Those who receive Christ find wisdom in that Christ is the very embodiment of wisdom. He is absolute and perfect wisdom. He is the source of all wisdom.

Colossians 2:3: "In (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." But all who receive Christ do not find the wisdom that is in the source.

Receiving wisdom is not a one time experience. Solomon begins this chapter by laying down a condition. Proverbs 2:1, "My son, if you will"; Verse

3: "Yea, if you criest after knowledge"; Verse 4, "If thou seekest her ..."

In other words, obtaining wisdom is conditional; it is not automatic. Many believers never find wisdom because they do not obey the conditions for doing so. Finding wisdom requires that a decision be made. That decision requires that a commitment be made –a strong personal commitment to the process laid out in Proverbs 2.

Acquiring wisdom is a Process, Not a One-time Procedure.

To know God and to understand Him requires a certain amount of effort and work. Solomon likens the process to a miner searching for gold, silver, and precious stones. If you dig in and get serious about your pursuit of wisdom, wisdom will be yours. But it doesn't come easily. There's a price to pay for wisdom: digging in the Word day after day.

Diligence is the earnest, conscientious application of our energy to accomplish whatever we've undertaken. When we are diligent, we pay careful attention to detail and are dedicated to achieving quality results.

Diligence means that we are continually working toward our goals, making use of what resources and opportunities are available. Diligence does not rely on talent or even a sharp mind, but demands commitment, hard work, and perseverance.

Why are so many of God's children living in spiritual ignorance, shallowness, and complacency?

Because they have not made the decision to commit themselves to Persistence and Diligence to study the Word of God and grow thereby.

Look how Solomon ends Proverbs 1:32b: "The complacency of fools will destroy them."

What does it take to have Persistence and Diligence? The story is told of a young man who came to Socrates and said, "Give me understanding, wisdom, and knowledge."

Socrates said one sentence: "Follow me."

As the young man followed the great philosopher, Socrates walked through the city until he came to the edge of the ocean. He walked out waist-deep in the ocean, grabbed the young man by the neck, and thrust him beneath the water.

Finally, the young man fought his way up for some air and gasped, "Master, what are you doing?"

Socrates said, "When you want knowledge and wisdom and understanding as badly as you wanted that breath of air; that's when you begin the journey."

How do I know when I am truly grabbing hold of wisdom and knowledge? Solomon tells us:

1. The Conditions – Proverbs 2:1-4 (the emphasis is on the worker). Note: "if ... if ... if."
2. The Discovery – Proverbs 2:5-9 (the emphasis is on the treasure). Note: "Then"
3. The Promise – Proverbs 2:10-23 (the emphasis is on the benefits). Note: "For"

A. The Conditions Proverbs 2:1-4

If you want to get real with God, you only need to run toward God and He will prepare for you a real life.

James 4:8: "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."

1. We must be Receptive Proverbs 2:1

Notice the construction of these verses:

Verbs Nouns

Verse 1 Receive Words

Treasure Commands

Verse 2 Incline your ear Wisdom

Apply your heart Understanding

Verse 3 Cry out for Insight or Discernment

Lift up your voice for Understanding

Verse 4 Seek As silver

Search As for hidden treasures

Wisdom is found through receiving God's holy, inspired Word – the Bible.

God cannot bless us, unless He has us. God is offering us a treasure infinitely worth seeking – More of Himself Entering into you, Renewing you, Safeguarding you.

God is saying to us: "My child, I'm so available – IF you want Me wholeheartedly."

James 1:21: "Receive with meekness (teach-ability) the engrafted Word, which is able to save your soul."

And then "hide" or "store up" My commandments – Proverbs 2:1b.

2. We Must be Responsive

Proverbs 2:2-3 Pay Attention When God Speaks Wisdom is found through yielding our will to God so that we may understand His Word.

3. We Must Seek God in Prayer

James 1:5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not (without reproaching or fault-finding), and it will be given him."

4. We must be Diligent in our Search of God's Word

Proverbs 2:4 If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures;

Notice the words “seek” and “search” in Verse 4. Because of the great value contained in the Word, mining for spiritual treasures takes work, work, work!

We may read the Scriptures in public, but to Search them, we must be alone with God and apply ourselves wholly to the Word.

B. The Discovery Proverbs 2:5-9

Here are the corresponding “THENS” to the “IFS” of Verses 1-4.

1. You will find God and understand what it means to fear Him Proverbs 2:5

Ultimately, wisdom is not a matter of discovery, but of revelation. The reward for seeking Him is finding Him, and finding Him is experiencing a living, growing relationship with God.

2. Wisdom comes to us “from His mouth” (His Word) Proverbs 2:6

3. You will be made victorious in life Proverbs 2:7-8

“Storing up wisdom” means memorizing Scripture. Storing up Scripture in our head.

For those who walk upright in this world, the world is a battlefield. Temptations are many. We never know when an attack is coming. Hiding God's Word in our hearts helps us to be ready when the attacks do come.

The word “shield” or “buckler” (KJV) is a small round shield carried in battle by the soldier to fend off arrows and strikes of the enemy, not the large, full-body shield used for hiding behind. Jesus Himself is our Shield. The Lord Himself absorbs the blows aimed at His people as they battle the enemy.

C. The Promise Proverbs 2:10-22

1. Truth Will Protect You Proverbs 2:10-11

Wisdom will keep you from walking in the counsel of the ungodly. God's Word hidden in one's heart will be pleasant to your soul and preserve you at all times.

2. You Can be Protected in This World Proverbs 2:12-15

While the evil walk the path of the ungodly, God will lead you on the right path.

3. You Will be Protected from the Words of the Immoral Woman Proverbs 2:16-19

4. You Will Occupy God's Good Land Proverbs 2:20-22

You will walk the way of the good, inhabit the land and remain in it, and the wicked will not be able to enter it.

42

SOLOMON'S THIRD LESSON TO HIS SON TRUST AND OBEY Proverbs 3:1-8

SOLOMON'S THIRD LESSON TO HIS SON

TRUST AND OBEY

Proverbs 3:1-8

Solomon is teaching his son to trust and obey the Lord. Where did Solomon learn to trust and obey the Lord? I think he learned it from his father, David. Turn to Psalm 37:3-7:

- Psalm 37:3 – “Trust in the Lord and do good”

Trust or a deep belief in the Lord is the key theme in this Psalm. Boldly place your

confidence in Him.

“And do good”

Don't just trust or believe in the Lord, find good things to do for the Lord.

- Psalm 37:4 – “Delight yourself also in the Lord”

The word “delight” means “to take pleasure in.” Nothing or no one should give you more pleasure than God Himself. Nothing else should take priority over your personal relationship with God.

“And He will give you the desires of your heart.”

The word “desires” means “petitions or request.” John said that “if we ask any thing according to His will, we can have this confidence: He will hear us when we ask and we will have the petitions that we desire of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

- Psalm 37:5 – “Commit your way to the Lord”

The word “commit” means “to roll over on.” Roll your cares and burdens over on the Lord. Roll everything that concerns you over on the Lord.

Then again he says, “Trust also in Him.”

- Psalm 37:7 – “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him”

The word “rest” means “to be silent and still; to settle one's nerves and to be at peace with the Lord. We can have confidence in Him and wait patiently for Him to do what He deems best.

Now look back at Proverbs 3 and underline these phrases.

Proverbs 3:1 is an Admonition

This Admonition brings the head and the heart together: “Do not FORGET my law.”

The word “forget” does not mean a lapse of memory; rather, it means “do not cease to pay attention to the Word of God.” Hide God's Word in your heart and it will control your response to the different circumstances of life as they arise.

Proverbs 3:3 is an Appeal:

“Don't let mercy and truth forsake you” The word “forsake” does not mean to go off and leave; rather, it means “to pound out.” Picture in your mind a thick, strong piece of metal. It carries a great deal of weight. But then picture a person who takes that thick, strong piece of metal and begins to pound it; to beat it with a hammer. He hammers it out until it becomes a thin sheet of metal that you can bend to your own liking.

Here's the meaning: Don't water down the Word of God so that it has no strength and means absolutely nothing.

Proverbs 3:2, 4 is an Assurance

The “favor” here is God's promises of peace and long life; good understanding and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

More than anything in my life, I want to be a focused Christian. I want to stay on course in this life, accomplishing my best every day for the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to have assurance that God's Holy Spirit is leading me and directing my steps so that I don't veer off the path to the right or to the left. The Book of Proverbs warns us of that possibility. I believe God wants us to stay focused and He has made provisions for us to do so. This passage in Proverbs contains all the elements necessary for maintaining the focus in our spiritual lives.

These two verses are among the most beloved in the entire Bible. You may have memorized them in Sunday School. Or perhaps you made a cross-stitch pattern of these words and hung it on your wall.

When the great British Bible teacher, G. Campbell Morgan left home for the first time, he said his father pressed a note into his hand as he was getting on the train. When Campbell Morgan was on the train, he unfolded the note and it contained just one verse of Scripture: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

These two verses speak to a great need we all feel – the need for guidance. It is a short course in knowing God's will for your life.

There are four action words in these two verses. Three of these are imperatives, or commands directed to the child of God. They are our responsibility: Trust – Lean – Acknowledge.

The last word is a declaration of a promise: "And He will make your paths straight."

So there is my Part and God's Part.

| My Part | God's Part |
|----------------|----------------------|
| A. Trust | A. He will make your |
| B. Do not lean | way straight or |
| C. Acknowledge | smooth. |

God is speaking to each of us personally. Four times he uses the word "your." "Trust the Lord with all YOUR heart ... Refuse to lean on YOUR understanding ... Acknowledge Him in all YOUR ways ... so that He might make straight YOUR paths."

Solomon tells us to focus our life on four things:

I. Focusing Our Life Requires Dependence Proverbs 3:5

In our thinking the word "trust" means "to rely upon or to have confidence in." But the Hebrew word is stronger. It is the idea of stretching yourself out upon a bed or a hard surface. It means to put your full weight prostrate on something. To trust the Lord is to lay your whole weight upon Him.

And notice: Trust is an all or nothing proposal: "Trust in the Lord With All Your Heart." Partial trust is not trust at all. Either God is trustworthy or He's not. If He can't be trusted with ALL, He can't be trusted at all.

Our God is totally dependable. His character is such that it makes it impossible for Him to lie (Titus 1:2). His wisdom is so great He can never make a mistake. His love is so limitless He can never be unkind. He has high and holy purposes and no ulterior motives. Trust what He says; What He does; What He desires for you, How He gets involved with you.

He will never let us go, never let us down, and never let us off. Get to know Him by spending time with Him in prayer, in His Word, and in worship. We can trust Him! We must trust Him! We must trust Him with our whole heart. Anything less is an insult!

Why do we find it difficult to trust the Lord? One reason is that we don't know Him well enough to trust Him. To know God is to love God. Then to love Him is to trust Him. To trust Him is to obey Him. And to obey Him is to be blessed by Him!

II. Focusing our Life Requires Discipline Proverbs 3:5

"Leaning not on our own understanding" may be the hardest part of staying focused. To "lean" means "to rest upon something for partial support." Leaning is what you do when you walk with a cane or hold on to a walker because you are unsteady. You lean on something, like a tree, when you are not strong enough to stand alone.

Do not lean – or put part of your weight – on your own understanding.

The word "understanding" refers to the mental process by which one analyzes a problem, breaking it down into smaller parts and then making a decision about what you are going to do.

Early in the morning when you make a list of all the things you have to do that day. You use your understanding to sort out your

priorities. Or it's what you use on Sunday night when you plan out the up-coming week. That's understanding. Understanding is the decision-making ability that God has given us.

When you take the word "lean" and bring in the idea of "understanding," then add the negative (lean not), the meaning is something like this: Use all your mental powers, but do not lean on them for total support. Don't trust in our own ability to figure out your life. Lean instead on the Lord! Rest your weight on Him.

Don't rely on your own wisdom, but get God involved and seek the wisdom of God.

III. Focusing our Life Requires Discernment Proverbs 3:6

"In all your ways acknowledge Him:" Consult Him, recognize Him, ask or seek His advice, remember Him in all our ways.

The key word in this phrase is "in." In the home, business, school, workplace or at play – there is no place where we are not to acknowledge His Lordship and our dependence upon Him. By acknowledging Him we remind ourselves that we are not alone.

IV. Focusing our Life Requires Direction Proverbs 3:6

The end of the process of resting in the Lord is that "He shall direct our paths."

Here is God's promise: If we will trust Him with all our heart, and don't lean on our own understanding, and remember and recognize Him in all our plans and decisions, He shall make the paths of our life straight and smooth.

How will He make the path or road of our life straight and smooth? God is able to remove the obstacles in front of us. He is able to fill the potholes and turn a dead-end into a short-cut.

Sometimes the road of our life appears to be impassable. Portions of our road are washed out, still others are blocked by huge boulders. In some places the road apparently becomes a dead end.

We rarely see far down our road in advance, but God knows what's coming. We mostly see potholes and dangerous curves. Many times, it seems as if there is no path at all. But He will make a way.

No one can say how He will do it. There are thousands of ways in which God leads His children. He leads us through delays, detours, miracles, the advice of friends, unexpected opportunities, suddenly closed doors, answered prayer, unanswered prayer, inner impressions, a still small voice in the night.

The old hymn says it best.

"All the way my Savior leads me, What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, He though life has been my Guide."
He will lead us all the way!

SOLOMON'S FOURTH LESSON TO HIS SON THE BLESSING OF THE BELT Proverbs 3:11-20

In the even-numbered verses of Proverbs 3 so far, the father has highlighted the rewards and blessings of God for fearing Him – for submissively obeying Him.

Proverbs 3:2: "For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you."

Proverbs 3:4: "And so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man."

Proverbs 3:6: "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths."

Proverbs 3:8: "It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones."

Proverbs 3:10: "So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

But God is not only a God who rewards His children for obedience, He is also a loving Father who corrects His children when they disobey Him and His commands.

So far in Solomon's lessons to his son, he has taught him to:

1. Listen to his parents.
2. To shun or avoid evil companions.
3. To trust and obey the Lord.

Now he tells his son that there is wisdom to be found in the chastening of the Lord that comes in life. You and I really can learn wisdom if we look at the chastening of the Lord in our life.

Now remember that chastening is not punishment. We have confused punishment with chastisement. The criminal is to be punished; the child is to be corrected or disciplined. The word chastened means to "child-train." In correcting the child, we put something in the child to cause him not to want to do again what he did so that he was disciplined.

The principle of God's chastening of His own is found in several places in Scripture. Remember that God does not chasten the devil's children, but He does spank (chasten) His own children. If you are chastened by the Lord, it proves two things: God loves you and you belong to Him.

1. Job 5:17-19.

The child of God should have the right attitude toward God's chastening: "Do not despise the chastenings of the Lord." There is the necessity of God's Fatherly disciplining to increase wisdom and blessing. Such correction should not be resisted.

Job 5:18

Though God bruises, He also heals and restores. He wounds, but He also makes whole.

Job 5:19.

"He shall deliver you in six troubles." This is an idiomatic expression like the one Jesus had in mind when Peter asked Jesus, "How many times shall I forgive my brother? Seven times?" Jesus said, "Seventy times seven." Don't keep records. There is no limit.

2. 2 Samuel 7:14

3. Hebrews 12:5-11

I. The Advice Concerning Chastening Proverbs 3:11-12

Do not "despise" it. The Hebrew word translated "despise" is translated other ways in Scripture.

It could mean "Do not spurn the chastening of the Lord." When some difficult thing comes in our life that God is using as our correction, don't shrug your shoulders and say, "Oh well, win a few; lose a few." Rather, endeavor to know why you are being chastened by the Lord. Don't spurn it.

It could also be translated by the word "disappear." Don't disappear when the chastening hand of the Lord falls upon you. Some try to disappear through drugs or drink – anything to get away from the reality of the situation.

It could also be translated by the word "refuse." Don't reject the chastening of the Lord. We refuse or reject the chastening of the Lord when we have the attitude, "God, if this is the way You are going to treat me after all I've done for You, then I'm through with You and Your church."

II. The Advantages of Chastening

When we are chastened of the Lord and learn from His correction, we not only gain wisdom, but we gain true blessing in life.

Proverbs 3:13 is the first of eight beatitudes in the book, all of which pronounce blessing upon different aspects of godliness.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Gaining Wisdom Proverbs 3:13 | 5. Trusting the Lord Proverbs 16:20 |
| 2. Practicing Obedience Proverbs 8:32 | 6. Demonstrating Integrity Proverbs 20:7 |
| 3. Seeking Instruction Proverbs 8:34 | 7. Possessing Reverence Proverbs 28:14 |
| 4. Showing Mercy Proverbs 14:21 | 8. Accepting God's Word Proverbs 29:18 |

What contribution does wisdom make to our life?

A. It Brings Happiness Proverbs 3:13

“Heavenly bliss comes from being right with God.” Throughout Scripture, happiness is the result of God's favor, and it is often translated as “blessed.”

Psalm 1:1: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, who stands in the path of sinners, who sits in the seat of the scornful.”

Psalm 32:2: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”

Psalm 33:12: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance.”

Psalm 34:8: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trust in Him.”

B. It Is of Great Value Proverbs 3:14-15

Wisdom is compared to the most treasured product or possession of that day.

Silver (Proverbs 3:14a). In Palestine during those days, silver was rare and more valuable than gold.

Gold (Proverbs 3:14b). Gold has usually been one of the wisest investments a person could make. Yet wisdom is far more valuable and pays far greater dividends.

Rubies (Proverbs 3:15). Rubies were a most precious stone because of its beauty. Of everything a person could desire, wisdom makes you a richer man than money ever will.

C. Cultivates Long Life, Riches, and Honor Proverbs 3:16

This does not mean that anyone who dies young has displeased the Lord in some way. It does mean that when we learn to live life according to God's Word and in obedience to Him, our chances for long life are a whole lot better.

Genesis 25:8. Old age is not necessarily a blessing. What is desirable is “a good old age.” A man can live a long time and end his days shriveled and drained and empty, and devoid of all that makes life worth living. What is desirable is to arrive at old age “full.”

D. It Makes a Person's Life Pleasant and Peaceful Proverbs 3:17

Sin is the great spoiler. Sin bankrupts us; it turns loveliness into ugliness and harmony into discord. Wisdom calls us back to the Word of God.

It offers – as much as is possible in a world saturated with evil and under a curse – length of days, riches and honor, pleasantness and peace.

E. Wisdom Becomes to Us a Tree of Life – the Very Source of Life – to all Who Take Hold of it
Proverbs 3:18

Wisdom offers “help.” The word “Help” sums up a very interesting statement in Proverbs 3:18, though we do not find the word “help” there.

Wisdom is like a “tree of life.” What does that mean?

The first time we see the Tree of Life is in Genesis 2:9. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were put out of the Garden and cherubim were placed at the gate of the Garden, lest they come back in and in their fallen state, eat of the Tree of Life and become like the fallen angels – living forever in their sins, deathless, sinful, and beyond all redemption.

The last time we hear of the Tree of Life is in Revelation 22:1-2. The Tree of Life was transplanted in Heaven and cannot now be violated by sinful men.

Other passages refer to the Tree of Life to show us how wisdom is related to the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life is used in the Bible as a representative of health, vital strength, vigor, and renewed energy.

Proverbs 11:30: The fruit of righteous is the result of a healthy spiritual life.

Proverbs 13:12: When you are hoping for something and it does not come to pass, you are disappointed and heartsick over it, but when the thing you wish for comes, you are full of life, energy, and strength.

Proverbs 15:4: A perverse tongue causes a breach in the spirit, but a wholesome tongue produces health, strength, and wisdom.

F. Shows us How Much More We Need Knowledge in our Lives Proverbs 3:19-20

We understand wisdom by studying how the Lord operates.

The Lord founded the earth and set in place the sun, moon, stars, and galaxies.

He waters the earth through the evaporation of the waters and their return through dew and rain. The waters of the seas are evaporated into the atmosphere, where clouds carry them across the land and drop them on the earth.

Imagine, the same water that God originally spoke into creation has continued the process of watering the earth throughout its existence.

If God used His knowledge to establish the laws that control the world and its order, how much more do we need knowledge in our lives?

SOLOMON'S FIFTH LESSON TO HIS SON

THE VALUE OF WISDOM

Proverbs 3:21-35

“My Son” (Verse 21) indicates the beginning of a new session of instruction from the father. The general lesson plan is the same.

The father begins with a strong exhortation to FIND and FOLLOW wisdom; then he proceeds to list benefits of doing so.

Proverbs 3:21. We need to keep our eyes on sound wisdom and discretion (the freedom to make right decisions and choices), and let them not escape your sight, but keeping our focus on wisdom.

In Proverbs 3:1 the emphasis was on the heart; in Proverbs 3:21 the emphasis is on the eyes.

In Proverbs 3:1 the father stressed Receiving wisdom; now in Proverbs 3:21 he stresses Retaining wisdom.

Here is the critical lesson: Once wisdom is Learned, it has to be Preserved and Maintained.

Solomon possessed extraordinary wisdom; yet, he failed to live wisely, failed to live a righteous life.

See I Kings 11:1-11 (Living Bible).

Though Solomon insisted that he retained his wisdom throughout his long excursion into the pleasures of sin, his actions reveal that he was deceiving himself. See Ecclesiastes 2:9; Deuteronomy 11:16.

The word “keep” (Proverbs 3:21) means to guard, as a person protects a valuable treasure; keep like you are keeping God's covenant and commandments. The reason he needed to guard the wisdom he learned was to keep the enemies of the flesh and the devil from stealing it away.

These verses mention a number of benefits that come to those who heed the exhortation in Proverbs 3: 21.

These benefits include:

1. “Life to your Very Soul” Proverbs 3:22

The picture is the same as when God breathed into Adam, and he “became a living soul.” Wisdom breathes life into an individual and gives a person vitality and fullness of existence.

Notice that wisdom brings fullness “of life to the soul and grace to the neck.” The “neck” poetically stands for the whole outward appearance.

The union of the terms soul and neck brings out the effect of wisdom upon the whole man. It affects him both inwardly and outwardly.

2. Safety or Security Proverbs 3:23

This speaks of the protective care of God. “He will walk in life safely.” The godly person may face the challenges of life with confidence (Proverbs 3:6).

Your feet will not “stumble” over obstacles when you retain wisdom, but you will be sure-footed and will not become caught in traps along the way.

King David took his eyes off of God for a while and he said, “I almost slipped.” David said, “I almost envied the wicked. They were living in sin and they were living the good life. Everything seemed to be going good for them. Then here I am, when I do wrong as a believer, nothing seems to go right. And I talked to the Lord about it.” (See Psalm 73:2-28, Living Bible)

3. Peaceful Sleep Proverbs 3:24

You will sleep well because you haven't done the foolish things that cause you to stay awake worrying. You won't be afraid that you'll get caught or found out. You won't have to lie awake thinking to yourself, “What if she reads that E-mail? What if he runs into that person? Who else knows about this? How can I make sure this never gets out?”

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and He will keep those who fear Him safe.

Psalm 127:2: “So He giveth His beloved sleep.”

Deuteronomy 33:27: “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

A scene from the life of Peter provides a powerful, real-life illustration of the truth of this proverb. Herod had put James and Peter in prison for preaching the Gospel. He took James first and cut his head off with a sword. The people liked that so much that he thought he would kill Peter as well. But God intervened. See Acts 12:1-12.

4. Confidence in the Future Proverbs 3:25-26

He's referring to personal safety. God protects us from the land mines that sin has hidden here in the world.

Now Solomon gives us five maxims about relationships with others – Proverbs 3:27-35, each beginning with the words, “Do Not.”

1. “Do Not Withhold Good from Those to Whom it is Due.” Proverbs 3:27

Solomon moves from the Vertical relationship with God to our horizontal relationship with God. When it is right, your relationships with others will be right in everyday life. If you love God, you will love your neighbor.

Be a good neighbor! Kindness is a matter of Obligation; it is not Optional. When you're able to help your neighbor, do it without delay.

If someone is in need and you have the means to do so, if someone deserves it or needs it – Help!

I John 3:17-18: “If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him – how does God's love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.”

Do not hesitate to help those who deserve it. As believers, we have a holy responsibility to be prompt in our obligations and to be generous in helping and giving to those in need. This command pertains to:

- Paying workers their wages and paying them promptly.
- Providing assistance to those who need our help.
- Paying our debts in a timely manner.

2. Do Not Delay or Postpone Your Help Proverbs 3:28

- Don't delay in doing good if you have the means.
- Don't put it off because you're lazy, and then forget.
- Don't put it off because you are indifferent or selfish.
- Don't just try to get rid of the person with an excuse like, “I don't have any cash on me.” Right then, go the extra mile to meet the need. Failing to do good to your neighbor when it is in your power is wicked. It's a sin.

Matthew 5:42: “Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

Galatians 6:10: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

3. Do Not Plot Harm Against your Neighbor Proverbs 3:29

Don't devise a wicked plan against your neighbor that would lead him to distrust you.

4. Do Not Create Conflict Without a Cause Proverbs 3:30

Romans 12:18: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceable with all men.”

Hebrews 12:14: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man will see the Lord.”

James 3:17-18.

5. Keep You Distance From the Violent Man Proverbs 3:31-35

SOLOMON'S SIXTH LESSON TO HIS SON

LEARNING WISDOM THROUGH REPETITION

Proverbs 4:1-9

Repetition is the key to learning wisdom. Solomon uses repetition as his chief method of instructing his son in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. Solomon uses a number of teaching tools as he instructs his son.

- First is the charge to listen, to pay attention to his teaching.
- Then he equates his teaching to the Word of God and its laws or commandments.
- Then he encourages his son to get wisdom and to grow in wisdom.
- He talks about the benefits and the value of wisdom.
- Finally, he deals with the dangers of rejecting wisdom.

Solomon, in Proverbs 29:15, reminds us that a child untaught will be a living shame.

Remember that each of these 13 lessons of Solomon to his son begins with the words, "My son;" but here in Proverbs 4:1, he begins with "Hear, my children." Literally, it is plural, "My sons."

Actually, Solomon is teaching his son what his father, King David, had taught him. Note Proverbs 4:3-4. We don't know when or how often the teaching was: once a day, once a week, or once a month.

We are told that Solomon had three other brothers (1 Chronicles 3:5) and that David is following the command of Deuteronomy 6:2 to teach his children the commandments of the Lord.

Wisdom is to be dispensed from a parent to a child. Not only is the wisdom Parental, but it is also to be Multi-generational. Notice Proverbs 4:3-4.

Solomon is saying, "My father taught me God's law, and now I am teaching you what my father taught me."

Instruction in wisdom should be a multi-generational thing. Parents have been entrusted with the responsibility of passing this down to their children.

- We can pass down patterns of Foolishness like laziness, addiction, or abuse.
- Or we can pass down patterns of Wisdom like humility, a good work ethic, and responsibility.

"My parents taught me wisdom, and now I'm teaching you wisdom." Proverbs 3:33 teaches us that we can bring blessings or cursing on our homes. The good news is that the chain of wickedness can be broken with one generation that pursues the Lord, but the bad news is that the chain of faithfulness can be broken with one generation as well. The goal of Christian parenting is to pass down godly wisdom

so that the chain will not be broken by your children and grandchildren. The goal of Christian parenting is not just Christian children, it is Christian grandchildren.

In Proverbs 4 we learn not only what Solomon taught his son, but also what the grandfather taught him – and it was the same truths. With three generations teaching the same thing, this is a tradition of wisdom.

Child psychiatrists tell us we ought not ever say to our children, "Now when I was a boy ..." After all, our kids think we were old fuddy-duddies and whatever we did when we were boys can't possibly be of any value to them today. But human nature is the same today as it was fifty years ago and we still need the wisdom of the Lord no matter what age we are.

Here is what Solomon is saying: "Boys, I was a boy once and I remember what my Dad told me. I'm a man now, and I want to tell you that if I had listened to my Dad then and obeyed his wise advice, I would have saved myself a great deal of grief."

Of course, you remember that Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. That in itself is a tremendous story of the grace of God.

Bathsheba was the wife of adultery and David was a murderer, and yet, God in His grace overruled it, though He did not excuse it, and out of that union came the man who is the author of this book. This should be a great encouragement to every person of how God can overrule our faults, our failings, and our sins. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

Notice the tribute that Solomon paid to his parents – Proverbs 4:3-4.

Solomon must have had an army of counselors, like the wise and fearless prophet, Nathan, who confronted David about his sin. Nathan was prominent throughout David's reign and in the early years of Solomon's reign. But Solomon remembered his father best: "He taught me." David taught his boy to understand the Scriptures.

It was his mother who bestowed that tender love upon this boy.

The word "tender" in Proverbs 4:3, refers to the early, innocent years of a child's life when his or her heart is soft and impressionable. David knew that his son would not be tender like this forever. Therefore, he took advantage of this limited window of opportunity: he stamped God's law – His Holy Word – upon Solomon's heart before it hardened, before the world made its impression upon him.

Wisdom is not a once-and-for-all decision; it is a process. In other words, gaining wisdom requires an ongoing commitment. Wisdom must be exercised; it must be intentionally sustained. If a person does not deliberately practice and apply wisdom, it will silently slip away – as it did with Solomon.

There are seven expressions in this lesson to describe what a father ought to teach his children.

1. Training Proverbs 4:1

The word "instruction" means "training."

The word "hear" means to really listen to instruction. It means to hear and to obey.

It is not that a parent stands before their children and shakes their finger in the face and "TELLS him" what he ought to do, but they "MODEL" before the child what he ought to do. Remember: the home is to be the primary place and the primary source of moral and spiritual training.

Have you ever visited a home and after you leave you say, "I wonder if those children have ever had any training at all." Then you visit another home and after you leave you say, "Those are the best trained children I've seen in a long time." Children need to be instructed (trained) by their parents. It is a team effort.

2. Understanding Proverbs 4:1, 5, 7

Three times in this lesson on wisdom, Solomon emphasized the importance of understanding.

The word "understanding" means "to separate mentally." Think as you listen to what is being said. Don't swallow everything wholesale, sort it out. Decide what is good and what is bad. Ask: "Does this apply to me?" Decide how it may or may not apply to your life.

3. Sound Doctrine Proverbs 4:2

Parents, it is your responsibility to see to it that your child is provided with good, sound doctrines.

Parents, your child should know what YOU believe and why you believe it.

4. Law Proverbs 4:2

The word "law" is the word "Torah" which describes the first five books of the Bible: Genesis – Deuteronomy. For us it speaks of the total Word of God.

5. Words Proverbs 4:4

The word "words" means "advice." Parents are to see to it that their children gets sound advice.

6. Commandments Proverbs 4:4

The word speaks of all the commandments of the Lord.

7. Wisdom Proverbs 4:5, 7

Wisdom means to be wise in Mind, in Words, and in Actions. Wisdom completes the whole man. Without wisdom, the whole man cannot be complete.

One of the most important things a parent can do for their children is to read the Bible to their children, pray with them, bring them to church, have family devotional time, share your testimony with them, let them see you worship Jesus in public services, let them see you participate in the ordinances, and share Jesus with them so they can know Him intimately.

Then, based on their relationship with Jesus, teach them practical wisdom like how to be honest, how to fight anxiety, how to handle money, how to avoid get-rich-quick scams, how to receive a rebuke, how to lovingly give a rebuke, how to complete task like chores, and a thousand other things.

Then, Proverbs 4:1-9 presents some Attitudes that are to be manifested toward the instruction that is given.

You do know, don't you, that instruction is not always graciously and freely received?

You may say, "I don't know what's wrong with that boy; he never wants me to tell him anything." There's nothing wrong with him. That's his nature. You and I have the same nature.

That's why you get upset when your wife says, "Honey, this is not the right road," and you say, "Don't tell me how to drive," and usually she's right, whether you ever admit it or not. You just don't like to be told. It's a natural thing.

1. Hear Proverbs 4:1

"Hear" means "to listen thoughtfully. In the early years of a child's life, you need to see to it that they hear.

In the early years of a child's life, if you sense they are not really listening to you, gently take their face in your hands, turn their face so they can look in your eye, and talk to them and ask them if they heard you.

2. Attend (give attention to know) Proverbs 4:1

The meaning is to "perking up your ears." Have you ever been in a group and someone is speaking, but you're not paying too much attention? Your mind is a thousand miles away and you just pick up a tiny bit of a conversation, and then something is said that catches your attention and you perk up your ears and say, "Run that by me again. I want to hear that."

3. Forsake Not Proverbs 4:2

Don't relinquish or let go of God's law. It's easier to let go of the Word of God than to hold on to it.

4. Retain Proverbs 4:4

Retain or to hold fast with all your heart. Parents, don't turn your children out in the big, bad world without properly training them to hold fast in their heart the truth of the Word of God.

5. Get Wisdom and Understanding Proverbs 4:5, 7

Sometimes folks say, "I wish I knew the Bible like so-and-so does." You can, but you have to pay the price.

There are two main steps in getting Wisdom:

- a. You must desire it more than anything else.

Like everything else in the spiritual realm, wisdom is free for the asking, but

it will cost you all you have. No one becomes wise by accident. We must put aside trivial pursuits in favor of that which comes only from God.

- b. You must humble yourself, admit your need, confess your lack, and ask God to help you.

6. Forget Not Proverbs 4:5

Don't turn a deaf ear to what you hear. Don't tune out the things from God you hear.

7. Love God's Word Proverbs 4:6

8. Exalt God's Word Proverbs 4:8

Give God's Word first place in your life.

What are the benefits of wisdom?

- Wisdom gives life (Proverbs 4:4), protection (Proverbs 4:6), and honor (Proverbs 4:8-9).
- As wisdom is valued and loved, it will create in you an attractive life, pictured as a beautiful wreath (Proverbs 4:9) and a crown of splendor.
- The more highly one esteems wisdom, the more highly wisdom lifts that person.
- The opposite is also implied: a foolish, unwise life is dishonoring, unattractive, and shameful.

SOLOMON'S SEVENTH LESSON TO HIS SON

SHUN EVIL PATHS

PROVERBS 4:10-19

In Solomon's very first lesson to his son, he deals with the subject of shunning evil companions or people in Proverbs 1:8-33.

Listen to Proverbs 1:10-16.

Now Solomon says, "Shun evil Persons and shun evil Paths or Patterns of life."

The key metaphor in this paragraph is "the way."

- Proverbs 4:11 "the way of wisdom ... in right paths."
- Proverbs 4:14 "the path of the wicked ... the way of evil."
- Proverbs 4:18 "the path of the just is like the shining sun" – Light
- Proverbs 4:19 "the way of the wicked is like darkness" – Darkness

Deuteronomy 30:1 "I have set before you the blessing and the curse;" Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

We face only two alternatives – the wise way or the evil way. God is saying there are only two ways: a gloomy disaster of a life without His wisdom and a bright success of a life with His wisdom.

The "path" metaphor tells us that life is a journey, and we take it one step at a time; with constant moment-by-moment re-commitments to the way of Christ.

In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus gives the New Testament version of the Old Testament wisdom lesson that Solomon gave to his son.

"Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Jesus spoke of two ways – a broad way and a narrow way. He talked about the people who walked the two ways and the end result of walking on each way.

The narrow way leads to life and Heaven; the broad way leads to death and hell. Then the startling truth: more folks are going the

broad way, the way of destruction and death, than are going the narrow way of life and Heaven.

Why are so many going the broad way to destruction? Because the broad way is the path of least resistance. You don't have to humble yourself on the broad path, or repent of your sins or turn and go the way to righteousness, or put your faith and trust and confidence in God and seek His forgiveness.

Solomon talks to his boys in very definite and simple ways so that there would be no misunderstandings about what he was talking about.

I. The Designation of the Paths

A. The Path of the Wicked Proverbs 4:14-17, 19

The word "path" means a well-marked path.

B. The Path of the Wise Proverbs 4:11-13, 18

Again, the word "path" means a well-marked path.

Notice that the "path" becomes the "way" and represents a manner of life which develops when one travels the path. The path of the just is called the "right path" which means the prepared path of uprightness."

II. The Description of the Paths

A. Those who travel the Wicked Paths

The word "wicked" means "people who are morally wrong." They are condemned, guilty and ungodly. They are not born again. They travel the path of the wicked consistently.

The phrase "the way of evil" means "worthless, good for nothing."

These evil men are good for nothing. They can accomplish absolutely nothing. The most worthless thing in the world is a man who is meant to be used for the glory of God and is being used for self and Satan.

1. What Disturbs the Wicked Man? Proverbs 4:16

One of the extraordinary features of sin upon the wicked is that sin compels the sinner to involve someone else in his evil. Sin hates goodness. This indicates what a hold wickedness has upon men.

2. What Delights the Wicked Man? Proverbs 4:17

The word "wickedness" refers to the restless activity of the fallen nature.

Bread and wine were the staples of life in Bible times, a man's necessary food. Solomon is saying that an evil person finds sin and wickedness as natural and necessary to his lifestyle as food and drink.

3. How Dark is the Wicked Man? Proverbs 4:19

They stumble and they don't even know why. Sometimes a lost man will tell you that he doesn't know why he does some of the things he does or that he can't explain his actions; he's telling the truth. He's in darkness!

The word "darkness" refers to that darkness that is caused by the setting sun. As the wicked are walking along their wicked pathway, it gets darker the farther down the path they go.

Just as you can recognize the approaching night and you say, "The night is about to fall." You can say, concerning the pathway of the wicked, "It's getting darker." These are more than mere words for those who die without Jesus as their Savior will be sent into outer darkness.

B. Those who travel the Wise Path Proverbs 4:18

The path of the wicked is one of darkness, but the path of the just is one of shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

The reference is to the dawning of the day. If you get up before daylight and watch the sun come up, you can see the darkness receding and the light of the sun beginning to make its appearance.

For the believer, God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path and the illumination of God and His Word will continue to lighten our day, brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

What a contrast: The Path of Wickedness leads to outer darkness, while the Path of the Wise leads to perfect light.

III. The Directions Regarding the Two Paths

Here are two paths ... two ways, well-marked as to where each will end up. Now Solomon gives his sons advice concerning the paths.

Note Proverbs 4:11. Notice that he teaches by Precept ("I have taught thee") and by Example ("I have led thee"). It is important that a father teaches his children to take the right path by precept and by example. If a child then chooses the wrong path, it is of great comfort to the parent to know that his conscience is clear – that he pointed the child to the right path.

Notice Proverbs 4:12. "Hindered" (KJV) is "straitened" (KJVJ). The word means "to be hemmed in."

Unsaved people complain that the Christian life is too narrow, too hemmed in. Of course it's narrow and hemmed in. Truth, by its very nature is narrow and exclusive.

Truth is always narrow; error is broad. Truth says two plus two is four; error says two plus two is three or twelve or a million. I'll go with the truth. Two plus two is four.

Salvation is narrow – Jesus said, "I am THE way ... No man can come to the Father but by Me."

Godly parents have to say "no" to their children when they want to be involved in some activities even if "everybody does it" because they want their children on the right way.

Psalm 1:1 Notice Proverbs 4:13.

Now, here are the directions about the path of the wicked. Proverbs 4:14.

Stay out! Stay away! Don't do as the wicked do! Avoid it! Pass by the wicked way! Turn away and go somewhere else!

Does that mean the saved person will never detour and wander into the wicked path? No. It does mean that in God's grace, time after time, He nudges us back into the right path.

We will never be completely in "the light" until we stand in the presence of Jesus, the Light of the World. But we are to be ever getting closer to the Light. Theologians call this "progressive sanctification," which refers to the process whereby we are changed little by little, day by day into the likeness of Jesus Christ – 2 Corinthians 3:18.

The goal in this life is not perfection – which is always unattainable – but simply day-by-day progress.

What's the difference?

Perfection says, "I must do right all the time or I'm a failure." Progress says, "I know I'm going to fail occasionally, but that won't stop me from getting up and trying again."

Perfection says, "It's wrong to admit my weaknesses." Progress says, "Admitting my weaknesses is the only way to get better."

Perfection says, "I've got all the answers." Progress says, "I've got a few answers and a lot of questions."

Perfection says, "It's not my fault." Progress says, "I was wrong."

Perfection says, "I can do it by myself." Progress says, "I think I can do it, but I need the help of God and a few good friends."

If we dwell on our failures, we will soon grow despondent. Who among us has not made mistakes that today make us blush with shame? But the past is more than a record of personal failure. It's also the story of God's amazing grace to us. Time after time God Bailed us out when by all rights, He should have given up on us. We were bankrupt and badly overdrawn in the Bank of Heaven when suddenly we discovered Someone had put more grace in our account.

In a fallen world we should not be surprised that we fall flat on our faces from time to time. It's what you do after you fall that makes all the difference. Remember, with God's help you can get back up and start moving in the right direction again.

SOLOMON'S EIGHTH LESSON TO HIS SON

KEEP YOUR HEART

Proverbs 4:20-27

What is the most valuable thing you possess? Is it your house? Your car? Your stocks?

Listen to Mark 8:36-37: "For what shall a man profit, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Proverbs 23:26: "My son, give Me thine heart."

When God saves us, He saves us wholly, totally, completely.

In REGENERATION we are born again and God saves our SPIRITS instantaneously the moment we trust Christ as our personal Savior.

In SANTIFICATION God redeems our Soul or, as the Bible often calls it, our heart – our mind, emotions, and will. It is our innermost being. And He does this progressively as we read His Word and walk with Him.

GLORIFICATION occurs at the resurrection when He transforms our lowly BODY to be conformed to His glorious BODY.

Your heart and my heart is what brought Jesus, God's Son, from His throne in glory to give His life on the Old Rugged Cross.

In the language of the Bible, the heart or the mind refers to the seat of our decision-making process.

Three things I want us to look at:

I. The Explanation of the Heart

The heart of man is his worst part BEFORE it is regenerated, and the best AFTERWARD; it is the Seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is fixed upon it; therefore the eye of the Christian ought to be fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart TO God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart FOR God.

Our mind is the seat of our decision-making process; the seat of our thought life; the seat of our will; the seat of our emotions. It is the real you and can be used for good or bad.

Your heart is your most private world, the place where you feel and dream and make decisions and meditate on external things. Your heart was made for God.

One of the key battlefields in spiritual warfare is the human heart. When you lay your head on your pillow at night, and it's just you and your thoughts, that's when your heart is revealed.

So, what do you think about when you are all alone with your thoughts? "As a man thinks in his heart ..." What he thinks about – good or bad – is what he really is in his heart.

Remember this: "You are not what you think you are, but what you think, you are."

Your thought life is important because your thought life controls the rest of your life. Tell me what you think about and I'll tell you what you really are and the kind of life you live. It's your thought life that controls you.

Sow a Thought; You reap a Deed.

Sow a Deed; You reap a Habit.

Sow a Habit; You reap a Character.

Sow a Character; You reap a Destiny.

And it all begins with a Thought.

That's why Satan has made your mind – your thought life – a primary target for his attacks. There are four things that Satan wants to do with our minds:

1. Satan wants to Corrupt our minds – 2 Corinthians 11:3.
2. Satan wants to Conquer our minds – 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.
3. Satan wants to Control our minds – Romans 7:25
4. Satan wants to Condemn (Blind) our minds – 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

II. The Exhortation Concerning the Heart Proverbs 4:23

Solomon makes sure we take this command personally. Each of us is responsible for keeping our own heart. Some eleven times in these verses he uses the words "you" or "your" (KJV – "thy", "thee" and "thine").

The word "keep" means "to safeguard," "to protect," "to guard," "to watch."

The word "diligence" means "with constant and consistent watchful care and painstaking effort and work."

And notice that he says "with all diligence."

This is to be the diligent duty; the chief priority of each one of us. This is not an easy obligation. It's not easy to keep our thoughts pure and holy. If sinful thoughts come into our minds and hearts, the Bible says to quickly mortify them (put them to death). Keep things that will defile us out of our hearts and minds. Keep bad thoughts out of our mind and keep good thoughts in. Keep watch as if you would watch a prisoner in a cell.

It is spiritual suicide not to guard your heart with all diligence. What does that mean? It means that every inlet of sin must be strongly guarded: the heart, the mouth, the eyes, the feet.

Nothing is more needful, difficult, or necessary. If we know our weak points and "the sins that so easily beset us," Satan knows them too.

The heart is the vital part of the body. A wound there could mean instant death. The same is true spiritually! "Keep your heart."

So, how do we keep our heart?

1. Give Your Heart to Christ.

Proverbs 23:26: "My son, give me your heart."

If you are not a believer in Christ Jesus; if you have not surrendered your heart to Him, that means your heart is not worth keeping. An unbeliever's heart is defiled, dirty, and dead. It is cold, hard, and lifeless. You need a new Heart!

Ezekiel 36:26-27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put My spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes,
and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

A spiritual heart-plant!

2. Crucify or Mortify Your Evil Thoughts – Colossians 3:5; Romans 8:13; 13:14

Make a conscious effort to put to death all the sins in your flesh. Deal with them ruthlessly and quickly. Don't allow them breathing room. Choke the life out of them. This is one of the marks of a true Christian.

Galatians 5:24: “And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

3. Put Restraints on Your Heart.

Get rid of evil influences. Don't read books or watch movies that fill your mind with wickedness. Have some self-control in what you expose yourself to.

How? How do we do that? See Proverbs 4:26-27.

Make sure you have:

A. A Consecrated Ear Proverbs 4:20

The father begins with the ears. Listen closely to his words.

- “Give attention or pay attention.” The word means to “prick up the ears.” Understand and retain what you are hearing. Keep the words in front of your eyes where they will direct your path.
- “Incline your ear” pictures a person bending forward or leaning in to hear more carefully what is said. Humans are prone to forget wisdom, to let it slip away; therefore, we must consciously guard it at all times.

B. A Clean Heart Proverbs 4:23

The condition of our heart will influence everything else in our life – Matthew 15:17-20.

Why should we carefully guard our heart? Because “out of the heart are the issues of life. The moral conduct of life, with its actions, is determined by the condition of the heart.”

If the heart is pure, the life will be pure; if the heart is corrupt, the life will be corrupt. The heart, the symbol of our hidden inner life, is the source of all our behavior.

C. A Cautious Mouth Proverbs 4:24

People's spiritual health, what is in their hearts, is usually reflected in their speech. In other words, a person whose heart is spiritually sound will resist and reject evil speaking (Proverbs 4:24). In contrast, a person whose heart is dark will usually spew forth despicable words. Nothing reveals what's in people's heart – their true character – more than their speech.

Matthew 12:34-35.

The words “forward” and “perverse” are synonyms. Both describe speech that is crooked, corrupt, distorted, twisted and falsehoods.

“Mouth” refers to the entire body part itself – the source of words.

“Lips” mean border or edge.

D. A Controlled Eye Proverbs 4:25

Pure eyes are critically important, perhaps more so than any other body part.

The father is saying, "Son, look straight ahead on the road of righteousness. Do not allow the attractions and distractions of sinful, impure things to catch your eye (Proverbs 4:25).

Why are pure, focused eyes so vital? Because the eyes are the gate to the heart. This means that whatever enters the eyes goes directly into the heart. (Matthew 6:22-23; 5:28).

A person with an impure heart will have eyes that are drawn to impure things. But a person who LOOKS at impure things will develop an impure heart.

Looking around distracts people from their important goals. Being distracted by seduction and enticements whet the appetite for sin.

Great temptations comes through the eyes, so put a guard on your eyes; be careful what you look at. Do not look upon something provocative or that appeals to the flesh.

Censor what you watch, especially those things that incline us toward sexual immorality.

E. A Careful Foot Proverbs 4:26-27

Our walk should be:

- A Planned Walk Proverbs 4:26
- A Perfect Walk Proverbs 4:27a Don't get side-tracked.
- A Protected Walk Proverbs 4:27b Pull your feet from danger

III. The Enrichment of our Heart

Read the Gospels and make a list of the kind of thoughts Christ had as He moved through His earthly life. Saturate your mind with what He thought about: Compassion – Love – Mercy – Submission – Forgiveness – Truth – Graciousness.

Philippians 4:8 gives six standards of thought: Whatsoever things are:

- True – real, genuine, sincere
- Honest – honorable; that which claims respect
- Just – right or righteous by divine standards
- Pure – that which is morally clean and undefiled
- Lovely – pleasing, kind, graciousness
- Good Report – highly regarded or well thought of

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

SOLOMON'S NINTH LESSON TO HIS SON

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS: GRAZE IN YOUR OWN PASTURE

Proverbs 5:1-23

Allen Petersen wrote a book entitled The Myth of the Green Grass." In the opening pages he writes:

"Sex, sex, sex. Our culture is nearly at the point of total saturation. The cesspool is

is running over. Books, magazines, billboards, movies shout it endlessly. Sex gets the ratings. It is the recurring theme in daytime soaps and talk shows, the inevitable subject in the nighttime interview. Every day, all day, the message bombards us like pellets from a brain-washing gun: 'Get all the sex there is ... Don't miss out. There is no tomorrow.'"

And because of this saturation, for many people the grass seems greener somewhere else. If they are single, the grass seems greener with pre-marital sex. If they are married, the grass seems greener with another person other than their present spouse. The world used to take adultery seriously, but things have changed. The tabloids and TV talk shows send the message that adultery is normal. "Everybody's doing it" becomes the moral guideline. And judging from the statistics the world is listening.

Immorality is never a good answer – it always promises more than it can deliver.

There are many secrets to a good marriage, such as respect, communication, commitment, forgiveness, a good sense of humor, and the ability to disagree without being disagreeable.

While it may not be the most important factor in marriage, a healthy sexual relationship must be high on the list of secrets for a good marriage.

In Proverbs 5, Solomon is talking to his son out of his own personal experience, and to his shame, he relates to his son the consequences of being unfaithful in marriage.

In Proverbs 5, Solomon deals DARINGLY and DELICATELY with the theme of marital love. It is almost taboo to deal with this subject in a church setting; and yet, the subject is in the Bible and it is better to deal with it delicately in church than to learn the world's ideas and distorted practices.

One of the benefits of preaching through a book in the Bible is that the Bible itself raises topics we might otherwise avoid – like sex. The Bible is not shy about sex, and its message is clear: sexual folly destroys, sexual wisdom satisfies, and Christ is better than the best sex.

The figure of the immoral or strange woman stands for very real sexual sin that the son can commit with a woman. But Solomon is not absolving the son of his part in this. This is a father talking to his son, so he will warn him about a woman. If he were talking to his daughter, he would talk about an immoral man. The fact is men do this kind of predatory seduction more than women.

Solomon is warning his son about any sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage. Any sexual activity that is not with your heterosexual spouse is a sin and will destroy you, your marriage, or your future marriage. That includes adultery, lust, fantasies, pornography, fooling around, co-habitation, and homosexuality.

God has given both men and women strong sex drives, but He has also given us Godly, Biblical, legitimate ways to satisfy and fulfill those desires. God has created a way that is better than looking at dirty movies, or looking at some cheap magazine, or flirting with someone on the job or going to some prostitute.

It is called loving your wife (husband). If you love your wife (husband) and enjoy her (him), you will find release and satisfaction for what God has put within you.

As man and woman came from the hand of Almighty God, they came as male and female. Within the marriage relationship, the sexual relationship of a man and woman is holy, righteous, pure, good and ought to be enjoyed.

Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Here's the case for marital faithfulness given by Solomon to his son: Stay home and enjoy your wife. Don't be a fool and look at some other woman. Enjoy the wife you have. Let her body satisfy you. Be intoxicated with her love.

Read this chapter carefully and you will find that the young man is counseled to live a pure life for the sake of his Home, his Health, and his Honor.

God calls marriage a wonderful relationship. It is high and holy and not to be treated as something that is unclean.

For the child of God, the Christian home is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His Church. That's why it is alarming to see Christian couples in the church are breaking apart.

Solomon gives a contrast between Perverted Love and Pure Love.

A. The Godless Woman's (Man's) Seductive Ways Proverbs 5:3-7

Notice that the first thing Solomon mention is WORDS. Communication is the first way we are drawn into sexual sin.

Both men and women are suckers for flattery (men more so than women). Sexual unfaithfulness starts with communication. The communication may seem innocent enough at first.

Maybe there's a little flirtation, but "that's not a big deal."

- "Well, I would not be doing this if my husband would just listen to me."
- "Well, my wife does not admire me like she does."
- "I wish I could talk to my mate like I talk to you. You meet my needs more than he does."
- "My husband never shows me any affection."
- "My wife is cold toward me."
- "You really seem to understand my needs."

If this happens in your life, you should hear the "Jaws" theme music in the background.

Repeated e-mailing, texting, calling or meeting up with someone of the opposite sex who is not your spouse is a major issue. It's massively stupid! You may think it is harmless, but you are wrong. You are forging an emotional intimacy through communication that can lead to more.

1. Our Nation's Cultural View Toward Sexual Relationships make Unfaithfulness Easier.

Our culture looks at sexual unfaithfulness as the norm. Sexual unfaithfulness is portrayed on TV thousands of times and it doesn't shock us. Magazines portray what Hollywood thinks is normal behavior.

2. Then There are Some Myths Many Believe.

a. "It could never happen to me."

The first step in avoiding a head-on collision with immorality is to realize that you indeed are capable of committing any sin under the right circumstances. Why? Because we all have inherited a corrupt sin nature.

The Bible says: "There is none righteous, not even one. All have sinned."

Our fallen nature combined with Satan's activity means none of us is exempt from sexual immorality.

b. "We are only friends."

Most affairs begin as friendships that fulfill some deep emotional need in one or both of the parties.

c. "If it feels so good, it can't be so bad."

Someone said, "If stolen waters were not sweet, no one would steal the water."

d. "Nobody is getting hurt – besides, no one will know. No one will find out."

No one can sin without it hurting them and others as well.

e. "God understands."

He does understand that one willfully sins against Him as well as His Law.

But look at the deception Proverbs 5:4

It begins with sweet lips and ends with a bad taste.

At FIRST ... there is something attractive about illicit sex – sex carried on with a stranger.

Proverbs 9:16-17. Forbidden delights seem sweeter and more pleasant because of the risk and danger.

Proverbs 7:21-23; Proverbs 6:32-33. Wounds he will get because if a man messes with another man's wife, he'll get the daylight beaten out of him!

Proverbs 5:4 “But her end ...” The Living Bible put it this way, “But afterwards (there is always an afterwards when we sin) only a bitter conscience is left to you, sharp as a double-edged sword.”

- A two-edged sword really cuts three ways. It cuts no matter which way it's swung, but there is also the cutting potential of the point.
- “Wormwood” represents the suffering that comes from man's wickedness or from divine punishment.

B. The Godless Woman's Subtle Working Proverbs 5:7-11

There is always a price to pay when one plays fast and loose with sex. Four serious consequences follow such immorality.

1. Dishonor Proverbs 5:9a

Many a man has had his reputation ruined by being caught in a compromising liaison with a woman who is not his wife.

2. Drudgery Proverbs 5:9b

Blackmail is a common aftermath of an encounter with a woman who is not your wife – maybe for the rest of our days, especially if the man involved has good reason to conceal what he has done.

Then, many of those who are never found out live with the fear of being found out.

3. Debt Proverbs 5:10

Loss of wealth and possessions.

4. Disease Proverbs 5:11

This refers to the broken physical condition of someone inflicted with AIDS or venereal disease.

There is also the mental anguish and conviction over the nature of his sin. His conscience condemns him over the failure to follow his earlier training. There is remorse, guilt, and shame in terms of a gnawing conscience.

C. The Godless Woman's Sure Wages Proverbs 5:5

The woman's real colors have been revealed. You would think Solomon had said enough to keep any man from going after the strange woman.

But notice Proverbs 5:8. Paul said, “Flee fornication.” (I Corinthians 6:14)

Stay away from her and her house. The mere presence of such a woman is a temptation.

Nothing we have read so far is pretty, because there is nothing pretty about perverted love, but Solomon is about to paint a beautiful picture of pure love.

Solomon is going to use highly poetic language here to describe the pure love between a man and his wife.

- God knows how we are made. His provision for satisfying sexual desire is marriage.
- A man can evade the snare of “another woman” by being content with God's provision – the gift of his wife. Solomon urges the husband to find delight and satisfaction in his wife.

When we come to Proverbs 5:15, we need to remember that in the poetic language used here, the words cistern, well, waters, and fountain all refer to his wife.

Notice Proverbs 5:15 – “Drink water out of your own cistern.”

The simple reading of these verses should settle once and for all that there is nothing unspiritual or immoral about pure physical love. The Bible puts its sanction upon the enjoyment of sex within the bonds of marriage. It forbids the enjoyment of sex outside or beyond the vows of marriage.

Notice: “Drink water out of your own cistern: “Have your own cistern BEFORE you drink.” If you are dating, don't see how many boys or girls you can lay with before you get married. There is something wonderful and special when you save yourself for that person that God has arranged to be your mate.

Keep yourself pure before marriage. A lot of problems in the home began way back in the pre-marital sex life of the individual. Once a person yields to pre-marital sex, you will never be able to present yourself pure to your mate.

Go back to Proverbs 5:15.

“Drinking” carries with it the satisfying of a natural desire. The water in a cistern is pure and is for the purpose of drinking to enjoy and satisfy a desire.

The wife is often called a cistern in Scripture because of its oriental usage.

In the Song of Solomon the bride is called “a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (Song of Solomon 4:12).

In Isaiah 51:1-2, Sarah is referred to as Abraham's cistern.

A similar imagery is used in the New Testament of the wife. Both Paul and Peter speak of the wife as “the vessel” (I Thessalonians 4:4; I Peter 3:7).

The allusion of the wife under the figures of a cistern or vessel enhances her value. It indicates the high esteem in which she is held, since the “cistern” or “well” was one of the most valuable possessions of an Eastern home.

The water in the cistern was not just rain water that was caught when it rained, but it was caught from running water and used for drinking purposes.

The picture is this: Pure love is something that is held sacred and is not for public discussion. Pure love is to be private and fresh. Pure love is not to be promiscuous. Pure love cannot be shared, with a mistress or the office girl or anyone else. Pure love is to be private.

Notice Prov. 5:16-17.

By confining yourself to your wife only, the only children that are yours will be those in your home; not those in the streets. Only the children sitting at your table ought to have the right to call you Father or Mother.

Then Prov. 5:18.

The picture of the wife being blessed with children; of being fruitful. The Jewish wife regarded herself blessed and happy if she bore children and unhappy or unblessed if she bore none.

Rejoiced with your wife when she is blessed with children.

In Prov. 5:19:

The “hind and roe” were graceful, loving to their family members in that they set their affection on their kin. They are beautiful animals.

The wife shows affection to her children, but she centers her affection upon her husband.

“The husband is ravished always with her love” means he is “intoxicated” with her and her love. There is an intensity of love connected with the feelings of superabundant happiness.

Solomon closes with reminding his son that he should love only his wife because the eyes of God are watching him and weighs all that he does – Proverbs 5:21.

That warning is given throughout the Bible.

- Proverbs 15:3 – “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”
- Job 34:21 – “For the eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps.”
- 2 Chronicles 16:9 – “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.”
- Jeremiah 16:17 – “For Mine eyes are upon all their ways, they are not hid from My face, neither is their iniquity hid from My eyes.”
- Hebrews 4:30 – “All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

SOLOMON'S TENTH LESSON TO HIS SON

THE CORDS OF SIN

Proverbs 6:1-19

I get the title for this study from the last three verses of Proverbs 5. These Verses – 21-23 – sum up the truths of Proverbs 5 and lay the groundwork for the truths discussed in Proverbs 6.

Notice the last words of Proverbs 5:22: “He shall be held or caught in the cords of his sins.” People will be captured – trapped as in a net or pit – by their own sins. They will be held in bondage by the cords of their own sins. These sins will act like cords of sin that will bind or hold a person down tight to where they are almost helpless.

Here are the sins Solomon points out:

I. The Sin of Overextending One's Self Proverbs 6:1-5

It's a warning against foolish financial entanglements. The warning in Proverbs 6:1 is not against borrowing or lending but against being held accountable for another person's high-interest loan.

What is “putting up security” or “giving your pledge” for someone else? It is cosigning a loan. It is putting yourself up as collateral.

“My son, do not act unwisely when taking on debt, or in underwriting another person's debt. If you do, you could be placing yourself in financial bondage for many years by guaranteeing a loan for someone else.”

From reading Proverbs 6:1-2 it seems that Solomon may have given this advice too late for it seems that they have already shaken hands on the matter and already become entangled and involved by his own promises and put himself under an obligation in which he could become liable.

The gullible person followed his heart rather than his head because he can ill afford the luxury of guaranteeing someone else's

indebtedness.

When banks loan money, they will not loan money to someone who is not a good risk. As a rule, the bank will loan money only to a person who has money or possessions like land or houses. When forced to decline a loan to a customer, the manager will often say, "Do you know anyone who would cosign your note for you?" The manager wants the best of both worlds. He wants to make the loan and keep the customer happy, but he also wants some kind of security that would make the head office happy. Then if the customer defaults, only the cosigner – the one who acted as surety – would be unhappy.

If his friend defaulted and could not pay the money back, the cosigner or surety became liable for the debt.

Greek philosophers used to say, "Give surety and ruin is near." Many have had their home and land taken from them and been reduced to poverty because they have become surety for someone.

Many friendships and family relationships have been destroyed because of cosigning and the failure to pay.

Does that rule out coming to the assistance of your friends or family when they are in need? What about your children or grandchildren? They've never borrowed money before and the bank will not loan them money unless someone cosigns the note.

Here's the rule of thumb: Cosign only if you are able and willing to pay the amount loaned, with no disruption of your relationship to that person and if it will not destroy your lifestyle if the loved one has to default for some reason.

Here's Solomon's advice to his son who has already shaken hands on the matter – Proverbs 6:3-5. Don't waste any time. Go to the person that you've made the pledge to and ask humbly if he will let you out from under the pledge.

Admit that you've overextended yourself. That you've bitten off more than you can chew.

In Proverbs 6:5 – The struggles of a gazelle or a bird to escape the snare are employed figuratively to describe the efforts which the surety is to make to tear and free himself from his friend.

Some animals caught in a trap have chewed their leg off in order to be free of the trap. Such is the urgency of the need.

II. The Sin of Not Providing for the Future Proverbs 6:6-11

Proverbs 6:1-5 dealt with surety; Proverbs 6:6-11 deals with slothfulness – laziness. We can become poor by something we do – by being surety for a friend; or we can become poor by something we don't do – by being lazy and refusing to work.

I am struck with how much Proverbs has to say about hard work (Proverbs 10:4; Prov. 12:24, Prov. 27; Prov.14:23; Prov. 20:4, Prov. 13; Prov. 21:25).

Every day we face a choice of going in one of two ways: the easy way or the hard way.

The easy way is the way of procrastination – of staying in bed – of saying it doesn't matter whether I work today or not – of saying the boss isn't around, nobody is seeing me – of saying take it easy, slow down, back off, don't have a heart attack., It's the way of no plan, no forethought, no diligence, no enthusiasm. It's the way of laziness, the way of the sluggard.

Let's all admit it – there's a sluggard deep inside each of us. It says, "Take a short cut. Cheat if you have to. Cut some corners. Pull some strings. Take it easy. Don't work too hard. Where's the fire? How much time do I get off anyway? What about my benefits and how much vacation time do I get?

Here's the hard way. It's the way of getting up early and staying up late. It's the way of working with your hands. It's preparation, long-range planning, goal setting, diligence, showing up for work on time, giving eight hours of work for eight hours pay, doing what you're told and then doing what needs to be done even if you're not told.

God is over on the hard road. He is not with the couch potatoes.

Here's the ironic thing between the easy road and the hard road. The easy road looks easy, but once you get on it, it turns into the hard road. And the hard road looks hard, but once you do the hard thing in life, it turns out to be the easy thing. The easy road is deceptive. It's the way of destruction, poverty, starvation, and desperation. It's the way of financial collapse, the way to wasted years, wasted months, wasted lives. The hard road of which appears to be so difficult is ultimately the road of prosperity, wealth,

and blessing. It's the road of fulfillment, happiness, and personal satisfaction. It's the road that leads you to the top. The easy road takes you to the bottom. The only road that goes to the top is the hard road. It is tough, but it is the only one that goes where you want to go in your life.

Go back to Proverbs 6:6. What is a sluggard? The word means "to lean idly." Think of the way thick syrup oozes slowly out of a bottle when it is cold. That's the sluggard – sluggish and slow and hesitant when he should be decisive, active, forthright. His life's motto is, "Don't rush me."

The Bible says, "As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed" (Proverbs 26:14). He is lazy, constantly making the soft choice, losing one opportunity after another, until he lies there helpless in his wasted life.

Only twice are "ants" mentioned in the Bible – here in Proverbs 6:6-8 and Proverbs 30:25: "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer."

Solomon invites us to study the ant for the purpose of learning wisdom. Solomon gives a contrast between the lazy man and the busy ant.

1. Ants Are Feeble – when compared to most creatures Proverbs 30:25

How do the ants with little strength manage to store enough food to make it through the long winter months? The answer is, they start early, they look to the future, they pool their strength, and they work together for the common good.

2. Ants Work Freely

Ants don't have to be forced to work. They don't need slave drivers to make them get up and get at it. No one has to put out a work program for them. They are self-motivated. They are busy little dudes!

3. Ants Have Ferocity

They are determined to protect their home and each other. Step on an ant mound and see how long it takes them to respond. They are aware of any danger.

4. Ants Have Fellowship

They have cooperation. They work together. They pool their strength. They are silent workers, working together and cooperating with each other.

5. Ants Are Fruitful

The ant has discipline and diligence. They know the value of hard work. Come wind or bad weather, under almost any circumstances, they work, storing food for when they need it.

Solomon's disgust with lazy people is impossible to overlook – see Proverbs 6:9-11. He insultingly mimics the lazy sleepyhead's response.

Parents need to begin instilling a strong work ethic in their children during their early years.

- Give them tasks to accomplish, instructions on how to accomplish them, and praise when they complete them.
- Encourage initiative by having them observe things that need to be done. Then praise them, especially when they do something without being told.
- Do not simply give children an allowance. Make it the reward for completing assigned chores that contribute to the family.
- Teach them principles in their lives that will one day contribute to successful careers.
- Train them to work without supervision.
- Show them how to be self-motivated.

- Teach them organizational skills.
- Develop a routine and require them to live by a schedule.
- Train them to perform tasks promptly and not to procrastinate.
- Teach them to do their best in all things.
- Help them set goals and lead them in fulfilling those goals.
- Reward children when they earn or deserve it, and withhold reward when they do not.

- Open savings accounts for them, and require them to save a portion of their allowance and earnings.

- Do not give them everything they desire. Do not loan them money to buy something that is unnecessary. Teach them to save their money until they have enough to purchase it.

We have a responsibility to teach our children diligence, discipline, and pride in their work.

III. Avoid Worthless and Wicked People Proverbs 6:12-15

Why?

1. They have corrupt, foul mouths – Proverbs 6:12

Perverse speech includes such things as:

- lying, slander, gossip
- profanity, cursing, taking God's name in vain
- impure or suggestive talk
- rebellious, insubordinate language

2. They are filled with deceit and seduction: They plot evil – Proverbs 6:13-14a

People who communicate with their eyes, feet, and fingers.

3. They stir up dissension – Proverbs 6:14b

Such causes turmoil, conflict, hurt feelings, hostility, and division.

4. They will be suddenly destroyed – Proverbs 6:15

Stay away from them. Have no fellowship with them.

SOLOMON'S ELEVENTH LESSON TO HIS SON

BEWARE OF ADULTERY

Proverbs 6:20-35

Sex sins, and especially the sin of adultery in the lives of married couples, are the great sins of our day.

Hollywood and novels and many popular songs all play on the same old theme – the triangle. There's the married couple and the third party, man or woman, who is breaking up the marriage.

No one can calculate the lives that have been absolutely ruined because of these sex sins, nor how many marriages are broken up today because of them.

Now you may be thinking, “We have just dealt with sexual sins in the last chapter of Proverbs; do we really need to deal with them again? It’s such an embarrassing subject for church.”

Yet, Solomon knew the tendency of men to the sins of impurity.

Solomon remembered his father, David. He saw what sexual sins did to his father and mother. I can hear him saying, “I will never get involved with women like my father did,” and, yet, Solomon confesses that although he should have learned from his father’s mistakes, he didn’t and now he is paying for his sexual sins. He is warning his son, “I saw what such sins did to my dad and now in my own life, please, son, break the cycle. Keep yourself clean.”

I want you to see that Solomon is not just repeating in Chapter six what he said in Chapter five about sexual sins.

In Chapter five Solomon is talking about the sin of going in to a prostitute; but in Chapter six he is talking about the sin of committing adultery with one’s neighbor’s wife.

Notice carefully Proverbs 6:26, 29.

- The “whorish woman” is a harlot, a prostitute, operating in some public place of prostitution. She operates without any secrets as to why she does what she does. You expect a harlot to ply her trade and seduce every man she come in contact with. That’s how she makes her living.
- But look at the last part of that verse. Here he is talking about the sin of adultery (listen closely) as it is related to your neighbor’s wife.
- There is a difference between visiting the house of prostitution and committing adultery with your neighbor’s wife.
- You expect a harlot to seduce a man. That’s how she makes her living. But – you do not expect a respectable married woman and housewife to spend her time seducing men. When she does, she’s doing the unexpected. She doesn’t do it to make a living. She’s doing something she ought not to be doing, something that is contrary to her standard in life.

Marriage is sacred to God, and, yet, it seems that everything in our society is trying to tear marriage apart. The practice of wife swapping is common in many circles. There’s even a TV show entitled “Trading Spouses.”

To understand this passage, you need to understand that there are two different women in Proverbs 6:26: the whorish woman – the common harlot, – and the adulterous wife.

You associate with the whorish woman, you are brought to a piece of bread. You associate with the adulterous wife, you are robbed of precious life.

Here is the real problem of church folks today and why there are as many divorces in the church as there are in the world. Very few church folks would lower themselves to go to a public house of prostitution, but somehow going in to your neighbor’s wife doesn’t seem quite as immoral, not quite sinful, not quite as shameful.

I. The Protection From Neighborhood Adultery Proverbs 6:20-24

God has offered divine protection for those of us who are going to be placed in this kind of temptation.

Notice the word “keep” in Proverbs 6:24. The word means “to hedge about.” This divine protection is of a twofold nature:

A. The Parental Responsibility Proverbs 6:20

Notice that both father and mother are united in the efforts of keeping their children informed about the temptation of sexual sins as well as the traps, the dangers and the consequences of such sins.

Notice in Prov.6:20 and Prov. 6:23 the instruction by the father is by way of commandment

and by the mother by way of the law.

The commandment is compared to a "lamp"; the law is compared to a "light."

A lamp is meant to be used in close quarters; a light is meant to light up the distance.

Where does the lamp and light come from? Psalm 119:1-5: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Help comes from the Word of God.

What will the Word of God do? It will light up the path immediately surrounding his feet, as a lamp does, so that he will not have to take one step in the dark.

It will do more than that. It will light up the path some distance down the road, just as the lights of your automobile light the highway, depending on whether they are on high or low beam. Low beam corresponds to the lamp. High beam corresponds to the light.

If parents discharge their parental responsibilities and prayerfully ask God to cause their children to respond, they will be equipped for the path of life they must tread.

B. The Children's Response Proverbs 6:20-22

This thing is two sided: The parents must instruct; the children must hear and heed. The Word of God must be hidden away in their hearts.

II. The Precautions Against Neighborhood Adultery Proverbs 6:24-25

"Don't lust for your neighbor's wife in your heart." The word "lust" means "to desire, or covet."

The tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife."

Sexual sin is rooted in lust, desire, or coveting. The word "lust" means to imagine the sinful act. And note: it is "In Thine Heart!" The admonition is a warning to repress the very first inclination to unchaste or wrong desires. Those desires may not be observed or detected by others, but they are known to yourself, and the first duty of repressing them calls for an act of determination and will on your part. Do Not Feed Your Desires by Replaying them in your Mind!

This initial attraction must be consistently rejected – James 1:14-15.

Notice Matthew 5:28. Notice it is "a woman." It means to pull one out of many and to put all your focus, attention, desire on that one woman.

Don't be taken or allured or captivated by her loveliness (her attractiveness), or her look (a world of meaning can be put into what one says with their eyes), or her lines (her flattery with words or seductive ways).

Here's the danger of neighborhood adultery. Couples become friends with each other. They enjoy doing things together. They playfully joke around with each other. They begin to share some details of their life. Then it seems that there is the detection that one mate is not as attentive as he or she ought to be with the other. One thinks, "I'll step in and show him or her the attention they deserve. They don't know what they've got in their mate. If he or she were my mate, I'd really show them what being a good husband or wife is all about."

Then desire sets in and then the person makes it clear by a look or word or some flattery that they are interested in the person and before they know it, they are emotionally and physically involved with each other.

Solomon is saying, "My son, stay alert to such things. Be careful what you let fill your mind. At the first hint of wrong desires toward someone of the opposite sex, repress the desire, don't stay in close contact with them. Flee temptation!"

III. The Price For Neighborhood Adultery Proverbs 6:26-35

A. With Adultery Comes Debt Proverbs 6:26

An adulteress may use blackmail by threatening to expose the adultery to get money but

the phrase “his precious life” refers to his honor.

Neighborhood adultery will ruin one's good name; it will ruin his family; it will ruin his marriage and the lives of his children and you will have to live in the shadow of a dishonored life.

Then there is the emotional and mental pain of being found out even if you are not caught.

Ask Reuben, Jacob's oldest son. Just when Jacob's heart was breaking over the death of his beloved Rachel, Reuben committed adultery with Bilhah, who was Rachel's maid and Jacob's third wife. Bilhah was the one that Jacob would most likely turn to for comfort. The deed was known to Jacob, but he said nothing to Reuben or Bilhah. They carried their guilt for years and their secret thoughts must have tormented them. “Does Jacob know? If he doesn't how long can we keep the secret? If he does know, why doesn't he act?” Years passed – in fact 39 years passed. Reuben thought he had gotten by with the deed. In time even the memory of the deed was buried and almost forgotten. Then Reuben was called to Jacob's deathbed. Being the firstborn, he knew the double portion would be his. Genesis 49:3-4. Jacob pulled himself up, leaned forward on his staff, cleared his throat, looked at Reuben and said, “Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and power. (You can almost see Reuben swelling with pride, thinking his sin was never known by Jacob, then Jacob said in Gen.49:4) “unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because you went up to your father's bed and defiled it.” The ax had fallen. It took nearly 40 years, but Reuben's sin found him out. Adultery always catches up with the adulterer.

B. With Adultery Comes Discipline Proverbs 6:27-31

Solomon compared the consequences of breaking the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” and the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.”

Adultery is stealing! When adultery enters marriage, everybody loses. God has put a high and holy fence around marriage. It was the first of all human institutions and God will not be mocked in this area of life. (I Corinthians 6:18)

Marriage is God's idea. He instituted it, set up its rules, decreed its boundaries, and declared its sanctity. A man's relationship with his wife is to be loving and loyal. Since the home is the basic unit of national life, as the home goes, so goes the nation.

Notice Proverbs 6:27-29. If you go in to your neighbor's wife, it's like playing with fire. You can't put coals of fire in your lap without getting burned ... nor walk barefooted on hot coals without being burned – and you can't commit adultery without getting burned.

Prov. 6:29 – “He will not be innocent” – go free – go unpunished.

Prov. 6:30-31 – We might overlook the thief who steals food when he's starving, but God has provided for a man to have his own wife so that he doesn't have to steal another man's wife.

A thief can restore bread if he steals bread, but the adulterer cannot restore the dignity, honor, or purity of a wife he has stolen from another man.

He can expect discipline – Proverbs 6:32-35. The injured husband will show no mercy to the adulterer, the man who has wronged him so deeply. His jealousy for his wife inflames the strongest feelings of revenge. He has only one goal: vengeance fired by jealousy and rage.

Men are in their graves today because they stole their neighbor's wife.

SOLOMON'S TWELFTH LESSON TO HIS SON

WISDOM: THE COMPANION OF GOD

Proverbs 8:22-36

In our study of the Book of Proverbs, when Solomon is about to give a lesson to his son, he will say something like: "My son, keep your father's command ..." Yet, in this lesson, we don't hear Solomon saying, "listen, pay attention, or obey my words" until Proverbs 8:32 and then many translations use the words "my children." But this is a new lesson for his son.

Many Bible students declare that Proverbs 8 is the most difficult chapter in the Book of Proverbs. It is complicated, but it is also rich.

We can more fully see the great glory of this chapter when we understand the teaching of the New Testament: Wisdom personified is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the very embodiment of wisdom: perfect and absolute wisdom.

Proverbs 8 personifies wisdom as though wisdom was a living Person.

In Proverbs 8:1-21 wisdom is seen as THE COMPANION OF MAN. Wisdom's voice is contrasted with the voice of the prostitute in Proverbs 7, who called out to men in the dark, secret places to follow the pathway of sin.

But wisdom cries out in Public, well-known places to follow the pathway of righteousness.

Well, if wisdom is personified, who IS wisdom? Paul says, the Lord Jesus has been made unto us as believers, righteousness and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 2:3).

Now in Proverbs 8:22-36 wisdom is seen as THE COMPANION OF GOD. When you read these verses, replace the words "me" and "I" with "Christ" and you will understand that wisdom and Christ are seen as one and the same.

Wisdom is the companion of God in the Pre-existence of Christ in creation.

I. The Identity of Wisdom Proverbs 8:22-31

The New Testament companion passage of Scripture to Proverbs 8 is John 1:1-5, 14. Here we do not find the words "wisdom personified," but we find the word "WORD" personified. The Greek word for "word" is "logos." "Logos" is a spoken word, and yet it is personified, it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read John 1:1-4 and substitute the word "Christ" for the word "word" and you will get the true meaning.

Sometimes folks ask, "Where did God come from? Where did the Lord Jesus come from?" I don't have the answer, for the Bible presents them as always existing together.

Let me call your attention to three phrases which discuss the "origin" of the Lord Jesus in this passage in Proverbs: "Possessed me"

– Proverbs 8:22

"Set up" – Proverbs 8:23

"Brought forth" – Proverbs 8:24-25

A. "Possessed me" Proverbs 8:22

The word "possessed" does not refer to making as in making or creating a being, but it means "to own as one owns a relative."

God the Father, the First Person of the Godhead, "owns as a relative" the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead.

Notice John 1:1-3. The word "beginning" here refers to when creation came into existence, not when Christ came into existence.

Christ already existed when this beginning occurred. Christ's existence is not limited to time. He is eternal.

"In the beginning" is the earliest possible point of measured time, but eternity cannot be measured by time.

There is one significant difference in the use of the "in the beginning" by Moses and by John. Moses and John go opposite directions from "the beginning." Moses follows "in the beginning" with what happened AFTER the beginning ("God created"). John follows "in the beginning" with what was BEFORE the beginning, namely, Jesus Christ "was".

The word "was" that is used four times in John 1:1-2, is in the imperfect tense in Greek. Unfortunately, we do not have an imperfect verb tense in the English language. The imperfect tense denotes continued action in past time. In regards to Christ, it means that Christ existed continuously before "the beginning" occurred. There never was a "beginning" for Christ. Christ always existed. He "is before all things" (Colossians 1:17). So He could speak of "the glory which I had with Thee (God) before the world was" (John 17:5). Some translate John 1:1 as "in the beginning of the beginnings."

Notice John 1:14. The words "only begotten" do not mean that God's Son was born; the words mean "only unique." God the Father, the First Person of the Godhead, has an intimate relationship with the Second Person of the Godhead and so owns a Father and Son relationship. Used "metaphorically" (a figure of speech containing an implied comparison, in which a word is used of one thing and applied to another) the First and Second Persons of the Godhead have a Father/Son relationship.

Psalms 2:7 "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee."

Romans 1:4 "Declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead."

Hebrews 1:5 "For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are my Son, today I have begotten thee'? And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son'?" (The title "Son" presents the unique relationship whereby the Second Person of the Godhead voluntarily submitted to the First Person for the purpose of fulfilling the program of redemption established in eternity past. When did this "beginning" begin? He was always God, but He fulfilled His role as Son in a point of time at His INCARNATION and was affirmed as God's Son by His RESURRECTION (Romans 1:4).

Hebrews 5:5 At the Incarnation, God the Father declared the Second Person to be Son, Messiah, Priest, King. "It was He (the Father) who said to Him (the Son): 'You are My Son, today I have begotten Thee.'" As He also said in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

B. "Set Up" Proverbs 8:23

The words "set up" mean "anointed." See Psalm 2:1-3.

Anointed in connection with what? God's Son is anointed to rule over the nations in the due course of God's plan and providence.

Psalm 45:6-7 – Above every person in the heavenly realm, the Lord Jesus Christ has been anointed because He is the only Begotten Son of God.

C. "Brought Forth" Proverbs 8:24-25

The words simply mean "I lived." If we exchanged the words "brought forth" with "I lived," we would have a clearer understanding.

Christ was brought forth, not in the sense of having a beginning of life, but as being one

nature and substance with the Father – both eternal and equal.

In John 5 Jesus makes seven claims of equality with the Father. See John 5:18.

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Equal in Working | John 5:19 |
| 2. Equal in Knowing | John 5:20 |
| 3. Equal in Resurrecting | John 5:21, 28-29 |
| 4. Equal in Judging | John 5:22, 27 |
| 5. Equal in Honor | John 5:23 |
| 6. Equal in Regenerating | John 5:24-25 |
| 7. Equal in Self-existence | John 5:26 |

Jesus is Eternally portrayed here:

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Jesus is equal with God's Age (Jesus is as old as God) | Proverbs 8:22 |
| 2. Jesus is everlasting (He always was and always will be) | Proverbs 8:23 |
| 3. Jesus existed before the Earth was formed | Proverbs 8:24-26 |
| – Jesus existed when there was no Form, no Fountains, and no fields. | |
| 4. Jesus fellowshiped with the Father when He prepared the Heavens | Proverbs 8:27, 30 |

II. The Instruction By Wisdom Proverbs 8:32-36

Of all God's wonders – His might and power in creating the heavens and earth, it was the creation of the human race and the preparation of the world for their habitation, that brought God to delight and rejoicing.

God skillfully crafted all things to reach out to us. He wanted to be our companion throughout life if we will only let Him.

His desires (wisdom's desire) is:

- to walk with us
- to guide our lives
- to provide for us
- to prosper us
- to counsel us in decisions great and small
- to strengthen us as we walk in righteousness

Listen to wisdom's plea and her conditional promises:

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Wisdom's Requirements to be Blessed | Proverbs 8:33-34 |
| 2. Wisdom's Promise: Both Earthly and Eternal Life | Proverbs 8:35 |
| 3. Wisdom's Warning | Proverbs 8:36 |

SOLOMON'S THIRTEENTH LESSON TO HIS SON

THE HOUSE THAT WISDOM BUILT

Proverbs 9:1-18

We have been looking at the thirteen lessons on wisdom that Solomon gave to his son, based upon the need for wisdom as Solomon had experienced it in his own life.

Twelve of the thirteen lessons begin with the words, "my son."

In Proverbs 8 wisdom is personified and became the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Proverbs 9 is the summary of these thirteen wisdom lessons and uses the idea of building a house of wisdom. In this ninth chapter we see a contrast between wisdom and folly. Both invite the “simple” to a banquet, but the differences in the invitation and banquet are stark.

1. Wisdom's invitation is open and public; folly's invitation is private and secretive.
2. Wisdom offers meat and wine; folly prepares bread and water.
3. Wisdom herself prepares her banquet; folly offers water stolen from someone else.
4. Wisdom's banquet leads to life; folly's banquet leads to death.

I. Lady Wisdom's House Proverbs 9:1-12

A. Wisdom's House Proverbs 9:1

Solomon is not speaking about a literal house. He is speaking symbolically. We are not told what the seven pillars are, but there have been some suggestions.

1. Some see the seven pillars as the basic ingredients of wisdom found in the thirteen lessons on wisdom given by Solomon to his son. Those ingredients are: knowledge, discretion, sound wisdom, prudence, counsel, instruction, under-standing.
2. Others see the seven pillars as the ingredients that the early Church was built upon in Acts 2:41-47: salvation, baptism, doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, giving.
3. Others suggest the seven characteristics of divine wisdom found in James 3:17:
But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

Since the house of wisdom is not a literal house, the pillars are likewise not literal. They represent the nature of the house as a well-supported building. The number seven indicates the thoroughness with which wisdom's “house” is built, together with its sacred nature.

Solomon personified wisdom as the Lord Jesus. Wisdom has “hewn out” seven pillars. The words “hewn out” denote the work of the stone mason. Wisdom carves the pillars from stone as she both adorns and strengthens her house.

B. Wisdom's Hospitality Proverbs 9:2-3

Lady Wisdom has prepared a feast of things which are related to the proper instruction in the Word of God and sends out an invitation to everybody to come and dine.

“She has killed her beast” or “Slaughtered her meat” and has a well furnished table. It represents an ample supply for everyone who is ready to come and partake of what she has prepared.

The feast elsewhere is an emblem of fellowship between man and God. Jesus uses the idea of a wedding feast in the parable of the marriage supper (Matthew 22:4; Luke 14:16). The saints will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb as they enter into the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 19:9).

The Bible is the bountiful table wisdom spreads. You will find more help, insight, and instruction, more practical, reliable, down-to-earth counsel in the Bible than in all the volumes of the world.

C. Wisdom's Help Proverbs 9:4-6

Wisdom sends her maidens to invite the simple or naive or those who lack under-

standing.

The great educational institutions today don't open their doors to the simple. In fact, they comb through and cull out those who do not make a certain grade on a test.

But God loves the simple. That's why He uses so many of them to get His work done – I Corinthians 1:26.

I think of D. L. Moody. He was simple, uneducated, and unsophisticated. But Moody heard wisdom's call, ate and drank at her table, and they asked of him what they asked about Jesus: "Where did this man get his wisdom?" (Matthew 13:54).

To be wise the simple must "forsake the foolish" – Quit the class of fools, give up being of the category of fools, leave off going the path of the fool and make real progress in the direction of wisdom.

Notice Proverbs 9:6 – "Forsake the foolish and LIVE." Note Proverbs 9:11 – abundant and everlasting life.

Proverbs 9:9: "Give instruction to a wise man and he will be wiser still." He is teachable, even when reproved or corrected, and he will love you for it or he will take your correction with a sense of appreciation. He will learn from his mistakes.

Proverbs 9:12a – No one can live my life for me; I cannot live your life for you. We make our own decisions, for better or worse, and we live with the consequences, good or bad. You cannot be wise for me; I cannot be wise for you. A wise man can give us good sound advice and share the benefit of his knowledge and experience, but he cannot make us take his advice.

II. Madame Folly's House

The house of folly is just that. It is a house with no pillars. Consequently, there is no permanence; nor can it meet the needs of those who go to that house.

This house is characterized by words like stupid, flighty, caring for nothing and knowing nothing.

A. Folly's Clamor Proverbs 9:13

Clamorous means loud, boisterous, noisy.

B. Folly's Call Proverbs 9:14-15

C. Folly Clients Proverbs 9:16, 7-8

The word "scorner" and "wicked" mean "those who have gone too far." Reprove him and he will hate you. Try to correct him and you are met with insult and scorn. You will heap upon yourself abuse.

That's why Jesus said, "Don't cast your pearls before swine."

The evil man regards the reprover as a personal enemy and treats him with contempt which causes unseemly bickering, disputes, injurious words and deeds.

Proverbs 9:8: Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you.: There are times when reproof only hardens and exasperates and makes matters worse.

Therefore, it is needful at times to keep reproof to ourselves and let them learn in us by our good living what they are not.

D. Folly's Claim Proverbs 9:17

Satan is always trying to get people to believe that they can find more satisfaction in things that are forbidden than things that are permitted. Take away the permission and it always becomes more desirable.

Folly is lying of course. Stolen water is no sweeter than any other kind of water. Satan likes to play with our minds and tries to convince us it is.

In this day of immoral lifestyle, pornography, perversion and the like are billed as “adult.” Activities that are illegitimate and depraved are somehow supposed to be for grown-up people. The implication of course is that those who refrain from such activities are not mature enough to participate.

E. Folly's Curse Proverbs 9:18

When one responds to folly's invitation, they enter into a trap from which they may not escape.

SOLOMON'S EVALUATION OF THE HOME

The book of Proverbs is divided into three parts:

1. Moral Issues (Proverbs 1-9)

Here Solomon gives thirteen lessons on wisdom to his son. We have just completed this section and we have learned that all but one of the thirteen lessons opens with the words “My son.”

2. Miscellaneous Issues (Proverbs 10:1 – 19:5)

Solomon roams here, there, and everywhere commenting on all phases of human life and activity.

3. Monarchical Issues (Proverbs 19:6 – 29:27)

Proverbs of special interest to those in authority.

Let me give you some interesting facts about the second part – Miscellaneous Issues – Proverbs 10:1 – 19:5:

1. Most of the proverbs in this section are the Personal Proverbs of Solomon – Proverbs 10:1. You may ask, “Are not all of these proverbs of Solomon?” Not all of them. But Solomon does have 375 personal proverbs in this section.

2. Each one of the proverbs in this section consist of two statements with one exception. Proverbs 19:7 contains three statements.

3. This second section is divided into two sections or divisions:

- a. Proverbs 10 – 15 present truths in Contrasting Statements
- b. Proverbs 16 – 22 present truths in Corresponding or Comparison Statements

Examples:

Proverbs 10:1: “The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: (in contrast) but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.”

Proverbs 15:1: “A soft answer turneth away wrath: (in contrast) but grievous words stir up anger.”

Proverbs 16:1: “The preparations of the heart in man, (then a corresponding statement) and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.”

Proverbs 22:1: “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, (then a corresponding statement) and loving favor rather than silver and gold.”

Each proverb is independent of itself. In other words, it could be lifted out of the book of Proverbs, put on a plaque, hung on a wall, presented as truth, and you wouldn't need to know any other proverb in the book to clarify that particular one, because they are complete within themselves.

There are several ways to study Proverbs, but I have chosen the method of grouping together the Proverbs on the basis of principles or subject.

Solomon begins the second section talking about the home. That is a good place to start, so we will look at Solomon's Evaluation of the Home.

I. The Atmosphere in the Home

One of the most important things about the home is the atmosphere of the home.

Solomon is not talking about the physical attributes of the home like the kind of house you live in or the street you may live on or the kind of neighborhood you might live in.

In every home there are two basic needs:

A. Love in the Home Proverbs 15:16-17

Proverbs 15:17 is the only verse of the book that directly comment on the love within a family, not because love is unimportant, but because the people of that day already understood the importance of love in the family.

Solomon believes it is better to have “little” (Prov. 15:16) and to have “love” (Prov. 15:17) than to have trouble in the home. It is better to have a small number of possessions while also having “the fear of the Lord” than to have “great treasure” accompanied by “trouble.” A simple home with love far excels an elegant home with hatred between the husband and wife.

I wonder if folks really believe that today. We have become far more “things oriented” than “people oriented” today. We work harder for things than we do in building loving, lasting, meaningful relationships, even among husband and wife and parent and child in the day in which we live.

Solomon says it's better to sit down to a meal of just vegetables where there is real love than to go out and eat rib-eye steaks every day. Without love, even eating the fatted calf doesn't satisfy!

B. Peace in the Home Proverbs 17:1; Proverbs 21:9, 19

Peace and contentment in the home is better than all kinds of material possessions in a house where every mealtime is spoiled by constant wrangling.

A spirit of ill-will and bitterness and strife and contention can spoil the best meal.

Notice Proverbs 21:9, 19

Think of the flat roof of an Eastern house which were open like a patio or place of private prayer or a place where one could go and sleep.

The wife here is described as not allowing her husband any peace because she is “contentious” – “creating controversy,” “quarreling,” “disagreeing,” “feuding,” “filled with bitterness,” “animosity,” “hard-feelings,” “nagging,” and an “angry

temperament.”

When husband and wife are always at each other's throats, there is no real peace for any in the household. There is a need for love and peace.

II. The Influences in the Home

A. The Influence of the Father Proverbs 17:6; Prov. 20:7; Prov. 13:22; Prov. 11:29

Proverbs 17:6: Solomon is giving us a picture of a stable family. An aging grandfather delights in his grandchildren and a son glorying in his father. The son can look back on his line of ancestors and take a healthy pride in his heritage.

Proverbs 20:7: Solomon is describing a godly, dependable man who is an example to his children. He is honest, sincere, upright – a Christian father.

This godly father lives a pure life and daily performs his duty towards God and man and walks in integrity. His children acquire godly habits from him as he sets the example before them day by day.

His true source of wealth is his children, who follow in their father's footsteps. How rich he is!

Proverbs 13:22: One translation has it, “A good man leaves an inheritance of moral responsibility to his children's children.”

The wealth may not be worldly wealth. It may be a good name and a good example.

Proverbs 11:29: (Amplified Bible) “He that troubleth his own house by being stingy, fussy, finicky, ill-tempered, a tightwad and always has to have his way and troubles his household by his harsh treatment of those in the house, shall inherit the wind – will be the loser in the end, because no one will want to have anything to do with him when he gets old.”

The Living Bible says, The fool who provokes his family to resentment will finally have nothing worthwhile left.”

Note Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:20-21. I know some lonely old men who were lonely, old men who had no place to go and no one to talk to, who were not welcome in the homes of their children because of this think of provoking their family to resentment – having to have their own way, no matter what, and the result was resentment. How sad!

B. The Influence of the Mother Proverbs 18:22; Prov. 19:14; Prov. 14:1; Prov. 12:4; Prov. 19:13; Prov. 11:22

It is interesting that in Proverbs, the proverbs related to the wife and mother have more to do with the wife's relationship to the husband than it does to the mother's relationship to the children.

Proverbs 18:22: “Whoso fineth a good, godly, worthy wife finds a good thing.”

Finding a woman is not the same as finding a wife. Solomon had no trouble finding a woman. His position, power, good looks, wit and personal charm made him attractive to women. He collected a thousand of them, but it is doubtful he ever found a wife among them (Ecclesiastes 7:27-28). He did genuinely lose his heart to

one woman and, from all we know about her, she could have been the perfect wife for whom he had longed. But by the time he met her he had married 60 times and was living with 80 concubines (Song of Solomon 6:8), so she turned him down cold. This Shulamite woman married a poor shepherd and they, though poor with this world's goods, were rich in love and companionship. Solomon would have given his kingdom to have traded places with him.

The man who finds such a wife should thank the Lord for His gracious provisions.

Proverbs 19:14: "A father can give his sons homes and riches, but only the Lord can give them understanding wives."

Any man, worthy or not, may inherit property from his father, but a true wife is a special gift of God.

Proverbs 14:1: Wives are not so much homemakers as they are home-builders.

The wife has the ability to bring happiness and fulfillment to a house as she builds it. She can build harmony and stability into the home.

The wife can also be a home wrecker by tearing down her husband and children.

Proverbs 11:22: "A jewel (a ring) of gold in a swine's snout."

Jewels in a muddy pig's snout is the same as beauty in a woman with a depraved character that is without modesty, doing what is without taste and unfitting.

Proverbs 12:4: This wife is her husband's crown. She serves as his glory, brings him to the fullness of his honor.

Think of the wonderful wives in the Bible:

Eve – in spite of the fact that she listened to the Serpent

Sarah – the model wife

Jochebed – the mother of Moses

Others were not so good ... rottenness in his bones:

Job's wife and Jezebel

Ogdon Nash gave good advice on how to make marriage successful:

To keep your marriage brimming

With love in the loving cup,

Whenever you're wrong, admit it'

Whenever you're right, shut up.

THE HOME AND ITS DISCIPLINE

Proverbs 10:1 begins the second division of the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs 10:1 – 22:16 contains 375 personal proverbs of Solomon.

Solomon covers many subjects in these proverbs and we will look at the different areas, try to put the proverbs that deal with each subject together, and a full teaching on that subject by Solomon.

The first subject Solomon deals with is the home, as we saw last time.

- Solomon says that the most important thing related to the home is the atmosphere of the home, and to maintain the right atmosphere in the home there is the need for love and peace.

- The father is to provide for his household materially and spiritually and to avoid the danger of provoking his children which will lead to resentment of him (Proverbs 20:7; Prov. 11:20)

- The “godly” wife is a “gift from the Lord” (Proverbs 19:14) and she is to be a home-builder (Proverbs 14:1) and not a homewrecker by tearing down her husband (Proverbs 19:13), or driving her children away from the home or being a woman without discretion.

Another way to keep the right atmosphere in the home is by the exercise of discipline of the children.

We will look at three things relating to Discipline of Children:

I. The Responsibility of Discipline

Parents have a God-given responsibility to discipline their children in the home and to start the discipline early when the child is young.

- There is no question that children are a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3) – but they are a challenge from the Lord as well.

- In America we have had several generations to witness the results of raising children the world's way, and the evidence could not be more clear: We need to return to the wisdom of the Lord.

Godly parents care about their children's welfare. Even when parents are old, they love and care about their children's welfare. A friend of mine told me about a friend of his who constantly worried about his kids – what they did, what they ate, how they dressed. That didn't sound too unusual until he told me the father was in his 90's and the kids were in their 70's. Parents never stop trying to influence their children.

Let me give you three insights from the Book of Proverbs as it relates to the discipline of children:

1. Proverbs isn't a book of Promises – Proverbs represents principles, not airtight promises.
2. Parents, if you pour yourself into your children when they are young, they're going to have what they need to be wise when they are old. The time for training children is when they are young. The Bible doesn't promise that every child of Christian parents will be saved. It just says if you want to give your child every advantage, build into your child those godly values and principles which will guide his steps as he leaves your direct care.
3. Young people need to realize that parents are God's tools in their lives for good. Parents aren't perfect, nor do they know everything. They are going to make mistakes. But children need to choose to honor their parents regardless of mistakes made.

Several verses in Proverbs speak of the parent's responsibility to discipline their children:

Read Proverbs 22:6. A Danish proverb says, “What youth learn, age does not forget.”
An English proverb says, “As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.”

There is all the difference in the world between telling a child and training a child. The Hebrew word “train” has several shades of meaning. One means “to train a child train by way of example; to whet the appetite by showing the way.”

Another meaning is “to hedge in.” It is a picture of cattle being guided into a pen. Their path is fenced so that there is only one way they can go.

The work of training must begin when they are young.

The Catholic church says that if you give them your child at birth, they can have such a commanding influence in the life of a child until that child is age seven, the child will be theirs. By then the child's character is formed, his convictions are embedded, and his course is set. No amount of contrary teaching would greatly alter the basic bent of that child.

A woman wrote to a Christian child counselor about her seventeen-year-old son who was breaking her heart. He refused to listen to a thing she said. He was rude and defiant. He was abusive and used bad language around the house. He was running around with the wrong crowd and sometimes came home drunk. She suspected he was using drugs and had already been in trouble with the law. What should she do? The counselor wrote back, "Shrink him down to seventeen months and start all over again." In other words, it was too late for him.

Child training needs to reach four areas:

1. The Mind

The entire educational system of our secular society is geared to focus the mind's attention on this world's priorities, philosophies, pleasures, prosperity, programs,

principles, and praise. The goal of secular education is to prepare children to succeed in this world, so the system sets this world's art, science, religion, heroes, and idols before the child. The goal of Christian parents must be different. They must teach their children to fix their attention on the world to come.

The Christian parent must lay a firm foundation with the Bible during the first seven years and then build off that foundation during the next ten years. Since the entire secular-humanist educational system scoffs at the Bible, the Christian parent must make sure that the Word of God is so firmly implanted in the child's mind that no amount of secular influence will challenge the Bible's authority.

2. The Heart

Every child also comes equipped with the capacity to love, hate, laugh, cry, desire, fear, and hope. He is a bundle of emotional contradictions, thanks to the fall. Parents must instill in their children a fear and horror of sin, seek to engage their affections to Christ, and meet their emotional needs. Jesus is the friend of little children and in our efforts to reach their hearts, we have a willing and wondrous ally in the Holy Spirit.

3. The Will

Parents must school the will of their children in obedience.

Parents must command respect, fear, and obedience early, for parents stand in the place of God in the lives of their young children. That stubborn, childish will must learn to obey without argument or the display of temper. Children who do not learn to respect parental authority will learn to defy or challenge all authority.

4. The Conscience

Conscience is the innate knowledge of right and wrong, but conscience by itself is a goad rather than a guide, for it can be conditioned – it can be sensitized or seared. That is why it is vital that conscience be bonded to the Word of God. Parents must lay a good moral foundation early in a child's life by instilling the precepts of the Mosaic law. These principles condition the conscience, which the Holy Spirit eventually uses as the instrument for bringing about conviction of sin, and conviction of sin is the great prerequisite to genuine conversion.

"Train up a child in the way he should go." If we neglect this first part of the verse, how

can we claim the second part: "When he is old, he will not depart from it"?

II. The Reasons for Discipline

Discipline has almost gone out of style. Where has the lack of discipline come from in our society? I can tell you where it did NOT come from: from the wisdom of Solomon. Proverbs is filled with exhortations and instructions on how to train children.

A. Discipline is Proper for Every Child Proverbs 29:17

- Every child needs to be disciplined.
- Disciplining one's son usually results in parents having peace and joy later because their son will behave and grow wiser.
- Our children become either a source of constant anxiety or a source of rest and contentment. It depends on how they were raised – but not all together.
- When we see two children from the same home, one may become a credit to his parents while the other throws off all restraints.
 - Out of Abraham's home came an Ishmael and an Isaac.
 - Out of Isaac's home came an Esau and a Jacob.
 - Out of David's home came an Absalom and a Solomon.

B. Discipline Proves Our Love for Our Children Proverbs 13:24

"Betimes" (KJV), "promptly" (NKJV) – "is careful to discipline him" (NIV) – literally, "When it is necessary to keep him in line or in order" ... When there is no alternative."

The old English proverb says, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

Notice: The emphasis is to discipline in love. The world is totally confused by the idea that love could be expressed by firm discipline, even corporal punishment such as spanking. How could making a child cry be a loving thing to do?

The number one reason parents give for not disciplining their children is because they love them too much to hurt them. But the Word of God says if we don't discipline our children, we don't love them – we hate them.

James Dobson says parents must learn that discipline is not something we do TO their children, but something they do FOR their children. They must get to the point where they love their child too much to allow him to practice destructive patterns of behavior.

The reason the emphasis is placed upon love here is that many parents do not chasten their children until they are angry, and then children associate chastening with anger.

- There are parents who let their children get away with proverbial murder, and do absolutely nothing about it until they have to. By that time, they are angry and exasperated. By that time, they don't discipline sanely or sensibly, and the only thing the child knows is that they've done something to make mommy or daddy mad. The madness is far more noticeable to the child than the discipline.
- We should discipline in love and convey to them that the reason that we are disciplining them is that we love them too much not to discipline them, then the discipline will be much more effective.

C. Discipline Postponed Will Be Ineffective Proverbs 19:18

Defiance must be confronted early or it will blossom into full-fledged rebellion.

This is Solomon's cure for bad behavior. Don't wait. Nip it in the bud!

Solomon is saying two things: Discipline is to be administered in time and it ought to be done in sincerity.

The last part of that verse – “and let not thy soul spare for his crying” does not suggest that you keep on beating your child, not being concerned about his crying. It could better be translated, “Do not indulge your angry resentment by undue chastisement and set yourself to his ruin.”

What do you do when little Johnny is defiant? Deal with it early. The great old preacher Vance Havner, shared this poem:

Junior bit the meter man,
Junior kicked the cook.
He's just anti-social now
According to the book.

Junior smashed the clock and lamp,
Junior hacked the tree;
Destructive trends are all explained
In chapters 2 and 3.

Junior threw his milk at Mom,
Junior screamed for more;
Notes on self-assertiveness
Are found in chapter 4.

Junior tossed his shoes and socks
Out into the rain;
Aggression! Well, that's normal
Disregard the stain.

Junior got in Grandpa's room
Tore up his fishing line;
That's to gain attention,
Chapters 8 and 9.

Grandpa seized a slipper,
Yanked Junior 'cross his knee;
For Grandpa hadn't read a book
Since 1893.

D. Discipline Purges Wrong Conduct from a Child's Life Proverbs 22:15

The sin nature imparts a self-centered attitude to everyone. This attitude leads children to gratify their own desires. Left to himself, the child develops a selfishness that turns him away from the Lord.

The child must have his sinful nature curbed while he is young, otherwise, he will develop an undisciplined spirit that takes him after his own desires instead of those that please the Lord.

Please understand that the word “foolishness” does not mean fun-loving or acting like a kid. A kid is not an adult, and he's not supposed to act like an adult. Kids are going to act like kids!! (Some of us sour adults need to be more fun-loving ... on the other hand, some adults need to grow up. There needs to be a balance.)

The word “foolishness” in Proverbs means “wickedness.”

In the context, this Proverb is saying, "Discipline can help expel an arrogant, flippant kind of attitude that is bound up in the heart of a child and replace it with wisdom.

E. Discipline Properly Administered Will Not Hurt Your Child Proverbs 23:13

If we love our child, we will not fail to impose discipline on him. Early in life a child has to learn that his will is not the only will in the world. He must learn that he cannot always have everything he wants and always get his way. He must learn that temper tantrums will be swiftly, surely, and sometimes painfully dealt with. The sooner a child runs into firm, fair, and consistent discipline, the better off that child will be. A person who has not learned to take "No" for an answer cannot get through life successfully.

"If you beat him with a rod, he will not die." It didn't say that he won't sound like he's dying, or try to convince you he's dying. It just says he won't die as a result of your discipline administered with biblical wisdom.

F. Discipline Proceeds in Spite of Crying Proverbs 19:18

Some parents just cannot stand the thought of being the cause of their child's crying.

Some children have it figured out so perfectly that they will start crying at the very suggestion they are about to be spanked. Other children steal themselves against the pain and refuse to shed a tear. But if they do cry, don't be thrown off track by it. Tears and crying are God's way of allowing us to release the pain we feel; tears are normal and healthy.

G. Discipline Provides Help for the Child, Not Release of Anger for the Adult

True discipline is corrective, not abusive in nature.

When parents use physical or verbal correction as a means for taking out their own frustrations or anger, children can easily become embittered (Ephesians 6:4).

One mother said, "My children were misbehaving so badly that I spanked them. It didn't seem to help them much, but it did me a world of good."

Discipline of children is not a means for parents to let off steam or retaliate or seek vengeance against their children. If you are angry at your child, wait to discipline them.

H. Discipline Prepares a Child for the Most Important Decision in His Life Proverbs 23:14

Punishment that hurts communicates clearly to the young mind of a child. Slowly, but surely, the child learns to submit his will to the will of his parents. This prepares him to submit his will to the will of God.

Delivering his soul from hell is an added motivation for parents to correct their children through discipline.

The importance of early discipline is expressed in this little poem:

I took a piece of plastic clay
And gently fashioned it one day,
And as my fingers pressed it still
It moved and yielded to my will.

I came again when days were passed,
That piece of clay was hard at last;
The form I gave it, still it bore
But I could change that form no more.

I took a piece of living clay
And gently formed it day by day,
And molded with my powers and art

A young child's soft and yielding heart.

I came again when days were gone.

It was a man I looked upon.

He still that early impress wore

But I could change him nevermore.

III. The Response to Discipline Proverbs 13:1

Proverbs 13:1: "But a scorner heareth not rebuke" – "tunes rebuke out."

All children do not respond the same way to discipline. In some families there is a Jacob and there is an Esau – a wise son and a foolish son.

Proverbs 15:5: "Regardeth" or "Receives" means to consider each suggestion.

The word "despise" means the foolish, rebellious son feels like he knows more than his father does. It is an indictment of the son instead of the father.

Proverbs 15:20: A child's parents stand in the place of God during the earliest and most formative years of his life. Children are to honor their parents, for in honoring them they honor God. Those who despise them dishonor God.

Proverbs 17:25: The word "grief" means "to exasperate", to irritate, infuriate, annoy.

Proverbs 19:26: "A son who mistreats his father or his mother is a public disgrace."

I have seen a lot of old people mistreated by their children – sometimes by ignoring them and they are dying by inches with broken hearts because their children won't honor them as parents.

Proverbs 20:20: The word "curse" means to speak disrespectfully to father or to mother.

The fifth commandment says we are to honor our parents.

One of the marks of the end-time is mistreatment of parents – 2 Timothy 3:1-2.

Parents, if you allow or permit your children to show you disrespect by sassing you or talking back to you or speaking flippantly to you or hitting you, you are raising that which God calls a public disgrace.

Children, if you disrespect and dishonor your parents, your lamp will go out, meaning you are out of fellowship with God and under His disapproval.

POSITIVE PRINCIPLES FOR PARENTING

Proverbs 22:6

This world in which we live is not "family friendly." We live in a culture where careers, cars, and cash are more important than children.

May I say to you, "You cannot be a success in life if you are a failure as a parent."

- Psalm 127:3 says that "children are an heritage of the Lord" – but they are a challenge from the Lord as well.

- Psalm 127:4 says, "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; So are children of the youth."

Who determines where the arrow will fly? The one shooting the bow, of course.

Before I get into the message, let me remind you that the Book of Proverbs is not a book of airtight promises, but a book of principles. That is, if we do so-and-so, the thing you can generally expect is this. If we follow this practice, you usually get this result: but, they are not airtight promises.

Parents, if you pour yourself into your children when they are young, they are going to have what they need to be wise when they

are old. The Bible doesn't promise that every child of Christian parents will be saved, even if they do train them in the way of the Lord; but they will have the advantage of at least knowing what God requires of them.

Parents are called to do two primary things in raising their children. They are to Disciple their children and Discipline their children.

I. Parents are to Disciple Their Children

Parents have the responsibility to teach and train their children in the ways of the Lord. The phrase, "My Son, listen" is found over and over in the first nine chapters of Proverbs.

The parents have the responsibility to teach their children, but, listen, children also have a responsibility. No amount of parental wisdom or teaching will help a child who refuses to listen attentively to them. Children are responsible to pay attention to their parents.

Nothing brings more joy to a parent than to see their children heed their teaching and to watch their child become wise as their teaching affects their child's behavior. Third John 4: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

A headstrong, rebellious child is called a fool in the Bible because they bring grief to both mother and father and brings trouble on his family.

Psalm 127:3 says that children are gifts of the Lord to parents. Our children are gifts of real value and they are gifts for which we will be held accountable. But we need to understand that our children, in one sense of the word, are temporary gifts. That means that we have a limited amount of time to spend with our children and to plant godly seeds in their hearts.

A man once argued with Samuel Coleridge about the place of Christian instruction in parenting. He said, "I don't think parents should indoctrinate their children with Christianity. They should give their children the freedom to make their own choices."

Coleridge did not say a word, but instead invited the man to his backyard to see his garden. "It's just a patch of overgrown weeds." Coleridge replied, "Well, it used to be a garden, but I decided to give it the freedom to become whatever it chose without any interference from me." Our greatest responsibility as parents is to influence the spiritual nature of our children.

Do your children know how to ask for and receive God's forgiveness? Do they know and understand the eternal consequences of dying without God's forgiveness? As you look across the table at your children, do you realize they are headed for an eternity of hell unless they make a deliberate choice to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord? Have they made that decision yet? Do they know HOW to make such a decision?

Have you made an attempt to rescue your children from an eternal separation from God? One of the saddest request I've received from parents is this, "Would you lead my child to the Lord? I don't know how." What joy is missed if a child wants his parents to lead him to the Lord and they don't know how.

God knew the only hope for Israel to survive was to know and do according to the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

II. Parents Are to Discipline Their Children

Discipline of children has almost gone out of style. Someone has said, "Too many parents are not on spanking terms with their children."

Let me give you some things EVERY child needs:

A. Children Need Authority Proverbs 29:17

Every child needs authority. Kids don't need another pal; they need a parent who is an

authority figure in their lives. They need someone who set boundaries or rules.

Parents must teach their child Obedience Ephesians 6:1

Obedience begins by REQUIRING it of our children. We take the initiative to teach our children to obey.

We think the home is important ... but it's not that important. It's not as important as the Church ... or the government ... or the economy ... or my job ... is it?

Some folks came to Jesus and asked, "Which is the greatest ... the most significant ... of the commandments?" You know the answer Jesus gave: Love God with all your being ... and love your neighbor as yourself.

We might ask, "Which is the most insignificant of the commandments?" Well, it must be that fifth one: to honor your father and mother. Don't tell me that the fifth commandment is more important than "Thou shalt not kill" or "Thou shalt not steal."

And yet, the first four commandments turn us God-ward and the last five turn us man-ward and the fifth commandment ties the two together. If we are not right at home, we cannot be right with God. If we are not right at home, we cannot be right with society or with man.

Eight times Exodus 20:12 is repeated in Scripture; more than any of the other commandments. Six times it is repeated in the New Testament.

Let me give you some Reasons and some Rules for discipline of children:

1. Reasons for Discipline

a. Love for the child

Proverbs 13:24 (AMP): "He who spares his rod (of discipline) hates his son, but he who loves him diligently disciplines him early."

b. Because of the nature of human nature (our sin nature). Ephesians 2:2; Proverbs 22:15

c. It will spare later heartache. Proverbs 29:15, 17

d. It will deliver the child's soul from hell. Proverbs 23:13-14

2. Rules for Discipline

a. Start early enough. Proverbs 13:24; 19:18

Don't start 200 pounds and 16 years too late. How soon should one start? When the child willfully disobeys you.

b. Talk or instruct first.

c. Keep your word — no matter what.

If you tell your child he is going to be disciplined, don't lie to him. Don't make empty threats.

d. Administer punishment as soon as possible after rebellion or disobedience.

Ecclesiastes 8:11: "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

e. Parents should present a united front.

Mothers shouldn't say, "Wait till your father get home." Don't play one parent

against the other.

f. Do a good job.

Spankings ought to be few and far between, but a remembered event. Spank until the rebellion is gone and then hug the child when you are finished to show you love them.

g. Discipline in love.

Hebrews 12:6: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens."

Ephesians 6:4: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath" (do not drive your children to anger, despair, and resentment).

There is a way of disciplining that makes matters worse. Never spank a child to get even with him. You are to discipline to teach. The child can tell the difference.

h. Work for repentance.

Teach the child to pray and ask God to forgive his wrong. Pray together with your child.

Why must we teach our children to obey us? Because every child is born with a sin nature and a bent toward disobedience. Jeremiah 17:9; Psalm 58:3.

We don't have to teach our child to disobey. They already know how to lie, be selfish, take things that don't belong to them, and show their temper. We need to teach them to obey; to do right.

I said that children need someone to set boundaries or rules, however, rules without discipline are nothing more than suggestions. Kids don't need suggestions; they need boundaries, which, when crossed, results in discipline.

113

And when you teach obedience, teach immediate obedience. When you tell your child to do something, they shouldn't be able to pick their time of when they are going to do it. Do it now! "Well, I'll do it later." No, now. Nor should the child get ten warnings of impending doom: "I'm going to count to ten and if you don't do what I told you to do, you're in trouble. No need to count. Teach them that "do it" means now! Implement the the "first time obey" rule. Expect them to obey the first time.

In I Samuel 3 young Samuel is living in the home of Eli the priest. Eli's two sons were vile men; immoral men, and the Bible says, "the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord" (I Samuel 3:17). Listen to what God said against Eli and his two sons in I Samuel 3:13: "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile" ("they were blaspheming God, bringing curse upon themselves," AMP) "and he did not restrain (rebuke) them." He let them continue in their sinful ways and did not discipline them.

We must not only discipline when there is disobedient actions, but also when there are defiant attitudes. They may come in the form of sulking, pouting, whining, temper tantrums, a mean look on their face, talking back, or rolling their eyes. Nip it in the bud.

B. Parents Must Teach Their Children Respect.

Instill respect in your children and begin at an early age. Old and New Testaments teach children to honor or respect their parents.

What does respect look like?

1. A Respectful attitude: Respect begins in the heart.
2. Respectful words: like "Yes, sir; Thank you; Please."
3. Respectful tone of voice: No sarcastic tone, shouting, or angry outburst.

4. Respectful facial expressions: A frown or scowl can communicate disrespect.

Did you know that the Old Testament gave a father the right to put his child to death if they were rebellious or disrespectful? (I often thought my Dad was an Old Testament saint).

C. Parents Must Teach Their Child Responsibility

“Work” is a good four-letter word. Show some initiative. Don't wait to be told what to do. Do it!

What if children don't yield to authority? Proverbs 13:24; Prov. 19:18; Prov. 22:15; Prov. 23:13; Prov. 29:17

We need to understand the difference between discipline and punishment. Discipline promotes change, while punishment inflicts pain. Discipline focuses on future behavior, while punishment focuses on past behavior. Discipline is done in love, while punishment is usually done out of anger or frustration.

No Christian parent should under any circumstances, do anything to emotionally or physically abuse a child. True discipline is corrective, not abusive, in nature. God has provided a padded area of the anatomy which can receive mildly painful corrective measures without harming a child in any way. Not the face or legs or back.

Don't punish your child, discipline your child. One mother said, “My children were misbehaving so badly that I spanked them. It didn't seem to help them much, but it did me a world of good.”

Parents must learn that discipline is not something they do TO their children, but something they do FOR their children. They must love their children too much to allow them to practice destructive patterns of behavior.

“What about corporeal discipline? Should I spank my child?” Although there is a lot of disagreement, I believe spanking is more effective for younger children than older children and teens. Younger children do not learn from verbal correction like they do from a spanking. Older children and teens understand the verbal correction with timeouts or loss of privileges.

Notice Proverbs 13:24. The word “rod” refers to the shepherd's rod, which was used almost exclusively for guiding sheep; not beating them. The shepherd would gently but firmly steer the sheep by holding the rod to block them from going the wrong way.

D. Children need Acceptance Proverbs 22:6

This is the foundation for training kids. The most important thing children need to know is, no matter what they might do or what mistakes they might make, they feel secure and valued.

Proverbs 22:6 could be translated, “Train a child according to his own temperament or personality (bent) and when he is old, he will not turn from it.”

This means if a son is not good at math, you shouldn't force him to be a CPA. If a daughter is not good at sports, don't force her to play. If your child is good at music, get them an instrument and pay for some lessons (hopefully it won't be drums).

Many parents try to live out their dreams through their children, and this leads to disaster. Stop trying to make your child like you. One is enough! God never intended your kids to be little replicas of you. The only thing worse than peer pressure is parent pressure. God created every child to be unique.

Proverbs 22:6 has produced a lot of guilt in parents because it seems to promise that if parents will start their children out on the right way when they are young, when they

are grown they will continue to live the right way. On the other hand, if you do not raise your children in the right way, they will live the wrong kind of life. The logic seems clear and straight forward from the Scriptures. How your children turn out reveals whether or not you started them out right.

There is a different way to understand Proverbs 22:6 that I have found extremely helpful. Instead of being a promise that if you do right, your child will turn out right, it is a reverse promise – a warning – that if you do not correct your children when they are young, they will run amok wanting their own way as an adult.

The best interpretation of Proverbs 22:6 is sort of sarcastic: Let a child have his own way when he is young, and when he is old, he will continue to insist on having his way.

Thus, this Verse is the flip side of a promise; it is a warning that parents must correct their children's foolish character before it is set. Children left to their own devices will destroy themselves.

An ancient Egyptian proverb said of young boys that they have ears on their backside.

A study at Calvin College actually shows that children spanked between the ages of two and six earned better grades in school and had a sunnier outlook on life. There is no room for physical abuse of children, but the Bible is also clear that a lack of discipline is a way to abuse children.

The main point of Proverbs 22:6 is that the parental task is to intervene and correct your children's foolishness before it become set later in life.

The Huston Police Department gave "Twelve Rules for Raising Delinquent Children":

1. Begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants.
In this way he will grow to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him.
This will make him think he's cute. It will also encourage him to pick up "cuter phrases" that will blow off the top of your head later.
3. Never give him any spiritual training.
Wait until he is 21, and then let him "decide for himself."
4. Avoid the use of the word "wrong."
It may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, when he is arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
5. Pick up everything he leaves lying around – books, shoes, clothes. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility on others.
6. Let him read any printed matter he can get his hands on.
Be careful that the silverware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but don't worry about his mind feasting on garbage.
7. Quarrel frequently in the presence of your children.
In this way they will not be too shocked when the home is broken up later.
8. Give the child all the spending money he wants.
Never let him earn his. Why should he have things as tough as you did?
9. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort.
See that every sensual desire is gratified. Denial may lead to harmful frustration.
10. Take his part against neighbors, teachers, policemen.
They are all prejudiced against your child.

11. When he gets into real trouble, apologize to yourself by saying, "I never could do anything with him!"

12. Prepare yourself for a life of grief.
You'll surely have it.

E. Children need Appreciation Proverbs 16:21b

Acceptance says, "Who I am matters." "What I do matters." If you want to raise good kids, don't nag, brag! Try to catch them doing something good and brag on them. Never shoot down your child in public. Embarrassment in front of his peers is devastating to a child. Look for improvement, not perfection. If all "Cs" is an improvement, praise them.

Get off their back and get on their team. Every child needs a cheerleader. Someone who is in his or her corner.

F. Children need Attention

Children can't get too much attention. When a child doesn't get attention, rebellion will spring up in various forms. If children can't get our attention by doing something good, they will get it by doing something bad.

Children desperately need attention and will do anything to get it. If a child is not getting attention, he feels rejected, and the worst form of rejection is being ignored.

G. Children need Apologies Proverbs 11:2

We need to tell our children we make mistakes. Parents are not perfect. Nothing can heal a relationship like an apology and nothing prevents us from apologizing like pride.

If you've been grumpy toward your children or forgot an important event or was unkind or just wrong about something – apologize.

Parents only have about ten years to be the main influence in a child's life. After that, peers have the main influence. Don't waste time.

HONOR THE LORD WITH YOUR POSSESSIONS

Proverbs 3:7-10; Malachi 3:6-11

You know that in the first nine chapters of Proverbs, Solomon is giving advice to his son. He encourages his son to search for wisdom, to fear the Lord, to trust the Lord with all of his heart, to shun evil paths and evil companions. AND it is encouraging to see that Solomon tells his son: "Don't forget to honor the Lord with your possessions!"

Maybe you already know what I am going to say. You know I am going to tell you to tithe. And I should, because you should.

What is tithing? A tithe is the first item in a Christian's monthly budget, the first check we write, ten percent of our gross income. And that first check goes to the cause of Christ. That's what Christ expects of His children. Something that comes first in our budgets. Do we really want to say to our Lord, "I'll fit you in, if I can."? Putting the Lord first without tithe every month is basic obedience.

The word "honor" in Verse 9 means "to give weight to." It is a weighty matter to tithe to the Lord. We ought not be like the man who was going to the door to shake the pastor's hand after the morning service. He said, "Pastor, I'm glad you said you didn't know where the money was going to come from to operate this church. I was afraid you were going to ask us for it."

Why is tithing so difficult for some people? Some will tell you, "I know the Bible teaches us to tithe and I know I'm suppose to tithe. I just don't do it."

Have you ever asked yourself why Satan does all he can to keep you from tithing? Let me suggest a reason: Satan knows that if God's people tithe, God will bless them. God said He would bless us if we tithe to Him and Satan believes God, and he doesn't want God's people blessed, so he does all he can to keep God's people from tithing.

- I Samuel 2:30: “... those who honor Me I will honor.”
- Proverbs 22:9: “He who has a generous eye will be blessed.”

Some decide they can't afford to give to God right now, but they'll get around to it one day. But short-changing God is the quickest way to become financially strapped.

Proverbs 11:24, NIV: “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.”

The classic passage on tithing is Malachi 3:6-11.

God's charge against His people is this: “You have robbed Me!” They respond, “How have we robbed You?”

Good question! How does someone rob God? Can a man get in a spaceship and fly to Heaven and take something from God? Of course not. Then how had the people of God robbed Him? Through their failure to give God what was His, plus their offerings of love, gratitude, and praise.

Four things I want you to see from this passage:

I. The Thief Malachi 3:8

Who is the thief? It is not the ones who don't belong to God, but those who DO belong to Him.

Look who the non-tither robs:

- He robs our Father.

It is one thing to rob a stranger, but for a son or daughter to rob their own Father – how low can you get?

- He robs our Savior.

How could believers – saved, forgiven, going to Heaven – how could they snatch something from His nail-scarred hand?

- He robs our Provider.

How could we pay God for the air we breathe, the sunshine that warms us, the sleep that gives us rest, and all the other things He provides for us?

There is a difference in stealing something and robbing someone.

When one steals something, they do it when no one is looking. Something is taken and the thief hopes no one will see him steal.

Robbery is done by force. The thief hopes to catch someone off guard.

We don't rob God the way we would rob man. If you rob a man you might hide in the bushes, stick a gun in his face, and demand what you want.

We can't break into Heaven. We can never catch God off guard.

You can't rob God by force because God is too strong; too powerful. He can hold the waters of the Red Sea back and make the sun stand still and create mountains.

Well, how do we rob God?

God says we rob Him instead of stealing because He is watching us. He sees.

We don't rob Him with a gun or knife, but by blatantly refusing to give Him what already belongs to Him. With a defiant spirit we refuse to obey His command.

Why should we tithe?

- It is a direct command from God.
- Because the tithe is holy unto the Lord. Leviticus 27:30
- Because we are so blessed.
- Because we are indebted to the Lord.

II. The Grief Malachi 3:9

In the Hebrew, the tone is one of pain of heart. "To think: My own people would take from Me!"

The bottom line of why people don't tithe is not a financial problem; it is a heart problem; a love and trust problem.

When we don't tithe because of our lack of love or faith in God, the one who suffers is us.

- Haggai 1:5-6: "Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but you do not have enough, you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm, and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

• Malachi 3:11: Notice the words, devourer, destroy, fail to bear fruit. If we do not give to God what belongs to Him, He has ways of taking from us what we withhold from Him.

On the other hand, if we give to Him as He commands, He has a way of stretching the 90 percent when we give what belongs to Him. Our goods seem to last longer instead of going out right after the warranty goes but ... the family seems to be healthier ... extra opportunities to work seems to come at the right time.

III. The Belief Malachi 3:10

Every word is inspired and every word is important. God gives:

1. The Plan (Bring)
2. The Person (Bring ye)
3. The Proportion (All the tithe)
4. The Place (The storehouse)
5. The Purpose (That there might be meat in My house)
6. The Proposition (Prove Me) Try it and see if it is not so.

IV. The Relief Malachi 3:10-11; Luke 6:38

God wants us on His side. He wants us to go into partnership with Him.

The hand that is closed in giving is also closed when it comes to receiving the bountiful blessings of God.

GOD'S FINANCIAL COUNSEL

Proverbs 22:1-2; Proverbs 30:7-9

In Proverbs 22:1-2 Solomon wants us to know the value God places on every individual.

In Proverbs 22:1 Solomon tells us that a person's good name is more valuable than wealth.

Names in Scripture are very important. For example, the names of God mean far more than the titles we use to refer to Him. God actually uses His names to reveal Himself to us. They describe His character and attributes. A person's name refers to far more than the identifying title our parents gave us at birth. It speaks of our reputation with others – the character by which we are known. We should value our reputation above all else.

Having a reputation for honor, integrity, and righteousness is priceless. It is of greater value than silver and gold.

In Proverbs 22:2 Solomon says that every person – rich and poor alike – is important to God: He created each one.

What God thinks of you is important – very important. Remember, God does not judge people by their possessions and wealth. Unlike humans, who idolize and cater to the rich, God is unmoved by the size of a person's house, bank accounts and portfolios whether rich or poor, neither gains any special favor with God.

Now look at Proverbs 30:7-9. Agur petitioned God for two things: Integrity and Contentment.

He asked for Integrity; that God would remove from him all deception, dishonesty, and lying. He wanted to be honest in all his dealings.

He also asked God for Contentment. He recognized that if he had an abundance, he would be prone to forget the Lord and not depend on Him.

Agur also recognized that he was capable of stealing and dishonoring God. He never wanted to do anything in his life that would bring reproach to the Name of Jehovah.

I use these two passages as I begin to talk about "God's Financial Counsel."

The Bible has a great deal to say about money – How we MAKE our money, how we SAVE our money, how we USE our money.

One Bible student pointed out that there are about 500 verses in the Bible on Prayer; but there are over 2,300 verses related to Money – that's almost five times as many verses on Money than there are on Prayer.

There are at least seven principles in Proverbs concerning finances: Earn Honestly, Spend Rightly, Borrow Cautiously, Save Regularly, Give Generously, Embrace Contentment, and Avoid Debt if possible.

Let me give you some Insights about money:

1. God owns everything; we own nothing.

A preacher made that statement the first time he spoke at a church in Texas. After the service a wealthy cattleman invited the preacher to lunch. After lunch the cattleman invited the visiting preacher to take a ride with him across his ranch. As he got a ways from his home, which was a large, beautiful home, he said, "Preacher, see that house. I own it. I don't owe anything on it."

As he drove down the road the man pointed out beautiful pastures with hundreds of cows on it. He told the preacher, "All of that is mine. It's all paid for." Then he said, "This morning you said that none of us own anything and that it all belongs to God."

The preacher said, "One hundred years from now, who will own your house?" The man said, "Well, I'll leave it to my children." The preacher said, "And all this land and cattle, whose will it be one hundred years from now?" The man said, "Well, my children." The preacher said, "Then you really don't own it; God does, and He's just allowing you to use it for a while."

Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein."

Psalm 50:10: "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills."
(And may I say, He owns the hills as well.)

I Chronicles 29:11: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in Heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all."

2. All we have comes from God.

James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights ..."

Proverbs 10:22: "The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it."

This proverb can be interpreted in two ways and both are correct:

First, only the Lord's blessing brings wealth to people's lives. People may scheme and labor with all their strength, but without God's blessing, they will never accumulate riches. Rich people are rich because of God's blessings.

Second, the only people who are truly rich are those who are blessed by the Lord. Genuine wealth is not determined by money and possessions. Many people have vast treasures in worldly things, but are poor in every other way. On the other hand, many who have little of this world's goods lead the richest and happiest lives because of the Lord's blessings. While having money is preferred to not having it, the greatest blessings of God have nothing to do with material things.

The last part of the verse means that true wealth – the blessing of the Lord – is not mixed or burdened with the problems and sleepless nights that accompany worldly wealth.

I. How We Gain Our Money

There are several ways for us to gain our money.

1. You can Inherit Money

Proverbs 19:14: "Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent (wise, understanding) wife is from the Lord."

The emphasis is more on getting a good, godly wife than on getting an inheritance from a father. An inheritance comes from parents, while a wife is a blessing from God Himself.

Proverbs 20:21: "An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed in the end."

An inheritance can be a dangerous, dividing thing. Families often experience hurt feelings anger because some feel the inheritance was divided unfairly, and can destroy families. (That's why I'm going to spend all I've got while I'm living.)

It is unwise for children or the young to receive an inheritance before they are mature enough to handle it wisely. Those who receive it prematurely are much more likely to misuse or waste it. (Example: The Prodigal Son.)

2. You can get money by taking a Bribe (we could call it cutting a deal).

Proverbs 15:27: "He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live."

Proverbs 17:23: "A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the ways of justice."

Proverbs 21:14: "A gift in secret pacifies anger, and a bribe behind the back, a strong wrath."

There is an over-riding principle within Scripture that teaches every person is to always acquire things in an honest way in their lives. Dishonesty profit is always forbidden and condemned in the Bible.

3. You can gain money by Stealing it or by Taking Advantage of Someone

Proverbs 13:11: "Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers

by labor will increase.”

Dishonest money, gained illegitimately does not last. On the other hand, integrity and honest hard work will carry us far in life.

Employees steal from the company – little by little. Cheating someone in business in order to gain wealth is an abomination in God's sight. (Proverbs 11:1; Prov. 16:11; Prov. 20:10)

Proverbs 20:23 (LB): “The Lord despises double standards; He is not pleased with dishonest scales.”

Proverbs 16:8 (LB): “It is better to be poor and godly than rich and dishonest.”

Proverbs 10:2 (LB): “Ill-gain has no lasting value, but right living can save your life.”

Solomon is warning against “get-rich-schemes.” Things like gambling, playing the lottery or power-ball. He also warns against taking advantage of other people.

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

No human being has a right to oppress another human being. God takes it as an act of open defiance when people abuse or take advantage of the poor in any way.

Those who wrong the poor, wrong God.

Proverbs 20:17: “Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.”

People may profit from their unethical business practices for a while, but, someday in the future, they will pay a painful price for their greed.

Proverbs 21:6 (LB): “Wealth created by lying is a vanishing mist and a deadly trap.”

4. You can gain Money by Borrowing it (Credit Cards)

Proverbs 22:7 (LB): “Just as the rich rule the poor, so the borrower is slave to the lender.”

Proverbs 22:26-27 (LB): “Do not co-sign another's person's note or put up a guarantee for someone else's loan. If you can't pay it, even your bed will be snatched from under you.”

While there is no absolute prohibition in the Bible against debt, Solomon writes extensively about the dangers of debt.

The primary problem with debt is that it allows us to artificially live beyond our means.

Today many consumers have become slaves to Master Card, Visa, and American Express. According to cardweb.com, the average American family carries a balance of \$8,100 on their credit cards. At 18 percent interest alone each year, if they pay the minimum balance every month, it will take them 13 and a half years to pay off the balance.

Suggestion: If you cannot pay off your credit cards each month – do this. Set your oven on 450 degrees. Take a pair of scissors, your credit card and a good pot. Cut the credit card into ten equal parts, put those parts in a pot and put it into the oven for half-an-hour!

5. You can gain Money through Hard Work Proverbs 6:6-11

Proverbs 10:4: “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

Poverty by itself is no disgrace, but laziness is. The righteous do not sit back idly and wait for God to drop money or life's necessities in their laps. God provides for those who are diligent and possess a strong work ethic. He will not bless lazy, undisciplined people. This is one of the major themes of Proverbs. The person who deals with a slack hand is not one who will not work at all, but one who is negligent and careless in his or her responsibilities. The diligent worker is the exact opposite of this person. "Diligent" is the same Hebrew word that is used of a sharp, effective tool.

Proverbs 13:4: "The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich."

Lazy people have few desires fulfilled and achieve very little in life. It is the diligent, the hard workers, who set the goals and make the plans and put forth the effort needed to satisfy their desires. Scripture says the diligent will prosper and have even more than they need.

II. How We Govern Our Money

A. Some Insights About Money

1. "When your Out-go exceeds your In-come it results in your Down-fall."
2. "The best way to hear money jingle in your pocket is to shake a lot."
3. "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."
4. "The fellow that has no money is poor. The fellow that has nothing but money is poorer still." Billy Sunday
5. Greed and covetousness will destroy your life.

Proverbs 15:27: "He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house."
Living Bible: "Dishonest money brings grief to the whole family."

Not only is greed a curse to the sinner, but it is often a trouble to his whole house. People who make money illegally or dishonestly creates problems not only for themselves, but also for their families. Inevitably, they will be caught, and their families will suffer the consequences of their imprisonment. They will lose their provider, be scorned and despised by others, and suffer the painful separation from their families.

Proverbs 13:11: "Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase."

Honest hard work will carry us far in life. God has ordained that we should earn our bread by the sweat of our brows (Genesis 3:19). Proverbs teach us that the people who have a strong work ethic will have what they desire.

Proverbs 15:16: "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasures with trouble."

Proverbs 15:17: "Better is a dinner of herbs (vegetables) where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred."

Proverbs 17:1: "Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife."

It is not food on a family's table, but the love at the table that makes a meal a feast. No price tag, no dollar value, can be placed on a home that is filled with love and tranquility. People who understand what truly matters in life would choose poverty with peace in the home rather than prosperity with turmoil and bitterness.

Proverbs 23:4-5: "Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, Crease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away like an eagle toward Heaven."

Life is about more than money and possessions. People should be industrious and work diligently, but they should be satisfied when they have enough to meet their own needs and to help meet the needs of others.

They should not exhaust themselves nor neglect their families in order to live a life or to accumulate wealth. This proverb stresses the principle of contentment.

Proverbs 27:20: "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied."

Hell and destruction are illustrations of sinful appetites. We always want more ... more ... more. Hell is always hungry – always craving one more sinful soul to devour. Just so, our sinful desires, especially about money, are never enough. We always want something different, something new, or what someone else possesses.

Proverbs 30:7-9: "Two things I request of you (Deprive Me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches – feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the Name of my God."

We might understand why he would say, "Don't give me poverty," but he also said, "And don't give me too much." A biblical attitude would be, "Lord, I want to be able to live comfortably in this life. Lord, I don't want so much money that I forget my need for You. But neither do I want so little so that I am tempted to do something that would dishonor Your name. Give me just enough to meet my needs."

B. Some Instructions About Money

1. Spend wisely Proverbs 21:5

Proverbs 21:5: "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty."

Living Bible: "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty."

God is not only interested in how we gain our money, but He is also interested in how we spend our money. God is to be honored not only in the earning of our money, He is to be honored in the spending of our money.

God cares about our spending habits. Most of us have never given much consideration to whether or not God is very concerned about our spending habits.

We know that God is concerned about our souls being saved, our correct treatment of our neighbors, our spending eternity with Him, but we often forget that Every Aspect of our lives is a concern to God.

Spending is a spiritual matter. It is a Stewardship matter and God is interested in our Stewardship. It is God who allows us to have the money we have, therefore God has a right to be involved in how we spend what He gives us.

The word "hasty" is key to this passage. Don't spend what God has given you on "hasty" or speedy ways to wealth. There are many short cuts or get-rich-quick schemes around to give one a hasty and speedy way to get (or lose) wealth (gambling, the lottery, etc.).

But it is the diligent hard worker who will do well.

Our spending habits reveal much about the reality of our walk with the Lord.

Two traps we ought to avoid:

a. The Trap of Impulse Buying

Without thinking the thing through, you see something, buy it, and a day later wonder, "Why in the world did I want that?"

b. The Trap of Unnecessary Buying

You see the newest pair of tennis shoes. But the new ones light up or they pump up or they really make you able to jump up; yet, you have five pairs already at home.

The Bible warns that hasty decisions, undisciplined decisions, have negative results.

There is an overriding test that should apply to the spending area of our lives: "Is this pleasing to the Lord?" Why should we waste what the Lord has given us?

Proverbs 13:11: "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow."

2. Borrow Cautiously Proverbs 22:7

Proverbs 22:7: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender."

One of the biggest problems in America is personal debt. The average household owes more than \$8,000 on credit cards alone. Regardless of income, the typical American families spend more than they earn. The majority of Americans owe more than they own, have not made adequate plans for their retirement, and could not survive more than a few weeks without a job.

Solomon's secret for achieving financial security has nothing to do with earning or inheriting. The secret: Whatever you earn, spend less.

Financial consultant, Dave Ramsey, tells of two couples that came to him for financial advice. Each couple was in their forties. The first couple had an annual income of \$35,000 and had accumulated \$150,000 in their 401K plans. They had no personal debt on their credit cards and had only three years left to pay on their \$70,000 mortgage.

The other couple had no savings, but had \$64,000 in credit card debt. They drove two leased cars and were still dealing with a ten-year-old student loan. They had a \$170,000 outstanding mortgage on their home.

You may say, "Well, they must have made a lot less than \$35,000 a year!" No. They earned \$84,000 a year and were near bankruptcy.

The first couple learned the lesson: Spend less than you earn during a given time.

Listen to Ecclesiastes 5:11. Today Solomon might put it this way: "The more you make, the more you spend."

The only way to create financial security is to spend less than you earn over time.

Financial consultants call this "living with margin." Instead of always pressing the limits, we need to allow for a safety net.

Those who live without margin usually become victims of unrelenting stress. They live from paycheck to paycheck, worried they will run out of money before they run out of month. They think, "Someday, things will be easier."

Financial margin provides security for future needs. Read Proverbs 6:6-8. Just as the ant sets aside some of its food for future needs, God encourages us to set aside a part of our present income for the needs that will surely come in the future.

We have a great illustration of this principle in Genesis 41. You remember that Pharaoh had a troubling dream concerning seven fat cows and seven lean cows ascending from the Nile River. Joseph interpreted the dream, saying that the seven fat cows represented seven years of prosperity while the lean cows represented seven years of famine. Joseph suggested that they put aside 20 percent of the grain they produced during the seven good years and save it for the seven years of famine.

God has given the same message to us. Save now for the famine years, of the college years, for children, the care of elderly parents, the loss of a job, the unforeseen emergency, or our retirement years. A time of famine is definitely coming.

Solomon gives us some important instructions about handling money:

a. Be Careful of Debt Proverbs 22:7, 26-27

Studies have shown we spend 30 percent more when using a credit card as opposed to cash. Buying with cash requires discipline in following financial principles. Credit cards are a Debt Demon because we can keep spending even when we are out of money.

To get out of debt you must stop charging and going further into debt. Perform “plastic surgery” by cutting each credit card into twelve pieces, one for each painful monthly payment. Then, cancel the card, because if you have a debt problem, you may be addicted to credit cards.

If you must have one credit card for emergency reasons, put it in a metal can, fill the can with water, and place it in the freezer. Why a metal can? So you can't thaw it out quickly in your microwave. Having to wait for it to thaw will help prevent impulse buying.

The Book of Proverbs says that we are a fool to spend all we have (Proverbs 21:20). If we are fools to spend all we have, what are we if we spend more than we have?

b. Never Borrow Money for Depreciating Items

Depreciating items are clothes, TVs, furniture, or anything that decreases in value.

It's OK to borrow money for a car, as long as you don't finance it for over three years. If you finance an automobile for more than three years, you are probably buying a car you can't afford. Keep the car two or three years after it's paid for and continue putting the payments in the bank toward the purchase of your next vehicle. After using this system for two or three cars, you will be able to pay cash for a car.

It's OK to borrow money for a home or a business or for education because it's an investment that will pay off for the rest of your life.

It is wickedness for a Christian not to pay everything we owe – Psalm 37:21a (“The wicked borrows and does not repay”).

c. Be content with what you have

Ecclesiastes 5:10: “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance will increase.”

If you are not content with what you have now, you will never have enough to be content.

Don't be deceived. All debt has a price tag. All debt cost. There is no such thing as free debt.

3. Save Regularly Proverbs 13:11

Proverbs 13:11 (ESV): “Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase.”

Why does God bless us “little by little”? Because He is building us. He is building in us character.

As Solomon observed, “When good things increase, those who consume them increase” (Ecclesiastes 5:11). Today Solomon might put it this way: “The more you make, the more you spend.”

The only way to create financial security is to spend less than you earn over time.

Instead of always pressing the limits, we need to allow a safety net in our finances.

Those who live without margin also become victims of unrelenting stress. You live from paycheck to paycheck worried that you will run out of money before you run out of month.

You figure that you can keep your head above water – as long as nothing catastrophic happens.

The fool is shortsighted and can only think about today, so he consumes all of his resources.

Those who spend every dollar they earn teeter on the edge of financial ruin. It takes just one unexpected circumstance to push them over the brink. Conversely, people with financial margin have options – and the freedom that comes with those options.

Proverbs 6:6-8

An ant has a brain so small that it cannot be seen with the naked eye. Yet God has placed within that ant the awareness that the abundant food surrounding it in the summer and fall will not always be there. That's why the ant sets aside some of its food for future needs.

In the same way, God encourages us to set aside a part of our present income for the inevitable needs for the future.

We have an example in the Old Testament life of Joseph – Genesis 41:25-36.

Try this principle: The first 10 percent goes to God; the second 10 percent goes to savings; learn to live within the remaining 80 percent.

III. How We Give Our Money

- Proverbs 3:9-10
- Malachi 3:3-11
- Matthew 6:19-20

THE FRIENDSHIP FACTOR

Proverbs 17:17; 18:24

The Book of Proverbs has a great deal to say about friends. In fact, the word for friend is translated by six different Hebrew words. Sometimes the word is translated “friend;” sometimes “companion;” and sometimes “neighbor.”

For a young person, one of the most important decisions they will make is their choice of friends. As Solomon says, “The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray”(Proverbs 12:26 ESV).

Sometimes young people are careless about their choice of friends, and will run with a group of friends who will get them into trouble. In fact, the quickest way for a young person to get into trouble is to hang with the wrong crowd.

Proverbs 12:25 (NIV) says, “A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

A modern proverb says, “If you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas.”

I Corinthians 15:33 (NIV): “Do not be misled: bad company corrupts good character.”

Perhaps you've heard people say, "I really don't need friends; I have the Lord." While that may sound like a spiritual statement, it actually reflects spiritual immaturity. All of us need friends. Real friends. True friends. Everyone needs friends and everyone needs to be a friend.

God never intended that we as Christians should live the Christian life by ourselves. It is through relationships and friendships that God does some of His most important work in our lives. Life is difficult from any perspective, and everyone needs friends to help them through the difficult times. Anyone who says they don't need or want friends has a deeper problem. God made us to be in relationship with one another.

Those who have close friends know they couldn't live without them. And yet not every acquaintance is a close, intimate friend. There are actually four levels of relationships that every person experiences – each of which is a friend, but in a different degree of intimacy.

1. Contact Friends

These are people you pass on a daily or regular basis whom you know well enough to speak to but not well enough to call a close friend.

2. Casual Friends

These are people whom you know well enough to have personal conversations with about matters of common interest – family, politics, sports, hobbies, and the like.

3. Close Friends

These might be business partners, neighbors, people you talk regularly within a Sunday School class or church group – people with whom you share common goals and values in life.

4. Committed Friends

These are the kind of friends the Book of Proverbs talks about. Friends who love you enough to confront you when you are wrong and to stand by you through thick and thin.

Many things in life are not left to our choosing, but friendships are. The choice of friends is more than a right; however, it is a responsibility.

Solomon points out three things about friends and friendships.

I. The Vain Friendship

It's interesting that most of what Solomon tells us about friends and friendships is which kinds of friends to avoid. We should choose our friends carefully. Friends can either lift us up or bring us down.

What kind of folks should we avoid as friends?

A. Avoid Making Friends with the Wicked Proverbs 4:14-17, 23-27

Proverbs 4:14-17: "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it, turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; and their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence."

You can almost hear Solomon shouting, "Avoid wicked men like the plague!" The word "avoid" means "to leave them alone, stay as far away from them as possible, don't even get near them."

It's interesting that Solomon gives these instructions to young people. When he directs his instructions to "my son," he is talking to his son before he has hair on his chin.

Proverbs 4:23-27: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your feet from evil."

Solomon says that young people should strongly guard their heart (Verse 23), their mouth (Verse 24), their eyes (Verse 25), and their feet (Verse 26). Sin can enter your life through any of these avenues.

Out of the heart are the issues of life. What a world of evil pours from the perverse mouth (James 3:1-12).

Your eyes are the light of the body and what you focus your eyes upon will either corrupt or enhance your thought life and character. If Eve had not focused on the forbidden fruit, and if Lot's wife had not turned around for one last look at Sodom, and if Achan had not focused on the accursed thing, and if David had not looked with lust upon Bathsheba, their lives would not have been ruined. Every step should be carefully weighed so we can walk before the Lord in purity.

B. Avoid Making Friends with a Foul-mouth Man Proverbs 4:24

Proverbs 4:24: "Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put perverse lips far from you."

Deceitful, corrupt, or perverse language should not grace your lips because it twist, distorts, perverts, and misrepresents truth. What comes from your lips should be pure and truthful. Dump all filthy language into the garbage can. Use your mouth to help and encourage others.

Ephesians 4:31-32: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ sake hath forgiven you."

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

Because we are human, we will disappoint our friends at times. We don't want to, but we do. So there will always be offenses. The wise person covers them with forgiveness, the way God does. Why? Because we want our sinning friend more than we want payback.

If you truly love a person, you will conceal their sins and faults. You will not make them public nor reveal them to others. Repeating a friend's transgressions to other people will result in the end of your friendship. Your friend will realize that you do not truly love him or her, and that you cannot be trusted.

People who love their friends forgive their offenses and bury them. They do not continue to bring them up and repeat them. This is the only way the relationship can continue. This goes for husbands, wives, and siblings.

Proverbs 11:12: "Whoever belittles his neighbor (friend) lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent."

A wise man knows that it is not enough to be right. Even if we are right, God wants us to humble ourselves with restraint. Don't answer every insult. Silence can preserve a friendship, a marriage, a church.

Proverbs 17:28: "Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise: and he that

shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.”

Proverbs 17:14: “The beginning of strife is like releasing water (from a dam: The smallest break in the dam sets loose an uncontrollable flood force); therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts!”

It's so hard to stop a fight once it starts. No one ends up happy and satisfied.

Proverbs 25:9: “Debate your case with your friend, and do not disclose the secret with another.”

Proverbs 20:19: “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.”

A “talebearer”: His name describes his work. He makes “tales” of everything he sees or hears. He has a dangerous, unfaithful character, for he reveals secrets.

Some folks are drawn to those who gossip because they want to hear the latest news or scandal. It's as if they are addicted to gossip and can't get enough. The gossipier loves to spread secrets and will use flattery to learn the secrets of others. We are to avoid those who gossip because those who will gossip TO you will gossip ABOUT you! If you hang around a person who has a reputation for being a gossip, people will assume that you are a gossip, too.

C. Avoid Making Friends With Drunks and Party Animals Proverbs 23:19-21

Proverbs 23:19-21: “Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty.”

Solomon warns against a besetting temptation. Avoid carousing and spending time with party animals. Why? People like that are trouble, that's why.

Poverty and shame are temporal fruits, but the eternal ruin is far more deadly.

A member of Alcoholics Anonymous sent Ann Landers the following:

- We drink for happiness and become unhappy.
- We drink for joy and become miserable.
- We drink for sophistication and become obnoxious.
- We drink for friendship and make enemies.
- We drink for sleep and awaken without rest.

- We drink for strength and felt weak.
- We drink for relaxation and got the shakes.
- We drink for bravery and become afraid.
- We drink for confidence and become doubtful.
- We drink to make conversation easier and slurred our speech.
- We drink to forget and were forever haunted.
- We drink for freedom and became slaves.
- We drink to erase problems and saw them multiply.
- We drink to cope with life and invite death.

D. Avoid Making Friends with a Hot-Head Proverbs 22:24

Proverbs 22:24-25: “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.”

The warning is clear: Keep away from the hot-head. The reason? You will learn his ways and endanger your soul.

Proverbs 13:20: “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools

will be destroyed.”

II. The Value of Friends

A true friend is of great value. A friend is one you can share with, confide in, pray with, talk with, cry with, rejoice with, laugh with, and be with. He is one who defends you, consoles you, understands you, reproves you, and corrects you.

Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.

Proverbs 13:20: “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”

Someone put it this way: “If you surround yourself with clowns, don’t be surprised when your life resembles a circus.”

What is a True Friend?

Proverbs 20:6: “Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?”

Many people claim to be faithful friends or totally devoted, but those who are truly loyal are rare.

The Verse’s reference to goodness points to loyalty, steadfastness, or faithfulness. Countless people boast of their steadfast love or undying friendship. They vow that they would never betray you or turn against you. And many who make such assertions honestly believe that they would be loyal to the point of death. The Apostle Peter is a perfect example of this.

Some people, however, are intentionally deceitful. They promise their loyalty to others with evil intention of eventually hurting them. Or, they use people to their advantage. When they have gotten everything they can from them, they toss them aside to prey on somebody else.

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

A. A True Friend Gives You Good Advice Proverbs 27:9

Proverbs 27:9: “Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel.”

Ointment brings healing and perfume is sweet and soothing. That’s what hearty counsel does. It is counsel from the heart that is genuine, sincere, and filled with goodwill. It is counsel that is good for you with the desire to bring you success. These are friends who are not driven away from you in hard times. In fact, hard times draw them closer to you. They will challenge and encourage you with what you need to hear and not what you want to hear. Good counsel always sweetens your relationship with your friends. A true friend can be trusted and someone you can have confidence in.

B. A True Friend Will Make You a Better Person Proverbs 12:26

Proverbs 12:26 (NIV): “A man chooses his friends very carefully because he knows that picking the wrong buddies can be a disaster.”

You want to pick friends you admire for their intelligence, their values, and their character. You will learn from them, and each one will make you a better man. A man with strong character will draw you up to his level, while a man with a weak character will pull you down to his.

Proverbs 27:17: “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

Every one of us needs to go to another person and say, “Help me see myself. Help me get sharper for Christ.”

Iron sharpens through friction: direct, abrasive contact with another piece of iron. As human beings, we are honed this way as well. Scripture declares that friends sharpen each other’s countenance through their interactions or relationships.

“Countenance” means face. Literally, it means to stand before or to stand face-to-face. Through direct contact and candid face to face discussions with close friends, both we and they are sharpened. Such frankness can produce friction between two people, bringing about a heated exchange. However, it is absolutely necessary for the jagged edges of the sin nature – theirs and ours – to be honed into effective tools for the Master’s use.

C. A True Friend Will Lovingly Correct You When You Are Wrong Proverbs 27:5-6

Proverbs 27:5-6: “Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

Promise Keepers had a very good program which included accountability groups. Everyone needs to be close enough to someone who will ask them the hard questions about their life. Are you faithful in church and Bible study? Are you spending time with your wife and children? Are you keeping your finances in order? Are you careful about relationships in your work place, especially with members of the opposite sex?

III. Some Virtues of a Friend

A. A Friend Should be Cordial Proverbs 18:24a

Proverbs 18:24a: “A man who has friends must show himself to be friendly.”

If you want to have a good relationship with other people, then it's important that you be friendly. Someone put it like this: “The best vitamin for developing friends is B1.”
Be a friend.

Jesus is the Best Friend anyone could have.

“Can we find a friend so faithful,
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

Proverbs 18:24b: “There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.”

John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that Someone lay down His life for his friends.”

John 15:15: “No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends.”

B. A Friend is Consistent Proverbs 17:17

Proverbs 17:17: “A friend loves at all times.”

True friends are loyal to you in good times and hard times.

Hebrews 13:5c: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

C. A Friend Should be Caring Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: “Two are better than one, because they have good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe unto him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be over powered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

Michael W. Smith Lyrics

“Friends”

Packing up the dreams God planted
In the fertile soil of you
I can't believe the hopes He's granted
Means a chapter of your life is through.

But we'll keep you close as always
It won't even seem you've gone
'Cause our hearts in big and small ways
Will keep the love that keeps us strong.

And friends are friends forever
If the Lord's the Lord of them.
And a friend will not say never-dying
'Cause the welcome will not end.
Though it's hard to let you go
In the Father's hands we know,
That a lifetime's not too long
To live as friends.

And with the faith and love God's given
Springing from the hope we know
We will pray the joy you live in
Is the strength that now you show.

We'll keep you close as always
It won't even seem you've gone
'Cause our hearts in big and small ways
Will keep the love that keeps us strong.

And friends are friends forever
If the Lord's the Lord of themselves
And a friend will not say never-dying
'Cause the welcome will not end
Through it's hard to let you go
In the Father's hands we know
That a lifetime's not too long
To live as friends.

And friends are friends forever
If the Lord's the Lord of themselves
And a friend will not say never-dying
'Cause the welcome will not end
Though it's hard to let you go
In the Father's hands we know
That a lifetime's not too long
To live as friends.

To live as friends

Though it's hard to let you go
In the Father's hands we know
That a lifetime's not too long
To live as friendship

No a lifetime's not too long-await
To live as friends.

A TRIBUTE TO MOTHER

Proverbs 31

If you were to see the last 22 verses of Proverbs 31 in the Hebrew, you would find that each one of these verses begin with each of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

Notice that Proverbs 31:1 states that these words were taught to King Lemuel by his mother. Well, who is King Lemuel? Most Bible students believe that Lemuel is the “pet name” given to Solomon by his mother, Bathsheba.

You remember Bathsheba. She is the woman who was bathing in plain view of King David. As David watched her bathing, he lusted after her, called for her, committed adultery with her. When David found out she was with child, David had her husband killed in battle and married her himself. You will remember that that baby died. Then she and David had a second child. His name was Solomon.

Solomon remembers his mother, Bathsheba, as a godly woman. When we first meet her, we see her in sin and shame, but she met the Lord and was transformed into a godly, virtuous woman.

Proverbs 31 is actually two poems. The first nine verses record what Solomon's mother TAUGHT him; the rest of the chapter deals with what Solomon THOUGHT of his mother. She taught her son to be a wise king and he thought of his mother as an excellent woman, mother, and wife.

Proverbs 31:10-31 describes the kind of woman every Christian man should search for as a life mate; a wife.

Five things I would focus on about a godly woman.

I. Her Valor Proverbs 31:10

The word “virtuous” means an excellent wife. It does not just refer to her character, but also to her courage, to her capabilities, and to her strength that enables her to face life.

The indication is that such a woman is rare. She is not necessarily easy to find – but they are out there. I found one, and others of you have found one – but you have to look in the right places. I believe that any woman, by God's help and grace, can become the kind of woman described here, if she isn't already.

Verse 10 says that her price; her worth is far above rubies. In the time when Proverbs was written, rubies were an extremely valuable commodity that might be compared to diamonds. The right kind of woman and mother is priceless. Her influence is immeasurable.

- Napoleon once said, “Let France have great mothers, and France will have great sons.”
- Abraham Lincoln said, “All that I am and hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.” (And Lincoln was speaking of his step-mother.)
- One man said, “An ounce of Mother is worth a pound of preacher.” Amen!

The two most important decisions of a man are:

- First, the Lord you will serve; and second, the lady you will marry.
- The first will determine Heaven or hell in the life to come; the second will determine heaven or hell in this life.

II. Her Value Proverbs 31:11

She is Faithful Proverbs 31:11-12

Fidelity is so important in marriage. With this woman there is no thought or suspicion that his wife even might be unfaithful to him. It never entered his mind.

Notice the word “safely” not only does her husband trust her, but he is safe in so doing. In other words, he is justified in trusting her, because what she appears to be, she is. There is no pretense; there is no slipping around. That goes for the wife toward her husband as well.

“So that he shall have no need of spoil.” This should be true of both husband and wife. Neither let their eyes and desires wonder. Neither feel the need for looking elsewhere.

Verse 12: “She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.” Her devotion and love doesn't play out with the passing of time.

III. Her Vigilance Proverbs 31:13-25

She is not afraid of hard work, working with her hands and her head. She learns to do her task well. She is thrifty.

Men, we need to appreciate the hard work that our wives and mothers do, and we ought not be demanding.

Jerry Vines told of a working mom coming wearily into the kitchen one morning, trying to get everyone ready for the day, and her husband said, “I want a hot breakfast this morning.” She handed him a match and said, “Here. Set fire to your cornflakes.”

One lady sat down and wrote out What a Mother Is and What She Does:

What a Mother IS:

- baby feeder, changer, bather, rocker, burper, hugger
- listener to crying and fussing and thousands of questions
- Picker-upper of food and debris cast on the floor ...
- comforter, encourager, counselor ...
- linguistic expert for two-year-old dialects ...
- listener – to the husband as well as the children – about their day, their needs, their concerns, their aspirations
- Teacher of everything from how to chew food to how to drive a car
- assistant on school projects ...
- censor of TV, movies, and books ...
- reader of thousands of children's books
- planner and hostess of children's birthday parties
- central control for getting the appliance fixed or the carpet shampooed
- executioner of ants, roaches, wasps, and other pests
- resident historian in charge of photo albums, baby books, and school record books ...
- resident encyclopedia source for all those hard questions that seem to arise ...
- food preservation expert ...
- keeper and locator of birth certificates and other valuable documents
- ironer of wrinkles ...
- appointment desk for the family's visits to the doctor, the dentist, the orthodontist, the barber, and the mechanic
- seeker of God, one who prays ...
- cleaner of the oven, the drawers, the closets, the garage, the curtains, the windows, and even the walls
- refinisher of furniture
- hubby's romantic, attentive spouse ...
- emergency medical technician and “ambulance” driver

What a Mother DOES:

- clip ten fingernails and ten toenails for each young child regularly
- return library books ...
- choose gifts, purchase gifts, wrap gifts for birthdays, Christmas, Father's Day, Mother's Day, wedding showers, baby showers, anniversaries, and any other event that might even remotely require a gift ...
- mail packages, buy stamps
- drop off the dry cleaning; pick up the dry cleaning ...
- haul everything that needs repair
- attend recitals
- attend every school sporting event imaginable
- chauffeur everyone everywhere
- comb little girl's hairdos ...
- help in the classroom ...
- attend school PTA meetings and conferences
- act as a room mother, making things and organizing more parties
- Chaperon field trips and special events
- coordinate car pools ...
- serve as a Scout leader, a Blue Bird leader, an AWANA leader, a Sunday school teacher ...
- deliver forgotten lunches, forgotten homework and forgotten athletic gear ...
- make bank deposits and withdrawals

IV. Her Voice Proverbs 31:26-29

"The law of kindness is on her lips." She is never vindictive, cutting, or mean. She is patient and gives advice and instructions. What come from her lips is tempered with kindness.

Her Children Bless Her Proverbs 31:28-29

The children of this mother stand to their feet and bless her. They testify to her impact on their lives and her influence that still shapes and guides them. One of the all-time greats as a mother was Susannah Wesley, mother of Charles and John. Mother to seventeen children, she prayed one hour each day just for them, and she spent one hour each week discussing spiritual matters with each one individually. Her children, no doubt, called her blessed. Why? Here are a few of the rules she used in raising her children. At the time, they may have seemed harsh. Later, her children saw the wisdom of them and blessed her for loving them in such clear and tangible ways.

1. Eating between meals – not allowed.
2. All children are to be in bed by 8 p.m.
3. They are required to take medicine without complaining.
4. Subdue self-will in a child, and those working together with God to save the child's soul.
5. Teach a child to pray as soon as he can speak.
6. Require all to be still during Family Worship.

7. Give them nothing that they cry for, and only that wanted when asked for politely.
8. Prevent lying: punish no fault which is first confessed and repented of.
9. Never allow a sinful act to go unpunished.
10. Never punish a child twice for a single offense.
11. Comment and reward good behavior.
12. Any attempt to please, even if poorly performed, should be commended.
13. Preserve property rights, even in smallest matters.
14. Strictly observe all promises.
15. Require no daughter to work before she can read well.
16. Teach children to fear the rod.

("16 House Rules")

Any child would be blessed to be loved by a mother in such an intentional manner. As they grow to become parents themselves, they will bless her for how she raised them and what she taught them.

Her Husband Praises Her (Proverbs 31:28-29)

V. Her Vision Proverbs 31:30-31

She knows that outward beauty is short-lived, but inner beauty is lasting. She is a lady in every way.

Her secret? The fear of the Lord. She sets her mind on things above.

At the end of life, looking back over the many years of living for Jesus and serving Him, she will quietly and confidently say, "No regrets. No regrets."

THE TRAPS OF TEMPTATION

Proverbs 1:10

Temptation is not new. Man has been tempted since the Garden of Eden. And, every man, with the exception of the Lord Jesus, has yielded to temptation. Temptation pays a visit to each one of us every day and most of us struggle to say "no" to temptation.

Adam was tempted. Abraham was tempted. Moses was tempted. David was tempted. Peter was tempted. Name any person, and they have been tempted.

Think how many temptations you and I face in an ordinary day:

- Staying in bed late – the temptation to laziness.
- Dressing carelessly – the temptation to sloppiness.
- Growling at the breakfast table – the temptation to unkindness.
- Arguing over who should change the baby this time – the temptation to selfishness.
- Starting work ten minutes late – the temptation to slothfulness.
- Losing your temper when a co-worker doesn't do something correctly the first time – the temptation to impatience.
- Flirting with that good-looking woman, taking a second look at that good-looking man – the temptation to lust.
- Refusing to speak to a person who hurt you – the temptation to malice.
- Repeating a juicy story of your neighbor's misfortune – the temptation to gossip.
- Taking a secret drink at a party – the temptation to drunkenness.
- Lying awake at night thinking sensual thoughts – the temptation to impurity.
- Taking your anger out on the children after a hard day – the temptation to cruelty.
- Going out to eat when you can't afford it – the temptation to self-indulgence.

- Having a second helping and then a third – the temptation to gluttony.
- Picking up the phone and telling someone who has hurt you what you think of them – the temptation to revenge.

Hebrews 4:15 – Jesus “was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” In fact, Jesus was tempted to a greater degree or intensity than we will ever be.

Let me show you what I mean. Who is tempted more: the person who gives in to temptation at the slightest provocation or the person who resists the temptation and never gives into the temptation? Of course, it is the one who resists the full power of temptation and refuses to yield or give in to temptation.

Matthew presents Jesus as King. To be King, one must defeat every foe. In Matthew 4, Jesus faces the temptations of Satan in the wilderness for forty days; and there faces every type of temptation from Satan.

First John 2:15-17 says that Satan will use three types of temptations against us: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

I John 2:15-17: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
 “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride, is not of the Father, but is of the world.
 “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

In Matthew 4:3-4, Satan tempts Jesus to satisfy the lust of His flesh. After 40 days of fasting, at our Lord's greatest point of weakness relating to His physical hunger, Satan tempts Him by saying, “If (literally, “Since”) you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” “Satisfy your flesh.” Yet, the Father had sent Jesus into the wilderness to fast. Satan tempted Jesus to substitute something good for the will of God. The temptation was in the realm of “doing” and stepping outside of the will of God. Satan often tempts us at our point of least resistance or those times when things do not seem to be going our way. Jesus answered Satan's temptation with the Word of God.

Next Satan tempts our Lord in the area of the pride of life. He takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple, some 450 feet from the ground, and tells Him to jump AND CLAIM GOD'S PROMISE.

Satan quoted (or misquoted) Psalm 91:11-12. Satan left out the phrase, “to keep you in all your ways,” which means. “as long as He was in the process of ministry.” In other words, “claim God's promise.” See if God will do what He says He will do. Put God to the test. Presume upon God.” Jesus didn't doubt His Father's word that He would keep Him safe while in the midst of ministry, but He would not presume upon God in order to prove that He believed His Father's word.

Finally, Satan tempted Jesus through the lust of the eye. “Look what I will give you if you will bow down and worship me. You will not even have to go to the cross if you submit to me.” Satan tempts us through our discontentment. “You can have more if you do it my (Satan's) way. You don't have to wait to be satisfied. Enjoy possessions now! Enjoy sex now! Enjoy prestige now! Don't do it God's way; do it my (Satan's) way!” By the way, Satan is still saying today, “Bow to me, to my way, to my plan, to my will. Yield to me! Worship me!” When we don't bow to God's will, we are bowing before Satan.

In Proverbs 1:10, Solomon is saying, “Just say 'no' to temptation. Don't fall into the traps of temptation!”

Alexander the Great was once told by his mentor, “Alexander, you can resist everything except temptation.” That's true of us, also.

It's important to remember that temptation itself is not sin. The issue is, how do we respond to the temptation. Every temptation – whether large or small – requires a moment-by-moment decision.

I want us to look at three things related to temptation:

I. An Analysis of Temptation

Let me ask and answer three questions about temptation:

A. What is temptation?

Temptation is our being presented with the opportunity to do wrong. Someone said that temptation is bad or evil masquerading as good.

Temptation comes to all of us – to the STRONG, as it did to Samson; to the SPIRITUAL, as it did to David; to the SINLESS SON OF GOD, for He was tempted in all points like as we are; yet, without sin.

B. Where does temptation come from?

1. Of course, temptation comes from Satan.

Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

2. Temptation comes from within us; our sin nature

James 1:13-16: "Let no man when he is tempted, say I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, ye beloved brethren."

3. How does temptation work?

a. Temptation is always alluring.

Temptation always makes sin look good and pleasurable. Anyone who tells you that sin is not fun – AT THE START – is lying to you. If sin didn't look fun and pleasurable, not many would yield to it. The Bible, itself, says that sin is enjoyable FOR A SEASON.

Hebrews 11:25: "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;"

b. Temptation comes to us as innocent and manageable.

Temptation to sin seems to start off so small. We think we can control it. Others may not be able to control it, but I can. That's the thought of every person who gets involved with drinking, drugs, or flirting with someone who is not their mate.

c. Once you yield to temptation, it is more demanding.

Once you yield to temptation and sin, it is easier to yield the next time and the next time. You always go further and linger longer than you thought you would.

d. If you give in to temptation, it will always be found out and it will always bring hurt to you and to others. "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23). Others may not know about your sin, but "You" will and "You" will know you have compromised and cheapened yourself.

II. The Anticipation of Temptations

Temptation is going to come to you – no exclusions and usually in unexpected ways.

Song of Solomon 2:15: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

Jesus knew that if we were not careful, we would be caught in the traps of temptation. That's why He

taught His disciples to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Some time ago I watched a spider begin to weave her web. When she was about half way through, a small moth flew into the web. She never stopped spinning her web. The moth struggled to free itself, but it was trapped. When the spider had finished her web, she went over to the moth, and by this time it was already dead. That's the way temptation is. It traps us and we are entangled by its power until our life is destroyed.

III. Answering Temptation

How do we deal with temptation successfully?

1. Know and apply the Word of God — Proverbs 6:20-23: Psalm 119:11

Proverbs 6:20-23 — "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:"

Psalm 119:11 — "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

The first step in dealing with temptation is to know the Word of God. That's the example Jesus gave us. If you neglect your Bible, you will find yourself easy prey for the traps of temptation.

2. Predetermine Your Decision

Determine what you are going to do BEFORE the temptation ever comes to you. Don't say, "Well, I'll cross that bridge when I get there;" if you do, the bridge will crumble under you.

I believe the secret to Joseph's success when faced with temptation was that he knew what he would do if faced with that temptation.

3. Look for God's Way of Escape

I Corinthians 10:13 — "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

You may think you are entrapped by some temptation and there is no way out, but God always makes a way of escape.

4. You cannot overcome temptation in your own strength, so God gives us a strength greater than we are.

I John 4:4 — "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

What if you have already yielded to temptation? You cannot undo the sin, but you can be forgiven and cleansed from the sin.

I John 1:9 — "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

DON'T WAIT TOO LATE

Proverbs 1:24-28; Prov. 27:1; Prov. 29:1

The writer of Proverbs deals with over 50 issues of life in the Book of Proverbs. He deals with anger, temptation, the thought life and the attempt to cover or hide our sin. He talks about the parent-child relationship as well as the marriage relationship. He talks about the process of aging and he tells us how we are to manage our money. But the subject he deals with more than any other is our relationship to God.

This wise man, Solomon, says in the Book of Ecclesiastes that we are to “remember our creator in the days of our youth,” for without God in our life, all will be vanity or empty or a waste.

Three passages in Proverbs warn us that we are not to wait too late about making our decision of commitment to trust Christ as our Savior and Lord and to receive forgiveness for our sins.

Proverbs 1:24-28 is God's invitation to man to respond to God's offer of mercy and grace. These verses tell, in part, what will happen to man if he refuses God's invitation.

Proverbs 27:1 presents to us the man who thinks he has many “tomorrows” to get right with God, but does not realize that, for him, there may not be another “tomorrow.”

Proverbs 29:1 presents a picture of an ox who has a yoke put about its neck so that the master can lead it in the direction that he wants it to go. But the ox is rebellious and will not go in the right direction. The yoke rubs on the neck until a callous is formed and the animal becomes insensitive to the pulling of the reins by the master. The only thing to do now is to destroy the animal; to put it to death, for it is of no further use to the master. Rather than the ox being useful, it becomes a burden and a problem because of its rebellious nature. God is saying something very important to us. We are not just beast. We are people that He loved, died for, and wants to bring control and direction to our lives.

As I tie these three passages together, God is saying to us, “Don't wait too late. Come to Jesus while there is still time.”

The Bible is a book about salvation, from the opening verses of Genesis to the closing verses of Revelation.

Three truths are presented in the Word of God:

1. Not all men are going to Heaven.

Somehow many have seen only the love of God and failed to recognize the wrath of God.

The sad truth is that not all are going to Heaven and men will go to Hell.

We don't hear messages on Hell like we once did. I think there are several reasons for that, but I will mention only a few. First, so-called men of God do not believe in a literal place called Hell. Second, preaching on Hell is not politically correct. Folks don't want to hear about Hell, so preachers preach a “feelgood” message. Third, in days gone by, people had church only once or twice a month. Therefore, there was more emphasis placed on evangelism; on getting saved; on repentance and forgiveness; and on Heaven and Hell.

But just because preachers don't preach on the subject of Hell as they once did does not mean that the Hell the Bible talks about no longer exist. It does! What is the Hell the Bible talks about like? It is a place of literal, everlasting fire and torment. It is a place of outer darkness; a place of pain and suffering; there is no love or light or water or peace in Hell. No answered prayer. No hope of escape. No compassion. No concern for anyone. It is a place of regrets, sorrow, unsatisfied desires. It is the place of the Second Death – ever dying and, yet, not being able to die and escape the pain and suffering.

2. Many more folks are going to Hell than are going to Heaven.

Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

3. Many who expect to go to Heaven will discover they are going to Hell.

Matthew 7:21-24: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Three things I want us to see:

I. The Tendency of Man Proverbs 27:1

James picks up on this very verse and speaks about the dangers, the foolishness, and even the sinfulness of presuming that tomorrow will come for you.

James 4:13-17: "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

We have known yesterday – the past – and we are experiencing the present, but we have no certainties of tomorrow. To count on tomorrow is to neglect the duty of today!

Tomorrow is the worst time for making a decisive choice and the Bible declares that Today is the best time. If you are to make a choice upon which eternity depends, than Solomon says we are to distrust the future, for tomorrow may not come for us. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Tomorrow" is the devil's greatest tool; "Now" is God's greatest weapon to defeat the devil.

It is not often that men reject that God is God or that Jesus is God's Son who died on the cross and shed His blood to forgive us of our sins. It is not that the Holy Spirit is failing to perform His ministry of conviction of sin that men are not saved. Most lost folks know they are in sin and they know they need God in their life and they want God's life – But Not Today – Tomorrow! But Today and not Tomorrow is "THE ACCEPTED TIME!"

Time, considered by itself, is very insignificant; but Time in its own right place is more important than eternity. There is a span in every man's life that is germ time for immortality. This earth is the nursery for Heaven.

"Now" is Mercy's offer. "Now" is the invitation from God, reaching down from Heaven. Tomorrow you may find the door shut. Tomorrow may be too late!

Have you ever been in the position where you had to meet a certain group of people to go somewhere and if you were not there at that time, you would be left behind? I've had some close calls. I've been late. I broke the speed limit to get there on time. I didn't want to miss out and I didn't want to be left behind. Maybe you got there just in time to see your ride going over the top of the hill. Your heart falls.

The word "boast" means "to shine or to make bright." Tomorrow will be a better day to get serious about God. Live it up, today! Do it your way, today! Tomorrow is the day to get serious with God. The truth is that if God gave us many more "tomorrows," most of us still wouldn't get serious about God.

What causes men not to get serious about God? Pride. People. Pleasure. Procrastination.

II. The Insistence of God Proverbs 1:24-28

"I have called ... you have refused ... you shall call ... But I will not answer." What sad, terrifying words!

You refused – no man regarded – set at naught – would none of my reproof.

How does the Lord call? By His Word. Through conscience. Through His preachers. But you refused. Man is the only creature in all of creation that resists the Lord's voice.

God stretched out His hand to offer help and pardon and blessing, and you would not accept His offer. God says, "You wouldn't listen to my reproof or my correction. You would not give ear to my counsel.

You have said "No" to the many ways God sought to redeem you. How will God respond to those who reject Him when they stand to give an account to Him at the Great White Throne Judgment?

1. God will Laugh Proverbs 1:26

This is not a laugh of delight or "I got you." It's a mocking laugh. God's heart will break because the person rejected Him, but it will be a mocking laugh at the insanity that one would reject His many attempts to reach the person that rejected Him.

"I will mock when your fear comes." What fear a person will experience as they stand alone before God, knowing they are condemned, because the evidence is presented to him, knowing it is too late, but crying for mercy anyway.

2. God will be Silent Proverbs 1:28a

Their prayer, that would have once been answered, is now powerless. God will have nothing else to say to the lost sinner after He says, "Depart from me." He will leave them alone to their choices.

3. He will Hide Proverbs 1:28b

To be forsaken by God is awful at any time, but how much more at the final judgment.

4. God will announce His Judgment Proverbs 1:31

The fruit of their sin is eternal separation from God. They will see Him no more. Doom is announced – The Second Death through eternity. We would like to soften the truth here, but we dare not. The day of grace has its limits. There is a knock that will be the last knock.

How many lost folks know what they ought to do and should do and plan to do ONE DAY. They have their plan to trust Christ someday, but they never do it. The sin of sins against the pleading wisdom of God is represented as being indifferent: Eyes that will not see; ears that will not hear; hearts which will not change.

It's a true story. A man was a professional skydiver. His thirteen year old son idolized his dad. His dad had taken him up with him many times. He had taught him on ground level the procedures and he seemed to have everything down. He asked that for his fourteenth birthday, he could jump solo.

The day came. The weather was perfect. The large red "X" where he was to land was clearly marked. The dad watched as his son got into position to jump from the plane. It was a beautiful jump. He floated down just as he had been taught. Time came for him to pull his rip-cord. He reached over to pull it, but missed it. He had to re-balance himself and again pulled for the rip-cord, but missed again. He continued to fall. The dad began to scream, "Son, pull the rip-cord ... pull the rip-cord," but he never did.

Instead the boy's body hit the target where the big "X" was. His friend, who was also a professional skydiver, said, "Target fixation. Target fixation. Your son had target fixation. He knew what to do and how to do it, but he was so fixed on the target that he couldn't pull the rip-cord."

How many folks know they need to be saved and plan one day to be saved. They know what to do to be saved. They plan to. They want to – someday, but they never do what they need to do to be saved. Everything is in place except that eternal choice to total commitment to Jesus. They die in their sins, not doing what they know they should do.

Amos 4:6-7, 9-10, 12: "I gave you cleanness of teeth by sending you famine and drought so, they would turn back to God – yet you have not returned to me. I withheld rain from you so you would return – yet you have not returned to me. I sent blight and mildew and locust – you have not returned. Your young

men were killed in battle with a sword – yet you did not return to me. Because you will not return to me, prepare to meet your God.”

And meet Him without ever turning to Him in life on earth. Meet Him – Condemned.

III. The Urgency of Today Proverbs 29:1

If God stirs your heart toward Himself, this is your urgent day.

- Deuteronomy 30:15 – “I have set before you THIS DAY life and death.”
- Joshua 24:15 – “Chose ye THIS DAY whom you will serve.”
- I Kings 18:21 – “How long will you halt (dance, limp) between two opinions? If God is God, follow Him – Now!”

There will never be a better time. God may never speak to you again as He is now.

Frogs are cold-blooded. You can take a frog, put him in a big black pot filled with boiling water, and he'll jump out. But you can take that same frog, put him in the same big black pot with cold water in it, and the frog will swim around happily. If you then build a fire under the pot, let the frog gradually get used to the water as it gets hotter, the frog will stay there until it boils to death. That's what happens to the lost man when he says “no” to the convicting of the Holy Spirit. He gradually gets used to the convicting of the Spirit until he is no longer bothered by the convicting.

Michael Spalding, 29 years old – strong, healthy; in the army – was stationed in Anchorage, Alaska, at Fort Richardson. This young man went on a hunting trip with some of his buddies. They went out on a tidal flat and he turned around and started to go back and he could not move his right foot. He tried to move his left foot and it would not move. Both feet were stuck, ankle deep and as he looked down he saw that he was standing in quick sand. He kept trying to get his feet up but he couldn't. His buddies were not far off, so he called to them and told them what was happening and they laughed, thinking he was joking.

Finally, they came and all their attempts to free him failed. One of them started to go get some help and he was so frightened he begged him to stay. His buddy knew he had to get help so he called the fire department and they came. They put two ladders out – one on each side of him – thinking they could walk out there to him and pull him up from each side. Now he was down to his waist. They tied a rope around him, started to pull, and something popped in his back and he could not take the pain.

Now, he was up to his armpits. A fireman went and got a hose from the truck and started blasting the quick sand from his body. It took three hours of blasting away but he was finally freed and lifted out.

Some are bound down by sin but Jesus comes and can loosen you and set you free.

In loving kindness Jesus came, my soul in mercy to reclaim.
And from the depths of sin and shame, Tho' grace He lifted me.
From sinking sand, He lifted me, with tender hand, He lifted me,
From shades of night to plains of light. O praise His name, He lifted me!

THE GRADUATE

Proverbs 3: 5-7

Graduation is a special time in the life of a young person. You have accomplished many things in the twelve years that it took to get you here.

You have survived over 10,000 hours of instruction. I know most of those hours of instruction didn't soak in, but we are grateful for those hours that did. If most of us had realized in first grade to twelfth grade how important these years would be, most of us would have been more serious about our studies, more diligent in our daily preparation in that ugly word: HOMEWORK.

Not only have you survived hours of instruction, you have survived – excuse me – you have “enjoyed” over 2,000 school lunches.

You have completed the longest period of structured instruction that you will receive.

Graduation is a special time.

- It is a time of Evaluation: A time to reflect on where you have come from and what you have done with your life in those twelve years. Have you wasted the years or have you invested the years?

- It is a time of Expectation: A time to see where you are going and what you are going to do with your life. In one sense, every day is a time of graduation for all of us; a time of evaluation and expectation.

Solomon would encourage us to put God first in all that we do. I don't know all of the things that you have learned, but if it has not been built on the bedrock foundation of a relationship with the Lord, it is not going to amount to anything.

What if you develop into a brilliant doctor, but you don't know the Great Physician? What if you develop into a great policeman, but you do not know the God of the universe who gave man His Laws?

As you begin this new phase in your life, let me encourage you to take four things with you:

I. Goodness

Goodness will not save you, but God calls on us to BE good and to DO good.

The wise man, Solomon, knew the importance of goodness. Notice Ecclesiastes 11:1. Solomon is saying, you will get out of life what you put into it, except in greater proportions. The figure of speech

158

Solomon uses is one that he was well familiar with. Every three years, Solomon would load a fleet of ships with goods and send them out (or cast them out upon the water) and they would come back after months or, in some cases, years, and the Bible says in I Kings 10, that Solomon would meet the ship at the place of docking and they would be loaded with gold and precious stones. He is expressing the idea that you will get back out of life what you put into it, only in greater proportions.

Jesus taught the same thing in Luke 6:38. If you put out goodness, you will get goodness in return. What you give out may not come back to you immediately, but it will come back.

You have something to give that will cost you nothing, but you will benefit greatly by giving it. What do you have to give? A gracious spirit. A caring, compassionate spirit. Friendliness. Kindness.

Give out goodness. "Jesus went about doing good." "Let your light so shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

II. A Grin Ecclesiastes 11:7-10 (Living Bible)

Solomon says to enjoy life! It's great to be alive! A ten-year-old boy was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The boy thought for a moment and then replied with just one word: "Alive."

I join in the boy's wish!

John 10:10

Solomon says, "Since we won't be here forever, we might as well have a blast while we last." You and I don't get to choose how we are going to die, or when. We only get to choose how we're going to live now.

Go to a cemetery and look at any gravestone. Underneath the name you will find a date of birth, a date of death, and a dash to represent everything in between. What are you doing with the dash? How will you fill the "dash" that will someday mark your gravestone?

May I share with you the goal of my life? I want to die young at a very old age. That's not just playing with words; that's a philosophy of life. Growing old is not just a matter of chronology. It's also a stage. You can be old at 20 and

young at 85. My goal is to die young at a very old age, doing everything I can for Jesus Christ.

I want to live until the very last moment, fully invested for Jesus Christ and for His Kingdom, doing everything I can to advance His cause in the world.

So enjoy the life God has given you. Laugh a lot! Live every day to the max! And have a blast while you last!

Here's a quotation from the Quakers: "I expect to pass through the world but once. Any good therefore that I do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

So how should we live in light of our coming death? Ecclesiastes 9:10 (Living Bible) offers a simple answer.

A. "Do whatever your hand finds to do."

The Message translates it, "Whatever turns up, grab it and do it." The deeper meaning is to take hold of the ordinary responsibilities of life and make sure they get done. Don't live in the never-never land of what you plan to do tomorrow. There is work to be done that somehow gets left undone while we are dreaming about what we are going to do "someday." Unfortunately, someday never comes for many people.

B. "Do it with all your might."

Not only are we to do whatever lies close at hand, we are to tackle our work with gusto. Whatever we do, we should do it heartily, with enthusiasm, with passion, with zeal, with 100 percent commitment.

C. Ponder the Brevity of Life Ecclesiastes 9:10c

Life is not a dress rehearsal. We only get one chance to do whatever we are going to do in life.

D. Be thankful for things large and small Ecclesiastes 9:7

Grin! Enjoy life! It's great to be alive!

Some folks enjoy being sticks-in-the-mud. They go through life with no joy, no humor, no smiles. I think of the lady at one of the churches I pastored. We were having pictures made for our church directory. The photographer tried everything to make the lady smile and then she said, "I haven't smiled for a picture in over 50 years and I'm not smiling for this one." Later, I told him, "Please, don't mess up her life. She has been miserable all of her life. Don't change her now!"

A merry heart is like a miracle medicine, but keep life in balance. Enjoy life, but keep in mind that you must account to God for everything you do.

III. Grit (Determination)

Carry with you some stick-to-it-ness. Winston Churchill was asked to give a speech to the leaders of England during a difficult time in the nation. He could not go, but he sent his speech and it contained only six words: "Never quit! Never, never, never quit!"

Many things will try to keep you from going on – stress, discouragement, failure, the pressures of life. The successful man is that man who gets up one more time. Remember that one plus God is a majority.

IV. God

Whatever you do, where ever you go, take God with you.

You will make many decisions in life. Let God be a part of your decision-making process. Someone has well said, "We make our

decisions and our decisions turn around and make us.”

The best way for us to live our life is in the will of God. But how do we know what the will of God is for our life? Wouldn't it be nice for the Lord Himself to come and whisper in our ear what His will is for us?

There is a strong emphasis in the Book of Proverbs on the sovereignty of God over our personal decisions.

In Proverbs 16:9 the word “directeth” literally means “determines” his steps. It's a very strong word that speaks of God's control of every detail. The verse is saying “you can make all your plans, in fact, you can have your life mapped out step by step, but in the end, God determines every step you take.”

Look at Proverbs 16:33. Most of us don't understand the concept of “casting lots.” In the Old Testament, the Jews often used this method to determine God's will. It sometimes involved using different colored balls or rocks, mixing them together, and then seeing which one fell out of the bag first.

In that sense, casting lots is like rolling dice. It appears to be a random act of chance. But God is behind those colored stones. He determines which one falls out of the bag first. This means that there are no “accidents” in life and no such thing as “luck.” Everything fits into His plan.

Note Proverbs 19:21. That is, you can make all the plans you like, but God gets the last word. God's purpose shall stand. The bottom line is, He is God and we are not.

We think that we are in control of our own life and that everything depends on us. No, God is in control!

That doesn't mean we throw our brain away. After doing all our research on a given decision, submit it to God and ask for His help.

As the popular saying goes, “When in doubt, don't.” If you are not sure about the new job, the move, the right mate, don't make any decision with less than total certainty.

God wants guidable people who will trust Him with the details of life. Guidable people look to God and not to themselves.

Let me share a secret with you. Guidable people always receive guidance from God. Always. Why? Because God always speaks loud enough for a willing ear to hear.

Are you a guidable Christian? Or do you still feel like you have to be in the driver's seat of life?

When the time comes, make the best decision you can and leave the results with God. God really does want you to know His will for your life. God has enough trouble getting us to do His will, without

making it hard to find. If you are willing to be guided by God, you will discover that He will lead you step by step.

Put God first in your life and have a blast as long as you last. That's the best way to live your life.

TRUST AND OBEY

Proverbs 3:1-10

Solomon wants the best for his son and that's what he says in Proverbs 3:1-10. You cannot have a better life on earth than when you Trust and Obey the Lord. God promises us guidance.

A. An Admonition Proverbs 3:1

The admonition brings the head and the heart together. It is not enough to have God's Word in our heads. We must be like the Psalmist who declared that he had hidden God's Word in his heart (Psalm 119:11).

Notice three words in the first four verses of Proverbs 3 — forget (Verse 1); forsake (Verse 3); and favor (Verse 4).

The word “FORGET” here does not mean a lapse of memory; but rather, it means “do not cease to pay attention to the Word of God.” A lot of folks know the Word of God, but do not pay attention to the Word of God.

Here's the admonition. Bring the head and the heart together. Hide God's Word in your heart and it will remain there and it will control our responses to the different circumstances

to life as they arise.

B. An Appeal Proverbs 3:3

The word “FORSAKE” does not mean to go off and leave, rather, it means “to pound out.” Picture in your mind a thick, strong piece of metal. It carries a great deal of weight. But then picture a person who takes that thick, strong piece of metal and begins to pound it; to beat it with a hammer. He hammers it out until it becomes a thin sheet of metal that you can bend to your own liking.

Here's the meaning: Don't water down the Word of God so that it has no strength and means absolutely nothing.

C. An Assurance Proverbs 3:2, 4

God promises peace and long life; as well as “FAVOR;” good understanding and high esteem in the sight of God and men.

Now we are given two examples of what happens when we Trust and Obey. We will find ourselves yielded to God in our Trust and in our Treasure.

I. In Our Trust Proverbs 3:5-8

What a contrast these verses are to Proverbs 28:26: “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.”

These are among the best known and best loved verses in the Book of Proverbs. They have to do with trust in God and letting Him be our Guide.

Six key words unlock the message of this text:

1. Trust – means “to lean upon totally with your full body weight.”

Our God is totally dependable. His character is such that it makes it impossible for Him to lie (Titus 1:2). His wisdom is so great He can never make a mistake. His love is so limitless He can never be unkind. He has high and holy purposes and no ulterior motives. Trust what he says; what He does; what He desires for you; how He gets involved with you.

You get to know someone by spending time with them – in prayer, in His Word, in worship services.

“He will never let us go, never let us down, and never let us off.”

So we can trust Him. We must trust Him. We must trust Him with our whole heart. Anything less is an insult.

2. “Lean” means “to rest upon something for partial support,” “to rely on, depend on.” The word “lean” is used of a person who rests upon Him for support and safety. This is a warning against pride. Basically, pride is leaving God out of our decisions and lives.

Ego is what makes us aware of self. It is the part of us that governs self. Someone said that EGO often means “edging God out.” Yet, we are to lean on Him.

3. “Understanding” is the word for wisdom.

We are not to rely on our own wisdom, but seek the wisdom of God.

Where do we get God's wisdom? James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

4. “Acknowledge” means “to seek advice.”

We are to recognize and remember Him in all our ways – in our homes, on the job, in the school. We are to acknowledge Him during times of discouragement, hurt, depression, failure.

Acknowledging the Lord means remembering we are never alone. We are to do nothing without seeking His advice.

5. "Direct" means "to make straight and plain."

He does this through His Word, His workers, His wisdom, His Spirit.

6. "Path" is "the road of our life."

The picture is of a road that appears to be impassable. Portions of the road are washed out, others are filled with potholes, still others are blocked by huge boulders. In some places the road apparently becomes a dead end.

He will remove the obstacles if they need to be removed. He will fill the potholes if they need to be filled. He will redirect the detour so that what seemed to be a dead end turns out to be the shortest way to reach your destination.

All you have to do is trust in the Lord. Lay yourself completely on Him for full support. Don't lean for support on your own understanding. In all your ways know God intimately. He will take the path of your life – which seems to go up and down and around and sometimes seems to curve backwards – and will make your way straight. That's the promise of Almighty God to you.

Notice Prov.3: 7-8 – "flesh" or "navel" – the navel bears a threefold silent lesson to life:

1. The Past Life – Life within the womb.

It was a dark, imprisoned kind of life – restrictive and narrow, utterly dependent, without liberty – unaware that there was much more to experience in life. Life in the womb represents the natural man who does not know God.

2. The Present Life

Birth ushered us into an altogether new life and world. We had new appetites. We began to grow and discover and explore the dimensions of our new way.

But before the new life could be experienced, the umbilical cord had to be cut. It attached us to the old way of life for which we were no longer suited. It would be ridiculous to think of someone not wanting to make a clean break with the past life once he is born into the new. Once that cord was cut, we were free. What a picture of the new birth.

3. The Promised Life – Life beyond the tomb.

While we were in the womb we could not begin to imagine what awaited us in this world after birth; likewise, while we are on earth we cannot begin to imagine what awaits us in the world to come after death.

It would have been almost pointless for someone to explain to us while we were in the womb what the world was like and neither can someone explain to us the wonder and potential of the life and world beyond the tomb.

It will be "joy unspeakable and full of glory" – I Peter 1:8 But we do not have the capacity to understand.

One day the Great Physician will cut the cord that binds us to this present world and life. We will open our eyes in a world of wonder, beauty, and glory beyond anything we can not now begin to imagine. That will be our first taste of Heaven and home.

We need to yield ourselves to God not only in our Trust, but also our Treasure.

Notice: Tithing is Required by God and also Rewarded by God.

Notice: God demands and deserves first place in everything including our income.

We can never expect Him to bless our financial affairs if we leave Him to the last or leave Him out altogether.

Dont's tell me you are totally committed to the Lord until your pocketbook is committed too.

Take My Life and Let It Be

WHOLESOME HATE

Proverbs 6:16-19

I received a copy of a letter from a lady who was a member of another church who wanted my opinion of the letter. May I tell you up front that this is one of the meanest, cruelest, unchristian letters I have ever read.

Let me fill you in on some details about the letter. The lady who received the letter always sat close to the front of the church and she always sat on the same pew and in the same place on the pew. The person who wrote the letter, put the letter at the place where the lady always sat and had her name on the letter, so she would find and read the letter just before the worship began.

In the first place, the letter was anonymously written. I don't read anonymous letters, because only cowards write anonymous letters. So, if you're thinking about writing me an anonymous letter, save your time, because I won't read it and it will go in the trash.

When I think about anonymous letters, I think of D. L. Moody. One night just before he was to preach, the usher handed him a note. When he opened the note, there was one word written in large letters – "FOOL!" Mr. Moody addressed the people and said, "I have received many letters from folks who wrote letters and forgot to sign their name to it, but this is the first time someone ever signed their name but forgot to write a note. He signed his name Fool."

No one signed their name to this letter, but listen as I read it. I will not read the name of the person who received the letter or the Pastor's name or the church that the lady attended. I will read it as written.

Dear Ms _____,

I wanted to write you this letter and let you know that I have prayed about this long and hard. I want you to know up front that I love all God's people and care for them. Because of that I think it is the responsibility of God's people to talk to one another and share with one another about things and problems we see in their lives without judging them, but as a means of help. I will not discuss in this letter the time I saw you pour a zip lock bag full of coffee and take it home nor will I discuss the other things people have told me they saw you take from our kitchen, but I do want you to be aware that many people know and are aware of you taking things from the kitchen.

I wonder how many Sundays Bro. _____ has been preaching his heart out and everyone's listening, paying attention but looking at you asleep propped over on your arm on the edge of the pew. I wonder what he thought?

I have seen the Sundays that we would be already singing the invitational hymn and you'd still be asleep. Ms. _____, please move to the back or to the balcony if you are going

to sleep during church. This is an insult to Bro. _____, to the congregation, and I would go as far as to say the Holy Spirit.

One other thing I want to mention is this. When we have a dinner or a supper in the

fellowship hall you seem to be in a hurry to get back there and fill your plates up before anyone else. Everyone comes through the line and the first thing they see is you with two plates absolutely full and overfilled with food. The supper we had after the Adult Christmas musical was embarrassing to me.

We ran out of food, many people did not get a single piece of food and there you sat with two plates running over with food. It was a finger food supper, not a meal, it was not meant for you to fill your plate and fill up, but for everyone to get a little bit to tie them over til they got home. Please do not eat like you are starving to death. Please don't pile the food on your plate like there will not be enough. It's embarrassing.

I know you are sitting with the _____ family and I think God for that. They need someone to help but before you were helping, you used to take home two-three plates of leftover food with you. Please don't do that. Even if you are taking it to someone else, people don't realize it. Take home a piece of pie, a piece of cake, but not a plate full of everything you can possibly put on it. Do you know why we stopped buying the carry-out plates with the lids? You. They saw you piling food in two or three plates full of leftover food and they said we won't do that again, it was embarrassing.

Ms. _____, I can imagine by now your feelings and emotions are running high. I want you to know I say this because I don't want folks talking about you, I truly do want to help you.

I am glad to have you as a part of our community but I want to say this. You don't have to be rich, have a nice car, or a big house to be clean. Some of the poorest people I know are clean. You can clean your yard. It looks like a junk yard. Garbage scattered all over your yard. It is embarrassing to drive past it and see every yard clean but yours. Here in Mississippi we may not be the cleanest folks on earth but there's one thing for sure, you can walk, you can work, and I am asking you to clean up your nasty looking yard.

Ms. _____, I want you to know we are glad to have you in our community and a part of our church, but here in north Mississippi, we have traditions and values. I am trying to help you, not put you down or sound like I'm running you down or that I'm better than you. I am trying to help you and let you know our community and church is talking about you, and we want you to change some things.

Please quit taking things that do not belong to you from our church. If this continues I want you to know this – our deacons will ask you to leave. We will not tolerate anymore stealing without permission. That's all I'm gonna say about that – you know it and we know it.

Quit eating like you are starving to death. Share, leave some for others. Clean up your yard.

We want you to fit in here, we want to help you when we can, but I just wanted to share these simple changes you can make that will help us all get along better.

In love,

Just a few observations:

There are eight obvious lies told by the person who wrote the letter.

There were misspelled words, useless phrases, incorrect sentence structure, and incorrect punctuation marks throughout the letter.

I think of the man Jesus told about who had the log in his eye, while trying to get the speck out of another man's eye. He could not see his own faults.

Then, could it be that the dear lady who went to sleep was on medication that made her sleepy (or maybe

she was a deacon)?

Jesus said that if you have a conflict, go to the person and deal with the problem. He didn't say to write them an anonymous letter.

In these verses that I'm about to read, we are told that there are seven things that God hates – more than that, these things are an abomination to God. They are so wicked before God that they are morally repulsive to Him.

All seven things that God says He hates, the writer of the letter directed to this lady.

This dear offended lady left, weeping and distraught. What if she had been so hurt that she had gone home and committed suicide? God hates “hands that shed innocent blood” or those who kill the spirit of another person.

Solomon uses a Hebrew literary device for emphasis that is used by other writers. “These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him.”

See:

- Job 5:19: “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.”
- Amos 1:3: “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron:”
- Proverbs 30:15: “The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough.”
- Proverbs 30:18: “There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:”

There is plenty of hate in our world today, but I want to speak on “Wholesome Hate.” It may surprise you to know that there are times that we should hate. Solomon, who wrote Proverbs, wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:8 that there is “a time to love (we would expect him to say that, but then he adds), and a time to hate.”

There are some things that we are to hate, and there are some things that God hates, also. Doesn't the Bible say that “God is love?” It is because God is a God of love that causes Him to hate some things. He is holy, so He must hate what is not holy.

These are not the first verses that tell us that God hates somethings.

- Deuteronomy 16:22 God hates idols
- Psalm 45:7 God hates wickedness
- Proverbs 11:1 God hates a false balance or scales or dishonesty
- Proverbs 15:26 God hates wicked, impure thoughts

Why does God hate these things? Because of the consequences that sin will bring to those who commit them. He knows the hurt and the harm that these sins will bring.

What would you put on God's “hate list?” What does the Lord hate? Notice that these sins involve the eyes, the tongue, the hands, the heart, the feet, the mouth.

I. A Proud Look : The Disdainful Look Proverbs 6:13, 17

Pride heads the list of God's “hates” because it is the worst and most dangerous of all sins.

Understand that the pride spoken of here is not referring to self-esteem. We need self-esteem and should have it. We should take pride in our appearance, in our family, in our work, etc.

The pride spoken of here refers to those with an arrogant spirit and an air about them. Pride refers to those of a proud and haughty spirit. Proud people look down on other people, because they feel superior to them. It is the attitude that overvalues self and

undervalues others. It is the feeling that says, "I'm better than someone else.

"Prideful" is the one word that best describes Satan. Because of pride Satan led a rebellion against God. Satan led Adam and Eve into sin by appealing to their pride, the same pride that caused him to rebel against God.

The very essence of pride is trying to be your own god. People who want to be God say, "I can make my own rules and live like I want. I can live by my own standards and morals."

One of the characteristics of a prideful person is that they are always right in their own eyes and considers himself a cut above everyone else.

- Proverbs 12:15
- "Sins in others I can see, but, praise the Lord, there's none in me."

The person who wrote the letter that I read, saw the other lady's faults clearly, but saw no wrong in herself. Pride!!

II. A Lying Tongue: The Deceitful Tongue Proverbs 6:12, 17

Satan fell because of his pride and became the father of lies.

John 8:44: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

We need to remember that we are never any more like the devil than when we lie.

Numbers 23:1 says that "God is not a man, that He should lie"; Hebrews 6:18 says that "It is impossible for God to lie"; John 14:6 says that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life."

Lying takes many forms: deception, exaggeration, misrepresentation, dishonesty.

Why do we lie?

1. We lie because we are unreliable and untrustworthy.

– Proverbs 25:19: "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint."

We can't trust a disjointed foot to perform like a well foot. A broken tooth will be unreliable and painful. Bite into something hard or let something cold come in contact with the broken tooth and you experience pain.

2. We lie because of fear – fear of men, fear of not measuring up, fear of being found out.

3. We lie to promote our self and we love to boast.

– Galatians 6:3: "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

– Proverbs 27:2: "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips."

– Proverbs 20:6: "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?"

Liars are self-deceived, but they are always ready to take credit for what they don't honestly deserve; like the Pharisee and the publican.

The person who wrote the letter wanted the lady to believe that she really cared for her, wanted to help her, wanted her to remain in the church, and loved her. None of that was true.

Liars are among those who will find themselves in hell.

Revelation 21:8: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

III. Hands That Shed Innocent Blood: The Deadly Hands Proverbs 6:13, 17

Satan "was a murderer from the beginning."

America has shed the blood of about 1.5 million babies every year since Roe vs. Wade. Our generation is becoming ingrained with the idea that human flesh is of no value. If you don't want it, destroy it. God hates hands that shed innocent blood.

Like the one who wrote the letter, our words can kill the innocent.

IV. A Heart That Devises Wicked Plans: The Depraved Heart Proverbs 6:14, 18

Proverbs 12:20: "Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counselors of peace is joy."

It was the wicked imaginations of man that lead to the flood in Genesis.

Genesis 6:5: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

God hates it when folks plan out evil. Wicked King Ahab and Jezebel schemed, like, cheated, and killed Naboth to get control of his vineyard. Judas schemed how he could betray the Lord Jesus. A young person plans out how he can cheat on a test without getting caught. A man and woman plan out how they can deceive their mates so they can be alone with each other. God hates it!

The person who wrote the letter had to plan out what she would say in such a way to deceive the lady so she would think she was being helpful.

V. Feet That Are Swift to Run to Evil: The Delinquent Foot Proverbs 6:13, 18

You don't have to twist this fellow's arm. At the first suggestion he is ready to yield to sin.

They not only scheme evil, they are so consumed with wickedness that they run to it.

The lady not only planned to write the letter, she wrote it and she could not wait to deliver it to the place she knew it would be found. I wonder if she watched as the lady picked the letter up and read it.

VI. A False Witness Who Speaks Lies: The Dishonest Witness Proverbs 6:19

It was false witnesses who spoke against the Lord at His trial.

There is more than just "a lying tongue." He is speaking about not keeping a vow; maybe a vow to the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 5:5: "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."

How often have we made vows to the Lord only to break them. We sing, "I Love to Tell the Story," and never speak of Christ. We sing, "Wherever He Leads I'll Go," and walk away from Him. We sing, "More About Jesus Would I Know," and make no attempt to know Him more.

This is the last sin on God's hate list, but it is not the least. In fact, it may be the worst of all. There is nothing more beautiful than for God's people to dwell in unity. There is nothing as ugly as division among the people of God.

Romans 16:17-18: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

Galatians 5:14-15: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."

There are seven things God hates. We should hate them, too. And if they are in our lives, we should cut them out.

INDECENT PROPOSAL

Proverbs 7:1, 5-22a, 27

Four times in the first seven chapters of Proverbs, Solomon gives his son wisdom in dealing with sexual sin. One of the things that Solomon tells his son is this: "Son, you are going to face sexual temptation."

Steven Arterburn, who wrote the book, *Every Man's Battle*, says that just being a male means that our very maleness, with our male tendencies, assures men that they will have a battle for purity in their heart and soul all their life.

J. Allen Petersen, in his book, *The Myth of the Greener Grass*, writes, "If you have a mind through which you think, you'll be tempted through that mind. If you have a body in which you live, you'll be tempted through that body. If you have a social nature by which you enjoy other people, you'll be tempted by other people. If you are a sexual being you'll have sexual temptations."

I have entitled this message, *Indecent Proposal*." I draw my title from a movie made several years ago.

It was the story of a young couple who were in deep financial trouble. Foolishly, in order to get out of their financial trouble, they decided to go to Las Vegas and, hopefully, win enough from gambling to pay off their debts. However, they gambled everything they had and lost it all. A billionaire, played by Robert Redford, noticed the situation and also noticed how beautiful the man's wife was. So, he made an indecent proposal. He offered the young husband one million dollars if the husband would let his wife spend one night with him.

The movie begs some questions: Does everyone have his or her price? Is there anything wrong with taking a little moral detour to find security, pleasure, or satisfaction?

The truth is, each of us face indecent proposals every day. It may not be a sexual proposal, but it is an indecent proposal none the less. A student faces the indecent proposal to cheat. The businessman faces the indecent proposal to take some short-cuts and embezzle from the company.

Here is what I want you to understand: If you accept an indecent proposal in any area, there will always be a loss. There will be the loss of personal integrity. There is also a gain. There will be the gain of shame, guilt, and regret.

Solomon uses Proverbs 5-7 to warn his son about immorality. Today, in our culture, the playing field is level when it comes to immoral men and women. There are dangers on both sides of the gender fence, and therefore the warnings of Proverbs should be interpreted and applied to men and women.

Although the truths of Proverbs were written 3,000 years ago, the truths are timeless. And since there is nothing new under the sun regarding immorality, Proverbs remains a standard to live by even for our modern age.

I don't have to tell you that our culture is near the point of total saturation when it comes to sex. The cesspool is running over. It seems the media is against sexual purity. Sex gets the ratings. It is the recurring theme in daytime soaps and nighttime interviews. Every day, all day, the message bombards us like pellets from a brainwashing gun: "Get all the sex there is. Don't miss out." "Everybody's doing it" has become a moral guideline. And judging from the statistics, America is listening.

Let me tell you: Immorality always promises more than it can deliver.

Did you know that we are commanded to avoid sexual impurity in nearly every book in the New Testament? Listen to just samplings of what God says about sexual impurity:

- Matthew 5:28: "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."
- Mark 7:21-23: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."
- Romans 13:12-13: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."
- I Corinthians 5:11: "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat."
- I Corinthians 6:13: "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body."
- I Corinthians 6:18: "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body."
- Galatians 5:16: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."
- Galatians 5:19: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,"
- Colossians 3:5-6: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:
- Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."
- Revelation 21:8: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."
- Ephesians 5:3-4: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks."

If there is a single passage in the Bible that captures God's standard for sexual purity, this is it. God holds each of us responsible for how we look at the opposite sex and for what goes on in our hearts and minds.

Remember that God's standard is to avoid every hint of sexual immorality in our lives. If we followed God's standard, we would never be in sexual bondage.

I. The Discretion We Must Follow

The word "discretion" means "caution." Solomon describes an experience he had one evening as he was sitting by his window. He

looked out through the window and what did he see? Proverbs 7:6-9.

He saw a young man who was ripe for temptation. He was doing something that was going to make it easy for him to sin. He was at the wrong PLACE. Whether deliberately or carelessly, he was walking near the home of a seductive woman. In Proverbs 7:15, we are told that they were evidently acquainted with each other. He put himself in the way of temptation and sin. Perhaps he had secretly admired her and, though he knew she was a married woman, he had developed feelings for her and so he thought, maybe, he would be able to see her.

He had the wrong DESIRE. He came as close to the edge of temptation and sin as possible without actually falling into sin. Romans 13:14 says that we are not to make any provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lust thereof.

Notice that it was while he was fooling around with temptation to see how close he could get to sinning without sinning that he was defeated. I've had young people who have yielded to sexual temptation say something like this to me: "I thought I knew how far to go before I said, 'We'd better stop,' but we got so far and we couldn't stop." Many an unwed mother knew when to stop, but they didn't stop and their life was changed forever.

Many a young lady could have stamped on her character: "Slightly soiled – greatly reduced in price." Girls, remember this when some boy wants you to sacrifice your purity on the altar of his lust.

Young people, you need to know that the sexual ignition switch is different for males and females.

Males receive sexual gratification through the eyes. Males have a visual ignition switch when it comes to viewing the female anatomy. Women seldom understand this because they are not sexually stimulated in this way. Females are stimulated by touch and relationships.

Ladies, that's why the Bible says, "Let the women adorn themselves in modest apparel" (1 Timothy 2:9) – to those women who profess godliness. What does that mean? Whatever style of dress you prefer, it ought to cover the subject – well!

Men, let Job be our example: Read Job 31:1, 9-11 (Living Bible).

Let me say a word to married couples. The grass will often seem greener in the other pasture, and the more you look in the other pasture, it will appear greener and greener.

Stephen Arterburn, in his book, Every Man's Battle, gives some good counsel: "Learn to starve your eyes of sexual gratification that comes from outside your marriage and eliminate 'junk sex.' Also, learn to 'bounce your eyes.' If you see something inappropriate from the opposite sex, turn your eyes quickly from it. Learn to bounce your eyes quickly from the image. The longer you focus on that which is inappropriate, the more that image becomes fixed in your mind."

Did you know you can train your eyes what to look at and what not to look at or focus on? If you don't, you'll fall into sexual temptation. It may not be physical impurity, but it will be mental impurity. Jesus said that whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her in his heart.

Notice her words in Proverbs 5:3-4. It is her words, not her physical attractiveness, that pose the greatest danger. Her flattery is designed to inflate his ego and signal her availability, opening the way for him to turn his thoughts into action.

It works the other way, too. Ladies, if you confide in a man that is not your husband, that your husband doesn't give you enough attention or if you do not communicate with your husband, he knows that you are an easy target and he will tell you what you want to hear. Most affairs don't start because of the way a person looks, but because someone is willing to listen and respond the way you wish your mate would.

Notice her aggressiveness in Proverbs 7:13.

Don't miss Proverbs 7:14-15. She has been to church and appears to be religious and invites the man to join her in a meal from the meat left over from her peace offering sacrifice. There is no telling how many pastors and other church leaders have been caught up in affairs because of spiritual counseling or church friendships. Satan likes nothing better than to bring folks down by using the Church. That's why when I counsel someone of the opposite sex, I do so with my wife present.

Then she says that she had everything prepared for love and promises that they will not be found out, because her husband is out of town and will not be back for a long time. (Proverbs 7:16-22).

II. The Damage We Will Suffer

The consequences of sexual impurity will surely come — Proverbs 7:22-23.

- He is like an ox being led to the slaughter, totally unaware of the fate that will soon strike.
- Like a deer stepping into a baited field, blind to the danger until the moment the arrow pierces his liver, ending his life.
- Like a bird darting into a net, trapped before he realizes he cannot escape.

You will lose strength — Proverbs 5:9a

You will lose your wealth — Proverbs 5:9b

Everything you have built and worked for will be gone: years of marriage wasted, parenting wasted, business wasted, reputation wasted. Someone else will have your wealth — your wife's lawyer will get rich. You will lose your house and all the work you put into it. You will lose your mate to someone else.

You will answer to God for your sin — Proverbs 5:21-22

A Presumptuous Sin

This is the Price I must Pay
Just for one Riotous Day,
Years of Regret and Grief
And sorrow without Relief.
Suffer it, I will my friend,
Suffer it until the end.
Until the grave shall give release.

But often the grave will not give release, for after the grave, God's judgment.

III. The Design We Should Follow Proverbs 5:15-18

God's design for a full, satisfying, enriching life is a godly marriage.

Proverbs 18:22. Our Lord said that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18) and “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9) for mutual support, comfort, helpfulness. Godliness in marriage is found when a couple marries “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39), for we are not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

God made man and He knows the strength of the sex drive, so God made provisions for it in marriage and marriage alone.

When a husband and wife love each other completely and allow God to be Lord of their home, where they live out the fruit of the Spirit daily before each other, their home will become the closest thing to Heaven on earth. You become best friends in the Lord.

Is your heart pure? Nothing will be right unless you are right with God in your heart.

THE DIGNITY OF WORK

Proverbs 10:4

Someone said, I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.”

There is dignity in work. Some of the most miserable people I know are those who cannot work. They used to work, but now they are confined to a bed or in a nursing home, and they would give anything if they could work again. The other side of the coin is folks

that CAN work, but WON'T work.

A young couple got married and left on their honeymoon. When they got back the bride immediately called her mother. "Well," asked her mother, "how was the honeymoon?" "Oh, Mama," she replied, the honeymoon was wonderful. It was so romantic." Suddenly, she burst out crying. "But, Mama, as soon as we returned, Sam started using the most horrible language. He said things I've never heard before! I mean they were all those four-letter words. You've got to come get me and take me home. Please, Mama!!"

"Darling," her mother said. "Calm down! Tell Mama what could be so awful? What four-letter words did he use?" Please don't make me tell you, Mama," wept the daughter. "I'm so embarrassed. They're just too awful! Come get me, please!" "Darling Baby, you must tell me what has you so upset. Tell Mama those horrible four-letter words." Still sobbing, the bride said, "Oh, Mama, they were words like Dust, Wash, Iron, Cook." "I'll pick you up in ten minutes," said the mother.

Sloth or laziness is counted as one of the seven deadly sins. I want us to see what Solomon says about work and labor.

Proverbs 14:23: "In all labor there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury."

Employees in a Detroit business office found this "Important Notice" on their bulletin board:

"The management regrets that it has come to their attention that workers are dying on the job and failing to fall down. This practice must stop as it becomes impossible to distinguish between death and the natural movement of the staff. Any employee found dead in an upright position will be dropped from the pay roll."

Do you do your best at work? Do you produce quality work? Pursuing excellence is a rare commodity in today's workforce.

Sadly, Christians are often guilty of shoddy work. It is Christians who feel that because they work for fellow Christians they have special privileges. They can take longer breaks, stop work early, take personal time during work time. Such brings reproach on the name of Christ and needs to stop.

Jesus was a carpenter. Do you think He cut corners on quality or passed poor work off as just business? Of course not!

"Preacher, why don't you preach on something spiritual instead of talking about our work ethic?"

The world doesn't see you at church, but they do see you at work. That's why God's Word has so much to say about hard work.

Colossians 3:23-24: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord. Christ."

Work is not a curse because of Adam's fall. Before sin entered the human race, Adam was assigned the task of cultivating the Garden (Genesis 2:15).

Work is a PRIVILEGE. It is an answer to boredom. Work is a place to invest one's energy and provide for our physical needs.

Solomon calls a person who will not work a "sluggard." It is his favorite term for a lazy person and is found 17 times in Proverbs.

I. The Signs of Laziness

A. A lazy man loves his bed.

- Proverbs 19:15: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger."
- Proverbs 20:13: "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread."
- Proverbs 26:14: "As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doeth the slothful upon his bed."
- Proverbs 6:9-11: "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; So shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man."

The lazy man is a whiner. Every day they repeat the complainer's creed, which goes something like this: "What time is it?" "It's not my job." "They don't pay me enough for this."

"Is it five o'clock yet?"

The lazy man has trouble getting started. The couch potato's motto is: "Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow."

I've dusted my desk, and I've wound up my watch.

I've tightened, then loosened, my belt by a notch.

I've polished my glasses, removed a small speck.

I've looked at my check stubs to check on a check.

I've searched for my tweezers and pulled out a hair.

I've opened a window to let in some air.

I've straightened a picture; I've swatted a fly.

I've shifted the tie clip that clips down my tie.

I've sharpened each pencil 'til sharp as a dirk.

I've run out of reasons for not starting to work.

B. A lazy man won't take advantage of his opportunities.

Often folks come by the church looking for handouts. They all have sad stories: My car broke down, my wife and children are sick. If we offer to help by offering them a job for minimum wage, you hear something like, "Oh, I don't work for minimum wage." Yet, they say they are hungry or they need food for the baby!

C. They dream big, but refuse to work for their dreams to become a reality.

- Proverbs 13:4: "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."
- Proverbs 21:25-26: "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labor. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not."

A lazy man wants a nice house or a nice car, but refuses to work for it.

D. A lazy man makes silly excuses for not working.

- Proverbs 22:13: "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets."

Ben Franklin said, "I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else." A lazy man had rather make excuses than make a living.

Ask a lazy man why he didn't keep his job and he'll say, "The hours were too long;" "The work was too hard;" "The pay was too little;" "The people were too demanding;" "They didn't appreciate me;" "It was too hot, or too cold, or too wet, or too dry."

The problem is that a lazy man begins to believe his own excuses.

- Proverbs 26:16: "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."

E. The lazy man is a quitter. He starts a job but never finishes it.

- Proverbs 12:27: "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious."
- Proverbs 26:15: "The sluggard hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth."

F. A lazy man has a life of hardship of his own making. The lazy man only does a half-shod job; just enough to get by.

II. The Shame of Laziness

Why is laziness shameful? Because the lazy man not only hurts himself, he hurts others. He has a negative effect upon society, family, co-workers, and God.

1. A lazy man represents wasted Talent Proverbs 18:9

God gives everyone gifts, but the lazy man wastes what God has given him. He doesn't simply hold others back, he destroys morale, motivation, and spirit because everyone must do more to compensate for his negative influence. He turns profit into loss through slow productivity. It would be better to be short-handed than to hire a sluggard (Proverbs 19:26 – "as smoke irritates the eyes, a lazy man irritates those who work with him.")

2. A lazy man will waste Treasures Proverbs 24:30-31

The lazy man doesn't take care of what he has – his house, his car, or his equipment – Ecclesiastes 10:18.

Look at a man's yard or a ladies house-keeping and you will learn a lot about their self-motivation.

3. A lazy man will waste Time Proverbs 24:33-34

The lazy man wakes up one day and realized he has wasted his life. He has nothing to show for his life and may now have to live off the generosity of others.

Laziness travels so slowly that poverty overtakes it.

III. The Solution to Laziness Proverbs 6:6-8

(Notice the work ethic of the ant)

A. The Ant is a Faithful Worker

Watch a colony of ants. I don't know if ants sleep, but if they do, you would never know it. They are able to carry many times their weight. They are not afraid of hard work. They move back and forth, clearing the way and doing their job. They need no overseer, no supervisor, no prodding. They take advantage of every moment God gives them.

B. The Ant is a Focused Worker

Ants have two main tasks: Moving dirt and finding food.

C. The Ant is a Fruitful Worker

They store up their food supply.

There is one work that we cannot do. Jesus has already finished and completed the task of salvation. It is "not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."

GOSSIP IS EAR POLLUTION

Proverbs 11:13; 13:3; 18:8; 20:19; 21:23; 26:20-28

The Book of Proverbs has a lot to say about what we say. Over 150 times in the Book of Proverbs, Proverbs refers to our lips, our mouth, and our tongue. One of the central issues of the Book of Proverbs is how we use our tongue.

- Proverbs 11:3: "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of of transgressors shall destroy them."
- Proverbs 13:3: "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."
- Proverbs 18:8: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly."
- Proverbs 20:19: "He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips."

Notice that Solomon addresses the male gender. We talk about women who are gossips, but men can hold their own. "He that flattereth with his lip" is not talking about someone who is complementary; it is not talking about someone who says nice things; it is talking about someone who is distorting the issue; always blowing things out of proportion.

- Proverbs 26:20-28: "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth disassembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abomination in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him. A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it: and a flattering mouth worketh ruin."

A talebearer's tongue is always busy at work, prying into other people's business, diving into family matters, searching out their secrets, meddling in their concerns. They injure and kill the name and reputations of others.

Gossip is a serious problem – even among Christians. Someone has said that the fastest form of communication is the Baptist Grapevine!

James says that "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity ... and is set on fire of hell. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

Words have a way of spreading like a fire on a windy day ... and, we are prone to believe what we hear – true or not.

Gossip is a very allusive sin. I know that you probably know of someone who is a gossip; and I think I know of some gossips. It's amazing to me that some folks have the scoop on everything that's going on; or they make it their business to know the business of everyone else.

I say gossip is an allusive sin because I know a lot of folks who know OTHERS who are gossips, but THEY are not gossips.

Gossip is a strange, allusive sin, and, yet, it may be one of the most Prevalent sins in our church today.

It's a sin that we make light of; we make jokes about; we make fun of; and we act as if there is nothing wrong with gossip; even when it's talk that hurts and destroys others.

Solomon talks very pointedly about the problem of gossip.

The Presentation of Gossip

What is gossip in the first place?

The dictionary would define gossip like this: "Idle talk; to reveal personal secrets; to reveal things that you know; the telling what you should not in a group; to reveal things to people who are not part of the problem and who cannot be part of the solution and have no business knowing about it in the first place; revealing things to others – things that should not be revealed."

Let me show you what you will find in most gossip:

1. Most, if not all, gossip will have some element of untruth in it.
2. It is easier to repeat what you hear than to find out the truth about a matter.
3. We tend to listen more about the failures, the troubles, and the sufferings of a person than we do about the good things and things that should cause us to rejoice with the person or celebrate good with them.
4. Sometimes gossip among Christians is prefaced by spiritually sounding words: "I want you to pray with me about ..." and we share something that should never be repeated or shared.

Now, let me share some characteristics of gossip from the Bible:

1. Gossip is always Sensational Proverbs 26:22

The NASB translates the verse: "The words of a whisperer (gossip) are like dainty morsels" (something sweet in the mouth).

That is why most of the time in the Book of Proverbs, the word "gossip" is translated by the word "talebearer." It is taking the story; taking the tale and blowing it up, making it bigger than it really is and adding spice to what is being told.

The person telling the tale has no need nor right to pass it on, but they do.

- Proverbs 18:8: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly."

Solomon adds that a gossip also has an insatiable appetite to hear gossip. They eagerly swallow every dainty morsel. Like tasty food being digested, gossiped news is assimilated in the inner most parts by the eager listeners. The gossip is treasured up in the memory, retained, and ready to be used as the opportunity presents itself. Both the one who spreads the gossip and the one who willfully listens to gossip is equally guilty.

2. Gossip is always Slanted

There was a certain man who didn't like his pastor and wanted to see him run off. Not knowing exactly how to go about running the pastor off, he started a simply questioning campaign. He would get with an individual or with a group and he would raise this question over and over: "Things are not really going right down at the church, are they?" Well, things can always be better in a church. The man would ask the question with a gentle focus on the pastor. Finally, the pastor had to resign, and it was all because of this man. Things may not have been going right, but the man certainly didn't help anything.

Nobody's Friend

My name is Gossip. I have no respect for justice. I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives. I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age. The more I'm quoted, the more I'm believed. I flourish at every level of society. My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face. To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become. I am nobody's friend. Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same. I topple governments and wreck marriages. I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartache and indigestion. I spawn suspicion and generate grief. I make innocent people cry in their pillows. Even my name hisses. I am called "gossip." Office gossip. Shop gossip. Telephone gossip. Church gossip. I make headlines and headaches. Before you repeat a story, ask yourself, "Is it true?"; "Is it fair?"; "Is it necessary?" If not – SHUT UP!

3. Gossip is always Secretive Proverbs 11:13

Notice: "A talebearer reveals secrets." Gossip is the abuse of privileged information.

There are things that I know and I know to be true that I would never tell. And there are things that you know to be true that, if you are a person of a faithful spirit, you will keep to yourself.

I've heard folks say, "Well, I'd tell him the same thing to his face." Well, go and talk to him about it; go and talk to her about it, but don't go spread it all over town; don't go spread it all over church! "A talebearer reveals secrets."

4. Gossip Stirs up and Sows Strife Proverbs 16:28; Proverbs 17:9

"A forward (perverse) man sows strife." He takes pleasure in digging up evil and the chief instrument of mischief is his tongue. He "digs," so he "sows," he "repeats it."

Proverbs 17:9 says if we bear patiently, silently, and conceal something that was done or said against us, we put love into practice, because love covers a multitude of sins. He who conceals a personal injury practices the law of love, but he who uncovers the injury and holds a grudge, causes a breach in friendships and will destroy friendships.

Have you ever heard someone say, "Now, don't repeat this, but ..." "This comes from a reliable source ..." "I'm just trying to inform you."

II. The Participants of Gossip

For gossip to take place, there must be two willing participants.

1. A Loose Tongue

James 3 says that it takes a spiritually mature man to control his tongue.

A man was trying to get his friend to tell him a spicy piece of gossip. He said to him, "Can you keep a secret?" He assured him he could. The man said, "So can I," and he refused to say any more.

2. A Longing, Listening Ear

"Tell me! Give me the scoop! Tell me the low-down!"

Remember: If someone will gossip TO you, they will gossip ABOUT you!

III. The Prevention of Gossip Proverbs 26:20

How can we prevent gossip? Refuse Participation!

Why do we gossip so much?

- Lack of control — we speak before we think.
- Lack of concern — we don't consider what our words will do to others.
- Lack of commitment — commitment to Christ translated into wanting the best for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Someone said that there are three types of gossips:

- The collar button type, who are always popping off.
- The vacuum cleaner type, who are always picking up dirt.
- The Liniment type, who are always rubbing it in.

Gossip is not cute. It is destructive. Before you speak, stop and think!

THE BACKSLIDER

Proverbs 14:4

One of the most frequent accusations from the world of the Church is, "There are too many hypocrites in the Church." The humbling truth is that they are right. Sadly, we often slip from the place we were when God redeemed us. Or, maybe after God saved us, redeemed us, forgave us of our sins, we began to grow in the Lord. Then we slipped back from that closeness and fellowship with the Lord. There was a time when we were closer to the Lord than we are now. We had a greater zeal for the Lord; we were more faithful to read God's Word and communicate with Him in prayer. We had a greater desire to tell others about Him and what He has done for us in our life. We were more sensitive to the slightest sin that may have slipped into our life and were quick to confess it to the Lord and repent of it.

The truth is, many of us were closer to the Lord at one time than we are now. We have "slipped back" or "drifted away" from the Lord. The Bible calls this "backsliding."

About one hundred years ago, a man by the name of Robert Robinson was riding a stagecoach. Another passenger in the coach was humming a verse of the hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." Then the first verse: "Come, Thou Fount of every blessings, Tune my heart to sing Thy grace; Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious

sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above; Praise His name – I'm fixed upon it – name of God's redeeming love."

She asked Robinson what he thought of the hymn. His answer was a strange one. He said, "Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then."

Robinson had been saved at age 19 through the preaching of George Whitfield. Later, he became a preacher, first in a Methodist church; then in a Baptist church; later in the Unitarian church, which denies the deity of Jesus Christ. He became a wandering, miserable, wayward soul!

Robinson failed to heed the words that he himself penned in the third verse of the song:

"O to grace how great a debtor, Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, Bind my wandering heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above."

A pastor was preaching a series of messages on "the Sins of the Saints." One lady scolded him for preaching such a series. She said, "After all, sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the life of other people." He said, "Yes, you are right. It's worse."

Hebrews 2:1, 3a: "We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, LEST WE DRIFT AWAY. How shall we escape (the chastening of God) if we neglect so great a salvation."

The picture is of a ship that was not tied up at the dock and had been allowed to drift past the harbor as the wind blew.

From the beginning of human history, God has had to call His people back to Himself, for they kept drifting away from Him.

- 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."
- Psalm 85:6: "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?"
- James 4:8: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded."
- I John 2:1: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:"

- Jude 1:21: “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Understand that every sin in your life doesn't prove you're backslidden.

- Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Sometimes we are “overtaken” in a fault: or snared by the sin itself.

- Leviticus 4:2: “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them:”

An “unintentional sin” means that one can stray into a sinful situation and be taken by surprise, a sin of ignorance.

I. The Characteristics of Backsliding

What is backsliding anyway?

1. Backsliding is NOT being lost. A lost person cannot backslide because they have never been To Christ and WITH Christ to begin with. A lost person can go deeper into sin, but they can't backslide. You cannot slide from where you have never been.

The word “backslide” means “to move away, to turn back.” The root word means “to sit on the fence;” to sit on the fence spiritually with this world with a lukewarm attitude. It also means “to spiritually cool-off.” A person who was once on fire for the Lord has cooled off. His passion for the Lord is not as full and rich or recognizable as it once was.

In John 15, Jesus says we are to abide in Him. The word “abide” means “to remain closely connected to, to be at home with” (Jesus). You and I determine our heart's condition spiritually. I don't know how close you are to Jesus, but you are as close as you want to be. Remember: you never slide up; you always slide down!

2. Backsliding is often hard to detect. It is easy for us to detect it in the lives of others, but it is hard for us to detect it in our own lives.

His name is not back-runner, nor back-leaper, but backslider. He slides with an easy, effortless motion; softly, quietly, perhaps undetected by himself or anyone else. He drifts like an unanchored boat – yet always losing ground.

3. Notice where backsliding begins: “The backslider IN HEART.” Backsliding is first an inward process. A man need not be a backslider in action to be a backslider. He may keep up appearances, but appearances are often deceptive.

4. Backsliding can go undetected by the backslider. Many folks have drifted away from the Lord and don't realize it or won't admit it. They think they are just fine and dandy. They have justified or rationalized their actions to the point where they truly believe there is nothing wrong in the way they are living.

Samson made this mistake. He lay asleep in Delilah's lap and a man shaved off the seven locks of hair from his head. When Delilah's shouted, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you,” he awoke, shook himself as he had done at other times before going against his enemy, but the Bible says that he did not know the Lord and the power of the Lord had departed from him.

Christians are not the only ones who can backslide. Churches can backslide, also. Paul encouraged the church at Ephesus to

keep her love for Christ strong (Ephesians 3:14-19), but Christ speaks to the same church in Revelation 2:4, 30 years later, and says, "I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love."

II. The Consequences of Backsliding Proverbs 14:14

Now, "he is filled with his own ways." Once it was the Lord's ways, the Lord's delights, the Lord's desires. Now, it is his own ways.

"Filled" means he is now satisfied with getting his own ways. The word can also mean "to be repaid."

His unfaithfulness will come back to pay him unwanted dividends on his disobedience.

Backsliding can happen to God's best saints. David, the man after God's own heart, backslid and tried to hide it for a year before God sent His prophet to say, "David, you are the man." All backsliding is bad, but it is most dangerous when we try to hide it or refuse to admit it and deal with it.

We are told that when Jesus was arrested, that Peter followed his Lord "afar off." The result was that Peter denied the Lord three times

.Backsliding results in loss of joy, loss of peace, loss of a sense of the presence of God, doubts and unconcern for the things of Christ. It will also result in a loss of fellowship with Christ. The Bible and prayer will mean less and less to you. Faithfulness in attending church and worship will lose its meaning and fullness. You won't get as much out of the worship services, but instead of seeing that the problem is yours, you will blame the preacher or the music or the Sunday School teacher for your lack of interest. You will become hard and critical of others. You will become super sensitive and the least little thing will upset you and hurt your feelings. You will hinder the cause of Christ with your attitude and lack of participation and cooperation. You will ignore God's warning – promise: "Whatsoever a man sows, he'll reap."

Every man is free to make his own choices in life, but he is not free to choose the consequences of his choices. Someone said it like this, "You are free to choose your kicks, but not your kick-backs."

III. The Correction for Backsliding

Praise God we can recover from backsliding. We can be forgiven.

Sometimes our backsliding so hurts the cause of Christ that we may not recover our usefulness that we once had for the Lord. Although God has forgiven us, the scars of our sin or unfaithfulness may cause God to chasten us and limit our service or usefulness to Him.

Here is one of the heartbreaking things about backsliding.

Backsliding sometimes makes it hard for others to know the backslider's spiritual condition.

We have all seen folks make decisions for Christ. They profess that they have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord and for a while, they take off like a rocket spiritually. They are involved in everything. They are there every time the doors of the church are open. Then, suddenly, they disappear. You don't see them any more. What happened to them?

Questions are asked about them: "Are they lost or just backslidden?" "Were we wrong about them? We thought they were saved. They sure acted like it. What happened?"

There are at least two possibilities:

1. They may indeed be lost.

- I John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they

- went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

Someone said: "A faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first."

In Matthew 13 Jesus gives a parable about sowing the gospel seed into the hearts of men. Some seed fell by the wayside; some on rocky places; somewhere thorns grew; then others on good soil. Some, Jesus said, sprang up with joy, but the soil was shallow, without much depth and couldn't take root. Others that sprang up were choked by the cares of the world or troubles and could not grow. They made an attempt, maybe a half-hearted attempt, but God demands wholehearted faith and trust. They had the appearance of being saved, but in their heart, there was no wholehearted commitment to Christ.

2. They may be saved, but backslidden Proverbs 24:16

This verse reminded me of those little wobble-wobble toys, — they wobble, but they don't stay down.

Yes, we are going to mess up at times. We'll fail, flub up, fall, but it is what happens after we fail and fall that will determine if we get up and go forward with the Lord.

You can make excuses, waste your life, or you can confess your sin and seek God's forgiveness.

I am convinced that a saved person will come back to the Lord. God will make the backslider miserable until he returns to the Lord. The Lord will use every means to bring the wanderer home. Even if He must leave the ninety and nine to go after the one lost sheep.

David came back to the Lord and so did Samson. It took David at least a year to do so and it took Samson a long time as well. My question is, what if they had not had the time or opportunity to publicly come back to the Lord? We might still wonder if they were saved.

How many have not had the time or opportunity or courage or humility to come back to the Lord? They were really saved, but died before making things right with the Lord, and the question of the family and others is, "Where they really saved?"

I think of the song that makes it personal for us:

"I am satisfied with Jesus,
He has done so much for me.
He has suffered to redeem me.
He has died to set me free.
But the question come to me,
as I think of Calvary,
is my Master satisfied with me?"

THE DESTINY OF AMERICA

Proverbs 14:34

Before Reading the Passage

It was on July 4, 1776, that King George of England wrote down in his personal diary, "Nothing important happened today." Little did he know what did happen that day across the sea in the New World. They did not have the rapid communication in that day as we do today, but it would not be long before he would be shocked at the news that that little band of colonist over there in the New World had declared that they no longer would be subject to him or them, but they would be free.

We celebrate today _____ (this year's date) what they did 226 years ago.

How are we doing as a nation? Two hundred twenty-six years from now, what will people say of us?

- We have made some great advances as a nation, but what about our future?
- Of the 19 great nations that have risen and fallen, all of them stood approximately 200 years — some a little more; some a little less.
- What is the destiny of America?

Read the Passage.

It is God, Himself, who raises up nations and brings down nations.

The greatest issue of our day is not politics or government ... or crime or race relations. The greatest issue for America today is how will we live before our God ... in righteousness or sin?

- "Integrity exalts a nation; evil brings any people low."
- "Godliness exalts a nation, but sin is a people's ruin."
- Devotion to God makes a country strong; avoiding God leaves people weak."

I. The Scope of America

Our nation was built on the principles of the Word of God.

I was pleased to learn that Columbus saw himself, not so much as a sea captain, but as a missionary.

It was the Great Commission that stirred his heart to begin with and his own testimony was that the Holy Spirit prompted him to set sail and he simply followed the leading of the Spirit.

Our forefathers were men of the Word and wanted to build this nation on the principles of the Word of God.

In the winter of 1777-78 George Washington with his little band of soldiers at Valley Forge ... "barefoot and all but naked," knelt in the snow to seek God's leadership and guidance and help. You have seen the picture of Washington praying in the snow.

On June 2, 1787, they were trying to build a constitution for our nation. It was hot and the leaders began to push their little petty views and some started to walk out of the room. It looked like the nation would crumble before it began. Ben Franklin, 81, stood and said, "We need light outside this room. A light that will shine and show us which way to go. Sirs, I have lived a long time and I can tell you, that a nation without God cannot stand." He called the Continental Congress to prayer ... and the constitution was formed.

We could spend the rest of our time looking at our founding fathers and noting what godly men they were, but the thing that bothers me is that our history is being re-written, and our children and grandchildren will never know by reading their history textbooks that our nation was founded by men of God who sought to live by the Word of God.

II. The Slope of America

I call it the slope of America because we are in a fast slide ... we have come a long way ... AWAY from God.

Once the people of America looked TO God; now, it seems, we don't want God in the affairs of our nation.

Let me share a Supreme Court ruling from 1892: The Church of the Holy Trinity vs. The United States

"Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. (Let me remind you this is not from a preacher, but from the highest court in our land. {Reread first sentence.}).

It is impossible that it should be otherwise. And in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian. This is a religious people. This is historically true, from the discovery of this continent to this present hour there is a single voice making this affirmation. We find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth. These and other matters which might be unnoticed, add volume of unofficial declaration to the mass organic utterances, that this is a Christian nation."

I wonder how George Washington and Abe Lincoln would have reacted to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals who said it was unconstitutional for our school children to say the pledge to the flag?

For about 125 years our nation tried to live by the principles of the Word of God. Most of the downward slope has come in my life time.

- 1963 Prayer was removed from our schools.

It was a slap in God's face. We said, "We will not allow our children to bow in submission before God."

- 1973 We legalized abortion, killing babies.

Not because we hated babies and not because babies were a threat to our well-being ... but for two main reasons: to cover our sins and, secondly, we didn't want to take responsibility for our actions. It had nothing to do with the health of the mother ... it had to do with cramping the style of parents who didn't want the responsibility of caring for a baby.

- 1980 We removed the Ten Commandments from our classrooms.

- 1992 Bill Clinton lifted the ban on homosexuals in the military and invited them into the White House.

Now churches are having to buy insurance to protect themselves in fear of offending homosexuals when the sin of homosexuals is preached on. For that reason, many preachers don't have the courage to mention homosexuality in a negative light.

My question is, if we cater to the homosexuals, how long will it be before we're afraid to preach against any sin?

- 1996 Bill Clinton passed the partial birth abortion bill – the killing of a baby as it comes from the womb.

Louis Chiffer said, "Modern man has both feet firmly planted in mid-air."

Here is the sad thing: When each of these things took place, Christians, for the most part, were silent. We said nothing, we did nothing, we let the forces of evil dictate with little objection from us and we will be held accountable.

Song: America Again

III. The Hope for America

While things may be dark, it is not time to give up ... give in ... or give over! The slope can be turned around.

But we must turn back to God!

God is our greatest Ally; He is also our greatest Threat!

We are not going to be destroyed by terrorist WITHOUT, but by our love of sinfulness WITHIN!

Read Psalm 33:12-22

We must begin to follow righteousness and not the path of least resistance.

True story:

Preacher in country church was preaching a funeral. After the funeral the funeral director told the pallbearers to line up with the casket behind the hearse. The guy in front misunderstood and when the preacher got out there, there were six grown men, three on each side of the casket sitting inside the hearse. The preacher said, "What are you doing in there? You're suppose to be behind the hearse."

A voice came from the hearse, "Blue John, I told you we weren't suppose to be in here."

The moral is, follow the crowd and you may end up in a hearse.

We as Christians must participate ... we must join together.

A P wire several years ago: A Greyhound bus driver saw a car on fire down the road. He stopped the bus, tried to get the person in the burning car out. He turned to see the people getting off the bus and called for them to come help him. None did. Some went back to the bus, got their cameras, started taking pictures. The person in the car died – no one would get involved.

When I was growing up there was a slogan: America: Love it or Leave it.

Better: Love it and Lead it.

Love it and Plead for it I Timothy 2

Love it and Bleed for it – not talking about going to war. That may be needful –
but starting now, make a difference by helping to decide
America's destiny.

GRACE FOR GROWING OLD

Proverbs 16:31; Proverbs 20:29

As I begin the message, let me say that I have no personal knowledge of what it means to get old, but I have talked with some who have, and _____ said it would be alright if I shared our conversation.

Someone said that aging is mind over matter: If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Proverbs 16:31 (KJV) uses an old English word to describe aging that we don't use any more. The KJV says, "The hoary head is a crown of glory." The word "hoary head" means "silver-haired head" or the "grey-haired head." It is referring to old age.

Growing older is a natural experience in life. In fact, as we sit here, every one of us is growing older. None of us are growing younger. We are all growing older.

Solomon says that growing older or aging can be a glorious thing. Proverbs 16:31 says, "The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, IF IT IS FOUND IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS." If a godly man grows and matures in the Lord as he is aging, and if he becomes more and more like the Lord Jesus as he is growing older, his grey hair is a crown of glory, shining with all the splendor of royalty. The godly old man is respected for his wisdom and his maturity and his steadfast commitment and faithfulness to his Lord.

But notice Proverbs 20:29. The beauty and glory of the grey head is most likely to be found where the strength and glory of youth has been dedicated to God. The young plant that is stunted and deformed in its youth will usually carry its crookedness throughout its aging process. How sad to see a "graceless" old man, with the white hairs of ungodliness waiting for the wrath that he has treasured up to reach its full ripeness. The world and the church needs both the strength of youth for energy, and the maturity of age for wisdom.

I. The Process of Aging

What is aging, anyway? Someone said that one sign of old age is when your knees buckle, but your belt won't.

Did you know that no matter what your age, somebody thinks you are old. To a grade school child, folks in college are old. To college folks, anybody who is married and has a few children is old.

Solomon has a beautiful way of expressing how old age comes to us – Ecclesiastes 12:1-7.

1. Ecclesiastes 12:2 pictures mental dullness.

"When the clouds do not return after the rain," means that one cloudy mental picture after another comes to you. Have you ever heard anyone say, "I can't remember anything. I must be getting old." You are! Everything seems cloudy in your mind.

2. Ecclesiastes 12:3-7 describe in an allegory terms the physical ailments and limitations

of the aging.

- a. "The keepers of the house tremble."
The hands and legs become shaky and unstable. The head begins to shake and the voice sounds trembly.
- b. "The strong men bow down."
The shoulders begin to droop.
- c. "The grinders cease because they are few."
Our teeth fall out. The older we get the more we have to "gum" our food.

A pastor was visiting an elderly lady from his congregation. As he sat on the couch, he noticed a large bowl of peanuts on the coffee table. "Mind if I have a few?" asked the pastor. "Not at all," the woman replied.

They chatted for an hour, and as the pastor stood to leave, he realized that instead of eating just a few of the peanuts, he had emptied most of the bowl. "I'm really sorry for eating all your peanuts. I just meant to eat a few," said the pastor. "Oh, that's alright," replied the lady. "Ever since I lost my teeth, all I can do is suck the chocolate off of them anyway."
- d. "Those that look through the window grow dim."
Our eyes grow weak and we need to grow longer arms.
- e. "The doors are shut in the street."
Your hearing goes. You ask, "How's that again?" "What did you say? I can't hear you; speak up!"
- f. "The sound of the grinding is low."
Your voice gets weaker.
- g. "One rises at the sound of a bird."
You wake up at the sound of the smallest noise.
- h. "All the daughters of music are brought low."
Your singing voice get weak. You can't hit the notes you once did.
- i. "You are afraid of heights." "And terrors fill the way."
You see possible dangers everywhere.
- j. "The grasshopper is a burden."
The least little thing annoys you.
- k. "Desire fails."
Romance is gone.

We might as well admit it: we are all getting older. Some of us wish it were not so.

And It Was So

God created the mule and told him, "You will be mule, working constantly from dawn to dusk carrying heavy loads on your back. You will eat grass and lack intelligence and you will live for 50 years." The mule answered, "To live like this for 50 years, Lord, is too much. Please give me no more than 20 years."

And it was so.

Then God made the dog and told him, "You will hold vigilance over the dwellings of men to whom you will be his greatest companion. You will eat table scraps and you will live for 25 years." The dog responded and said, "Lord, to live 25 years as a dog is much too much. Please give me no more than 10 years."

And it was so.

Then God created the monkey and told him, "You will be monkey. You will swing from tree to tree, acting like an idiot. You will be funny and you will live for 20 years." And the monkey responded, "Lord, to live for 20 years as a clown in this world is too much. Please, Lord, give me no more than 10 years."

And it was so.

Finally, God created man and told him, "You are man, the only rational being that walks on the earth. You will have intelligence and will use your intelligence to have mastery over all the creatures of the world. You will dominate the earth and you will live for 20 years."

The man responded, "Lord, to live like a man for 20 years is too little. Please, Lord, give me the 30 years the mule refused, and the 15 years the dog refused, and the 10 years the monkey rejected."

And it was so.

And so God made man to live 20 years as a man ... then to marry and to live 30 years as a mule, working and carrying heavy loads on his back ... then he would have children and live 15 years as a dog, guarding the house and eating left-overs from the pantry ... then in his old age, he would live 10 years as a monkey, acting like an idiot to amuse his grandchildren.

Someone else put down what it's like to grow old in a poem. Everyone over fifty can identify in some ways to this little poem.

I Am Fine, Thank You

There is really nothing the matter with me.
I'm just as healthy as can be.
I have arthritis in both of my knees,
And when I talk I speak with a wheeze.
My pulse is weak and my blood is thin,
But I'm awfully well, for the shape I'm in.

Arch supports I have for my feet,
Or I wouldn't be able to walk in the street.
Sleep has denied me night after night,
But every morning I find I'm alright.
My memory is failing, my head's in a spin.
But I'm awfully well, for the shape that I'm in.

How do I know that my youth is all spent?
Well, my get up and go has got up and went,
But I really don't mind when I think with a grin;
of all the grand places my get up has been.

Old age is golden, I've heard it said,
with my ears in the drawer and my teeth in the cup.
My eyes on the table til I wake up.
Ere sleep comes ore me I say to myself,
Is there anything else I should lay on the shelf?

I get up each morning and dust off my wits,
Pick up the paper and read the "obits"
If my name is still missing, I know I'm not dead,
So I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed.

The moral is this, as this tale I unfold,
That for you and me who are growing old
It's better to say "I'm fine" with a grin,
Than to let folks know the shape we're in.

Whether we are young or old, we need to realize that this is the day that God has given us to serve Him.
Philippians 4:11

J. A. Notthington, who died at 92, captured the spirit of Paul when he wrote his own epitaph. And it said:
From the time you are born, til you ride in a hearse,
There is nothing so bad that it might have been worse,
So Smile!

II. The Pleasantries of Aging

There are some good things about growing old. Notice again Proverbs 16:31.

I've heard some older folks say, "Well, I'm just living on borrowed time." Yet, the Bible says that long years are a reward from God for those who find the way of righteousness in Him. Well, does that mean that if someone dies young, that they were not serving the Lord? Not at all! But the principle is this: If you follow the Lord, He will extend your life if you walk in righteousness. He will not only add years to your life, but life to your years.

Senior adults are taking over America. It is called the "Greying of America" by some. In 1900, one in 25 people in America were Senior Adults. Today, one in ten, or over 30 million people, are considered Senior Adults. There are over three times as many Senior Adults than there are college students. And today in America, there are over 12,000 people who are over the age of 100. What a great thing!

III. The Possibilities of Aging

What are the possibilities for us as a church to relate to those who are growing older?

1. There is the opportunity for us to minister to them individually.

The church needs to minister to all age groups. Each group needs to intermingle with the other.

The sweetest, kindest, most faithful and most caring group of people in every church I have pastored have been Senior Adults. Sometimes older folks say, "I know you don't want to be around a bunch of old folks and you had rather be with the young people." Listen, I enjoy being around young people, but older folks have so much wisdom that I can benefit from, and I'm the looser if I don't listen to their wisdom. And So Are You!

2. Senior Adults can provide great leadership.

Sadly, in the average Southern Baptist Church, only six percent of Senior Adults are involved in leadership of any kind.

Let me share two letters:

One lady wrote: "I sometimes feel that I am excess baggage over at the church. I know of other older people who feel the same way. I'm surprised at how many older people get squeezed out of their positions in the church, and it bothers me to no end. They won't squeeze us out if we're efficient, so I work very hard so they won't feel that I can't do my job any more."

A man wrote: "The problem of an older person being pushed out of their jobs in the churches is a critical area and much more extensive than generally believed."

A well run church should have a program for both young and old members. I know that this made quite a few of the old-timers upset. Sometimes the church does not encourage us to come and the church is even cold and cruel at times."

I would say, "Brethren, these things ought not to be!"

3. Some of the greatest achievements of life take place in the Senior Adult years.

- Moses began leading the children of Israel out of bondage at 80.
- Caleb joined Joshua in the Promised land and chose the part of the land with giants in it at 85, and said he could take the land ... And he did!
- Abraham told Sarah, “Honey, sit down. I've got something to tell you.” And he started a family at age 100.
- Listen to Solomon as he came to the close of his life. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Song: Take My Life and Let It Be

MARVELOUS MARRIAGE

Proverbs 18:22; 5:18

Proverbs 5:18 from the Amplified Bible: “Let your fountain of human life be blessed with the rewards of fidelity, and rejoice with the wife of your youth.”

It is always a blessed, beautiful thing to watch a couple live out the truths of these verses – to be married 30 years, 40 years, or 50 years, and to watch as their love grows deeper and stronger through the years.

Last week Paul Harvey announced that his couple of the day had been married 75 years. I thought, what a sight that must be, to watch this couple who had cared for and loved each other for these 75 years.

Now, I must tell you that the greatest potential for Blessings and the greatest potential for Burdens can come in marriage.

1. There is the greatest potential for Blessings in marriage. It is in the marriage that you can experience the greatest sense of happiness love, friendship and oneness with another person.

2. There is also the greatest potential for Burdens in marriage. I have seen in some marriages such great hurt, bitterness, resentment, and even hate between two people who once declared their love for each other.

When you look at the title of my message, “Marvelous Marriage,” it is for some a contradiction in terms.

For one out of ever two marriages end in divorce. One reason is that too many enter into marriage as if it were a 30-day free home trial product and if it doesn't work out, we can get out of it and go on to bigger and better things. If you enter marriage that way – with no deep commitment for each other and for the vows that you took – you most likely will find that marriage and those lives will be shattered.

Even sadder, one half of those who remain married wish they were married to someone else, and when asked they said, “If I had it to do over again, I would not marry the same person again.” Folks, that's getting down pretty low; not too many of us are happy.

Well, preacher, how can you call marriage – Marvelous Marriage?

I've never seen a marriage that didn't start off with great expectations and hopes and dreams. A couple comes to be married and there is such joy and happiness, but, too often, that joy is short lived.

The shortest marriage that I ever heard about took place in Miami, FL, and it made the headlines.

HONEYMOON ENDS AS WIFE STABS HUSBAND TO DEATH

“ 'Three hours after Betty and Charlie Brown spoke their wedding vows to love, honor, and obey, Mrs. Brown stabbed her husband to death,' police say. Mrs. Brown, 33 years old, spent her honeymoon night in jail after being charged with second degree murder in the death of her 49 year old groom. Police said the two were bickering when they were married at the courthouse ceremony Friday. They celebrated their wedding in a bar and the argument continued. 'Three hours after the wedding, Mrs. Brown plunged a 10-inch kitchen knife into her groom's heart,' police said.”

It goes on but I know you don't want to hear all about that. But that's the shortest marriage I've ever known about. But God doesn't

want your marriage to end like that.

I. Pick A Good Mate

That's where it all starts. Now I know some of you are thinking, well, I'm way beyond the picking stage, preacher, – and you are – but there's hope for some who are here, so I want to tell you how you can pick a good mate.

1. Pick someone who is Attractive to you.

Now I'm not just talking about the physical ... we've put too much emphasis on that today anyway.

These girls are going around looking for somebody that's a "Hunk." That's the word they use ... I know what they're talking about. They are looking for somebody that looks like ... me?? No! They're looking for somebody with the three "B's": Build, Brains, Bucks.

And all the boys are going around and they are looking for a "Fox."

Now, that's the mold we're in but, you had better find someone with more attraction than just outward, for real attraction is not outward, but inward.

I had the privilege of knowing the ugliest man that God ever created and put on this earth. You say, I know him too, he goes here at _____ (name of church _____. No, this guy is a super, hurting kind of ugly. He is the only guy I know shaped like a cement mixer ... like a bail of cotton with the middle band busted. I thought ... "That poor fellow, he will never find a wife." Then one day he had a girl with him and when she turned around I thought, "What a pair ... God had created the ugliest woman in the world for him ... And they are attracted to each other."

2. Pick someone who is Compatible with you.

Someone who has the same standards as you do; someone who has the same set of morals that you do; someone who has the same goals that you do; most importantly, someone who has the spiritual desires and character that you have. If you don't, you have already started off with the odds of a happy marriage against you.

Second Corinthians 6:14 says Jesus is to be Lord of his life and Lord of her life and you seek to follow His will together. You must have your priorities in the right place.

You aren't going to change him/her.

II. Stick to God's Plan

There are "Fundamentals" of a Christian marriage:

1. A Christ-Centered Home

Establish and maintain a Christ-Centered home. Everything rests on that foundation.

The more the husband and the wife are personally committed to Christ, the more they will be committed to each other.

Both must make the commitment.

2. Committed Love

- a. Be faithful to each other. God's plan is one for one life – "til death do you part."
Through the good times; through the bad times.

Fidelity is so important, but it goes much deeper than that. It is me putting my mate first – always – even above myself; my mate putting me first in her life – always –

even above herself.

There is not a marriage that can withstand the invasion of an affair and remain the same.

- b. Resist and refuse all outside interferences to your marriage.

Outside forces can come in and eat away at the marriage. That is why God gave the leave/cleave principle. A meddling mother-in-law, or an over forceful father-in-law can ruin a marriage.

Or it could be your job, or friends or some other outside force.

3. Communication

If you don't communicate (correctly) your marriage will disintegrate.

Here's a test on communication. If you answer "Yes" to 7 or more of the 15, you are in trouble:

1. My mate often corrects my statements.
2. My mate challenges things I say.
3. My mate often contradicts what I say and tells me I'm wrong.
4. My mate often interrupts me.
5. My mate talks more rapidly than I and often finishes a statement I've started.
6. My mate tends to over react and get angry so I remain silent on some issues.
7. My mate does not take time to understand what I'm saying.
8. My mate often misquotes me.
9. My mate criticizes my friends, relatives, and/or co-workers.
10. My mate tells others what I have said in private.
11. My mate uses what I say against me.
12. My mate doesn't always take me seriously.
13. My mate pays little attention to me and doesn't listen carefully.
14. My mate sometimes ridicules me or gets sarcastic when I speak.
15. My mate does not spend enough time talking to me.

III. Kick The Habits

Now I know most of you don't have any bad habits, but your mate might; so to help him/her there are some habits you ought to kick.

1. Wives

Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. If anyone knew the bad habits of a wife, it was Solomon.

The number one problem of women: Nagging Proverbs 19:13, 21:9, 19; 25:24.

2. Husbands

- a. Men become cold, inconsiderate, unresponsive, and shut out their wives.

"Men are June when they woo, and December when they wed." Watch at a restaurant: you can tell who is married and who is dating.

- b. Men get angry and have bad tempers.

Either they don't say anything, or they say too much.

Ephesians 4:26-27. Don't build walls through Resentment and Bitterness.

IV. Benedict the Relationship

At the close of the service we have a Benediction which means to place a blessing upon the worshipers as they leave. One of the great needs in marriage is for people to back up and look at the blessings in the relationship.

Find the good, the blessings of God in our mates and our marriage.

It is a rare, rare marriage that I find that each mate has not out-married themselves.

The woman that God has given me – I don't understand why God gave me such a wonderful gift as well as He gave me in her. I am so grateful for her and her love for Christ, and her love for me, and her love for our son.

I see men and women who pick each other to death; who look at all the faults in each other; who go around pointing a finger at each other, gripping and nagging at each other and they never back up and see what a blessing God has given them.

I am reminded of, up in the hills of Kentucky, somebody in the backwoods country got a Sears catalog. Nobody had ever seen such a thing. And they all started looking through there, seeing things they didn't have and they all got upset and irritated because they didn't have more. They were happy until they saw what they did not have.

Some of us don't take the time to see what we do have and the way God has blessed us.

Note Proverbs 18:22. Men, ladies, God has given you an enormous blessing. I wish you would take time to see it in him/her.

God intended for you to have a Marvelous Marriage.

When God began to describe that relationship that we would have with Him, He used that relationship of the Bride and the Bridegroom. You find the sweetest marriage where there is love, trust. That is the way He wants you to know Him.

A CADILLAC MARRIAGE

Proverbs 18:22; Proverbs 24:3-4

If you compared your marriage to a car, what kind of car – SUV, or truck – would you say your marriage is? Look at your mate and ask them what kind of marriage you think you have together (on second thought, maybe you shouldn't do that).

You may be thinking, "Well, my marriage is like an Edsel or Studebaker or VW Bug, or maybe a Mustang." I believe God wants us to have a Cadillac marriage.

Just because you get married doesn't mean you are going to have a Cadillac marriage, even if you get married in a church.

Ann Landers said that "buying a marriage license doesn't guarantee you a good marriage any more than buying a fishing license guarantees you that you're going to catch fish when you go fishing. A license just gives you the legal right to try."

In fact, the tragedy of our day is that there are just as many divorces among church folks as there are among those who never attend church.

How can we have a Cadillac Marriage?

I. You Must Have the Right Foundation Psalm 127:1

It does matter what you build your marital house on.

I heard about a man who was going to build his own house. He laid the foundation, put up the studs, and the roof. He framed it out and put the sheetrock up. He came back a week later and found a big crack above the front door. The man said, "No problem. I'll put some mud on it and paint it well."

The next week, there was another crack and the door wouldn't open. He said, "I'll mud it again, put better paint on it, and a new door on it."

You know, and I know, that until he fixes the foundation, he could have mudded and painted every day until the cows came home, but if he didn't fix the foundation, it would never be right.

God wants us to have a Cadillac marriage and He has given us a Great Instruction Manual. Sadly, too many go into marriage like they go into so many other things in life: "When all else fails, read the instructions!" God is the author and designer of marriage and He knows best how to make marriage what it ought to be.

First, we must build upon the right foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we must use the right materials –

2 Corinthians 6:14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion have light with darkness?"

The Book of Proverbs, as well as other passages of Scripture, spends a lot of time telling us how to pick a mate; telling us what we are to look for in a mate and what characteristics we are to avoid in picking a mate. We often use the reverse order in picking a mate from what the Bible says. The Bible says that we are to look at inward qualities first and then the outward qualities. We often look first at the outward qualities. This is true of the woman and the man.

Proverbs 11:22: "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without direction."

Beauty and attractiveness is to be honored as a gift of God, but, if a man or a woman is without discretion (the ability to make godly and wise decisions or choices; discernment), her beauty is misplaced. All the charms of beauty are lost upon a foolish or empty-headed woman or man. Put a jewel of gold in a pig's snout and it will soon be rooted in the mud and mire. That's no place for a gold jewel. That's the parallel the Bible gives of a beautiful woman or an attractive man who lives an ungodly life in sin's mire.

Proverbs 11:16: "A gracious woman retaineth honor: and strong men retain riches."

A gracious woman is known, not so much for her outward beauty, but by her inward beauty. Outward beauty will fade, but inward beauty will remain and increase. You've heard me say, "If you're 15 and ugly, you can't help it; but if you're 50 and ugly, it's your fault." I've met a lot of women who are beautiful on the outside, but they are really ugly because of what's on the inside. And, I've met a lot of women who are not that attractive on the outside, but they are beautiful because of what's on the inside.

Proverbs 24:3-4: "Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches."

A wife is either a blessing or a curse to her husband. A godly woman is the very soul of the home. She instructs her children by her example as well as her teaching. Who can estimate the worth of a Christian mother?

A godly home is built (ordered, made stable and firm) by wise counsel and conduct of divine truth. Wholesome family relationships exist as the challenges of life are met by godly principles.

Solomon tells us there are some inward qualities we are to avoid in a mate, no matter how attractive their outward appearance may be.

Proverbs 15:17: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

It's better to eat a meal of vegetables where there is love than to eat a ribeye steak where there is contention and bitterness.

Proverbs 17:1: "Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife."

It's better to eat a dried out, stale piece of bread where there is peace and quietness than an elaborate meal where there is fussing.

Proverbs 21:9, 19: "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house. It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman."

It's better to be away from any woman who is nagging, quarrelsome, faultfinding, contentious, stirs up strife and one of vexation (brings something up over and over again in anger).

The same is true of men. It's hard to live with anyone who scolds you, especially in public, or always corrects you, again in public, or one who cannot restrain their tongue.

First Peter 3:4 says that a meek and quiet spirit is of great price in the sight of God. Ladies, that means that a woman who is not bossy, or loud, or argumentative, or always has to be right, or have the last word, is of great price before the Lord. Peter is referring to women who rebel against God's design for man to be the head, so she rebels to submission.

On the other side of this is the godly woman who is a crown and a bright ornament to her family, because she fears the Lord.

II. The Failures in Marriage

A. Sometimes we misunderstand the purpose of marriage.

What is the purpose of marriage? "Well, the purpose of marriage is to make ME happy and to meet MY needs."

Did you know that the Bible never one times says that marriage is designed to make us happy? Now, we ought to be happy. A good, godly, and happy marriage doesn't have as much to do with FINDING the right mate as BEING the right mate.

Don't misunderstand. The mate you pick is very important and will determine what your life on this earth will be like. I think of Abigail (1 Samuel 25). She was married to Nabal. It was most likely an arranged marriage. The Bible tells us Abigail was a beautiful, godly woman, but the Bible also says that Nabal was a fool. He refused to provide for David and his men after David had protected his flocks. David was angry and was about to kill Nabal when Abigail intervened. Not long after that, Nabal died and David married Abigail. Abigail's life was difficult with Nabal, but a blessing with David.

212

God created Eve as a "help meet" to Adam; to complete him and to compliment him. Two are put together so they can help each other become more like Jesus.

B. Sometimes marriages fail because of neglect.

A good, godly marriage must be maintained. It's hard to keep a marriage strong and godly and healthy. How could it not be? You have two sinners living in the same house. Both are sinners who are stubborn and selfish and who both think their way is the right way.

The natural tendency of a marriage, if left to its own, is to drift apart.

The natural tendency of a Cadillac, if not cared for, is deterioration. A Cadillac is a fine automobile, but if you don't take care of it – if you don't change the oil, the filter, the tires – it begins to deteriorate. And that can be costly. It can be a real pain. It's kind of a pay-me-now-or-pay-me-later thing. Once it begins to deteriorate, it's much more costly. Maintaining a marriage may be costly in terms of sacrifice and work and doing the little extras but a divorce is much more costly. Don't neglect your mate.

Charlie Shedd received a letter that could have been written by any of us. Here's what the letter said:

"Jerry and I used to be such good friends, at least, that's the way I remember it, and he says that's the way he remembers it, too; and I think that's the way it was. Before we got married, one of the great things we had going for us was how we could talk about

everything – and I mean everything – our hopes, our hurts, our love for one another, things we liked and things we didn't like.

“So what happened? Well, one thing that happened was three kids. Then there were the neighbors to keep up with, friends to see, and, yes, our jobs. I forgot to mention we both work.

“Jerry's a sales manager for his company. He's really good at it, but he gets tired. I'm a nurse. I'm good at that, too, but I get so tired.

“We come home, and wouldn't we love to just sit down and talk. Wouldn't we love to just sit down and hold hands, share, make love. But, there's dinner to cook, dinner to eat, dinner dishes to clean, meals to plan for tomorrow, the house to straighten up, homework, phone calls. Have you ever counted all the evening interruptions?

“So we fall into bed, Jerry and I. Fall. That's exactly right, we fall, as totally exhausted. 'So what's wrong with the weekends?', you say. Don't mention the weekends, please. Last weekend was a total disaster. I'm sorry to say, it was centered totally in the church. And yet, we can't give up our church. That wouldn't be right for our kids. Plus, we have so many great friends in the church. Only, sometimes I wonder, does our church know how busy we are?

“Yet, I'll tell you, sometimes I could just cry, the way Jerry and I look at each other. It's as if some lonesome part of us was calling out to the other one saying, 'You seem

like a nice person over there. I wish I could know you, I mean, I wish I could know you again.' What if we're dangerously close to becoming strangers? What if we already are?”

This letter could have been from any of us. These were church folks. Strong Christians. Yet, they let their marriage drift apart because of neglect.

III. The Focus of Marriage

A couple who had been married for 60 years were asked by their pastor the secret to their great marriage. The man said, “It's really simple. If the husband's goal is to please his wife and meet her needs, and the wife's goal is to please her husband and meet his needs, they'll have a great marriage.”

Your marriage may not be what it ought to be, but I've got good news: God can fix anything, IF we allow Him to.

I'll tell you this: If it was God's will that you marry on the day you said, “I do” to your mate, it's God's will still. He doesn't make mistakes.

Let me give you five requirements for improving your marriage:

1. Communicate

Allow your spouse plenty of time. Learn the art of really listening.

2. Courtship

Continue to date after you are married. Someone said, “If there was more courting in marriage, there would be fewer marriages in court.” Couples should have a “date night” each week. Husbands, this is your responsibility.

Proverbs 5:18b: “and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.”

3. Compliments

The most effective compliment or praise, is spoken in the presence of others. Always praise in public and correct in private.

Men, compliment your wife's appearance, her dress, her hair. Women need their husbands to compliment their bodies. That's why they take so long to get ready.

Remember, men: Few things can hurt as deeply as being critical of your wife's appearance. Men, treat your wife like a queen, and she will treat you like a king.

Proverbs 16:24: "Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."

4. Confession

Sometimes harsh words are spoken, unkind things done, important dates forgotten.

Confess it. See James 5:16a.

Proverbs 19:11b: "It is to a man's glory to overlook a transgression or an offense."

It is a sign of spiritual maturity, love, grace.

5. Christ

As the man and the woman get closer to Christ, they will get closer to each other.

COOL IT, BROTHER

Proverbs 22:24-25; Pr. 29:22; Pr. 14:29; Pr. 15:18

I heard about two men in a bar who were discussing the difference between irritation and anger. At 2:00 A.M., one friend said to the other, "I'll show you an example of irritation." He dialed a number at random on his cell phone and when the sleepy voice on the other end answered the phone, the man said, "I'd like to speak to Jimmy." The disgruntled man replied as he hung up, "There's no one here named Jimmy."

The friend said, "Now that's irritation." About thirty minutes later, the man hit redial and the same sleepy voice answered, "May I please speak with Jimmy?" The man said, "I told you there's no one here named Jimmy. Now don't call back again." The friend said, "That's aggravation."

Thirty minutes later he told his friend, "Now I'll show you anger," and he hit redial again. When the man answered the friend said, "Hi, this is Jimmy. Have there been any calls for me?"

Do you ever get angry? What does it take to make you angry? Knowing what makes us angry will help us to be alert and on our guard against getting angry.

We live in a hair-trigger society. Marriages, friendships, and individual lives have been ruined because of anger out of control. Men and women are in prison today because they lost their temper for just a few minutes. How they wish they could recall their actions for those few minutes. Actually, one does not lose his temper, he finds it!

Couples have gone through divorce courts because of anger out of control. They wish they could recall words that were spoken, but they cannot. Churches have split because of anger out of control.

We have given names to those who cannot control their anger. We call them Hotheads, Spit-fires. We say he has a short fuse, she flew off the handle, he got hot under the collar, or she blew her stack.

You don't have to go far in the Bible to see anger and temper out of control. In the opening pages of Genesis you find Cain getting angry at his brother, Able, and he killed him. Read on and you'll find Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone, and in anger he threw the tablets of stone off the side of the mountain and broke them because he was angry with the people.

When Jesus chose His disciples, two men who were brothers got angry at one point, and Jesus gave them the nickname, "Sons of Thunder." I've met some of their descendants!

Anger can be destructive. In fact, there is only one letter's difference between Anger and Danger!

It may surprise you to know that not all anger is wrong. In fact, God commands us to get angry at times. You can be Good and Angry. (Ephesians 4:26) The way to be angry and not sin is to be angry at nothing BUT sin.

I. The Definition of Anger

You may not know how to define anger, but you know when you feel it or see it. You become defensive and aggressive about some perceived injustice, mistreatment, or wrong done. You have an internal churning that usually makes you lose control. There may be an outburst of words or actions. You usually find yourself getting loud and raise your voice.

Psychologists tell us that uncontrolled anger is a form of temporary insanity. Anger causes the blood pressure to rise and the heart rate to rise and a chemical imbalance takes place. The flare of anger overrides one's judgment and he says things or does things that he would never consider doing in a calmer moment. A hot-tempered man may think he is defending his honor or proving his strength, but his inability to control his emotions puts his inability to control his emotions on public display. People sometimes use anger as a tool of intimidation to manipulate others. Hot-headed folks make others feel they have to tip-toe around them or they will explode in anger easily.

You never know what a hot-head will do, and neither does the hot-head. Anger out of control is not just a weakness, it is wickedness, but it can be controlled by the Lord.

II. The Devastation of Anger

Anger can ruin your life faster than most anything. And, yet, I know folks that brag about having a quick temper. Believe me, a quick temper is nothing to be proud of.

What can anger do in your life? What can anger lead to?

1. Anger Leads to Stupidity Proverbs 14:17

A person who loses his temper quickly and often tends to lose his common sense. He will say or do stupid things without thinking about what he is doing or saying; and then look stupid or foolish when it's all over.

For example, a man was caught in traffic and couldn't go anywhere. The man behind him honked and honked. The first driver got out of his car and went back to the driver behind him. He opened the door and yelled at him in some abusive, disrespectful language for honking. The second driver simply replied, "Your bumper sticker says, 'Honk if you love Jesus.'" When you and I react or speak without thinking, we end up damaging our testimony. That's why we need to keep a watch on our temper.

Notice Proverbs 29:11: "Many things are opened by mistake, but none so often as the mouth."

Ecclesiastes 3:1-7 says that "there is a time for everything ... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak."

You never regret or wish you could retract words you don't speak!

James says that we need to discipline that "little member" called the tongue. Control of our tongues is a mark of spiritual maturity. Samson got in trouble because he uttered his mind.

A foolish person finds it difficult to keep his mouth shut when he's angry because he wants everyone to know he's upset. This gets him into constant conflicts and arguments, because he prefers talking instead of listening.

Someone has said, "You will make the greatest speech you will ever regret when you are angry."

2. Anger Leads to More Sin Proverbs 29:22

Anger creates strife at home, at work, everywhere. If we don't learn to control our anger, it can ruin all our relationships.

Angry people can stir up the emotions of people and inflame them to the point of hostility and bitterness. It's interesting to note that when you stir things in a pan or pot, you stir the spoon back and forth or in circles. When you think about it, this is what constant anger does to a person. It causes an individual to keep repeating or rehashing in their mind, the faults of others and your grievances against them. I've also found that when something stinks – garbage or manure – the more you stir it, the more it stinks. Uncontrolled anger has a way of stirring up a stink, too.

Anger puts a person in a “fighting” mode. If your home is characterized by a lot of fighting and arguing, then the people in the home are struggling with anger for some reason. It would be a good idea to sit down and find out what is causing the tension.

Notice Proverbs 15:18. An angry person is a trouble-maker; the opposite of a trouble-maker is a peace-maker. Instead of stirring up strife, we need to appease strife. We need to remember that we owe our very salvation to the fact that God is slow to anger.

2 Peter 3:15: “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;”

3. Anger Causes Health Problems

Anger can trigger a heart attack. Men who have problems with anger are three times more likely to be diagnosed with heart disease and five times more likely to suffer a heart attack before age 55 than their cool-headed peers (“Archives of Internal Medicine”, 2002).

What is the opposite of being angry?

Proverbs 17:22: “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”

This means our emotions affect our health, and anger is a deadly emotion in more ways than one.

A merry heart does us good like good medicine, but a broken, brooding spirit of despondency that is always looking on the dark side, eats out our joy and vigor.

4. Anger Leads to Self-destruction Proverbs 19:19

Repeated acts of kindnesses are wasted on ill-natured people. If you rescue him, you'll just have to do it over and over again. He never seems to learn his lesson.

- He loses his friends, because they can't stand to be with him.
- He loses his job, because folks can't stand to work with him.
- He loses his wife, because she can't stand to live with him.
- He loses his children, because they don't respect him.
- He loses his health, because anger tears his body down.

5. Anger Opens the Door to Satan Ephesians 4:26-31

Every time we get angry, we give the Devil a PLACE to work in our lives – through bitterness, resentment, and uncontrolled tongue. When we get angry we say, “Mr. Devil, would you ruin my marriage? Would you cause my kids to resent me? Mr. Devil, would you kill my happiness, ruin my testimony, and make me miserable?” That's what we do when we get angry and give the Devil a place.

If you don't control your anger, it will control you!

6. Anger Will Steal your Spiritual Blessings

When the people of God were going through the wilderness, they ran out of water. In

Exodus 17, God told Moses to strike the rock and water would come from the rock, and he did so. Later, in Numbers 20, the people contended with Moses again because they had no water. This time God instructed Moses to SPEAK to the rock and water would come forth. But in anger Moses STRUCK the rock. Water came forth, but Moses was told that because of his outburst of anger and rebellion, he would not be allowed to go into the Promised Land with the people.

III. The Defusing of Anger

How do we handle anger we feel toward others?

1. Call an Emotional "Time-out" Proverbs 14:29; 16:32

Sometimes the only way to prevent an explosion of anger is to remove yourself from the source of your frustration – move to another room, ask the person on the phone to

call back, ask for time to collect your thoughts. A person who controls his anger demonstrates intelligence, insight, and understanding.

What a man does when he is caught off guard is the best test of what kind of man he is. If there are rats in the basement, you will likely see them when you suddenly turn the light on. The light didn't create the rats, it only prevented them from hiding. In the same way, sudden provocation doesn't make me ill-tempered. It only shows how ill-tempered I am.

The purpose of an emotional time-out is not only to AVOID your anger, but to ANALYZE your anger.

2. Overlook Minor Offenses Proverbs 19:11

This is not denying the offense, but choosing to overlook it. Minor offenses will heal in time and are not worthy worrying about.

There is nothing dishonorable in walking away from a fight that is not worth fighting, and saying, "No, I'm not going to argue." When one will not argue, two cannot argue."

Learn to pick your fights. You don't have to die on every hill. It takes more of a man to walk away from a conflict than to clean someone's plough!

3. Don't Nurse your Anger, Rehearse your Anger, or Disperse your Anger Proverbs 15:1

One morning in Washington, D. C., a young lady darted her compact car from a side street into the flow of traffic immediately in front of a driver, forcing him to slam on his breaks. He avoided hitting her by inches, but he was obviously furious. Within seconds, traffic stopped at a red light and the man leaped from his car and headed angrily toward hers. Clearly, he intended to give her a royal chewing out. Seeing him coming, a very beautiful young lady jumped from her car and ran to meet him with a radiant, big smile on her lovely face! Before he could say a word, she threw her arms around him, hugged him tightly, and planted a passionate kiss right on his lips! Smack! Then she went back to her car and drove away. He looked a little confused and embarrassed, but you know what? He was no longer angry! A soft, tender answer or kiss, does turn away wrath.

Don't associate with angry people Proverbs 22:24-25, 10

Sin is contagious. It is much easier for someone to pull you down than for you to lift someone up. Which is easier, to hold your arms up for an hour, or to let your arms hang down.

Finally, uncontrolled anger is sin. If the sin of uncontrolled anger is in your life, admit it, confess it, and repent of it.

Cool It, Brother!

WATCH WHAT IS EATING YOU

Proverbs 28:13

Before reading the Scripture

We are living in a health-conscious world.

- We are concerned about our weight ... so we jog and ride bikes and cut down on sweets and use “sweet and low.”
- Our blood pressure is high so we cut down on salt.
- We have a pain in our chest, so we check the cholesterol content in everything we eat.

But, it is not so much what you eat as it is what's eating you that determines the quality of your life.

So, Solomon invites us to examine what's eating us.

Read the Passage.

Some of us are being eaten alive – not by some wild beast or by some bacteria which would cause some disease to eat away at our bodies, but we are being eaten alive on the inside by things of our own making.

Solomon gives us four things that may be eating us alive. They are Peace Robbers; Life Disturbers.

I. Buried Sin Proverbs 28:13

It is not a question of whether we have sinned or not (for all have sinned), but what are we going to do with our sin.

So many try to bury their sin.

- Moses tried to bury the Egyptian so his sin wouldn't be known.
- Achan went into Jericho, took of the spoil, and buried it in his tent.
- Adam and Eve – when they sinned, they tried to hide themselves from God.

The person who tries to cover his sin “shall not prosper” or shall not get away with his sin. It begins to eat away at you.

Numbers 32:23 does not mean that your parents will find out what you've done, or your teacher or the police. You sin will find you out. You cannot escape what that sin will do to you.

A man that I had never seen before slipped into a service one night. After the service he wanted to talk about a sin that he had committed over 20 years ago. It was a great sin and affected several folks in the church. It was because of that sin that he stopped coming to church. Then he said, “My first thought every morning is about what I did 20 years ago. My last thoughts at night are about that sin. When I listen to preachers on TV, I am afraid that they will say something about that sin. I can't get away from it!”

God uses several things to open us up – to uncover that buried sin.

1. Our Conscience

The conscience is that red flag that is raised up to say, “that is not good, that is not right.”

“Conscience is that small inner voice that shouts without making a sound.”

But I must tell you: Don't trust your conscience all the time. The conscience can be distorted or seared and become insensitive.

2. God's Word

James says that God's Word is like a mirror. God's mirror exposes us for what we are. That's the reason some don't like to come to church.

The mirror is a truth teller. A lady (Jim's aunt) had been blind for seven years and then had an operation on her eyes. She was horrified when she saw herself for the first time. She went back to Sunday School and was telling them how she felt. They said, "You haven't seen us for seven years. How do we look to you?" She said, "You look as bad as I do."

3. God's Spirit

There are a lot of people that you can turn off or tune out, but not the Holy Spirit.

John 16 says that He will convince us of sin.

- I John 1:9 To confess our sins means to agree with God.
- Proverbs 28:13 and come clean with God.

The Publican and the Pharisee. Both were sinners, but only one admitted it.

II. Burdensome Worry Proverbs 12:25

Heaviness is the word for anxiety or worry. Worry will affect even your countenance. It will, from the inside, burden you down or pull you down.

Do you worry? What do you worry about?

- Paul writes from a prison cell. Philippians 4:5-6: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God."

- I Peter 5:7
- Matthew 6:31-33. Sparrows are colorless and song-less. The grass of the field.

Worry falls into two categories:

- We worry about those things that will never happen.
- We worry about those things we cannot change.

Dr. Charles Mayo of the Mayo Clinic said: "Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, the whole nervous system and it profoundly affects the heart."

Dr. W. C. Alberaz, who is in charge of the clinic that deals with stomach disorders, said: "Eighty percent of stomach disorders that come to the clinic are not organic, but functional. Most of our ills are caused by worry and fear. It is my experience that faith rather than food is more important in the cure of stomach ulcers."

You say, I can't help but worry; yet, Jesus said in a triple promise that He would never leave us.

Hebrews 13:5

III. Broken Relationships Proverbs 14:30

We think of envy as wanting something or some person that we can't have. But the word "envy" here means bitter feelings or wrong feelings against someone because of a break in a relationship. It describes a rip or a tear in a relationship.

The greatest hurt that can come to a person comes as a result of broken relationships – Parent to Child – Mate to Mate – Friend to Friend – Neighbor to Neighbor.

Rottenness of the bone describes a person's decaying attitude on life. It is an inside attitude that affects our outside actions. You can see it – Driving down the road – Shopping in the store – Going into some homes – It will even affect your sleep.

How do you get over that? Forgive!

One of the greatest demonstrations I ever heard of or read about, outside of the Bible, took place in the life of a man named Jacob Deshazzar. He was raised in a Christian home but he himself was not a Christian. Jacob Deshazzar left home, somewhat bitter about Christianity. He was an unbeliever. He went off to fight the big war; was going to fly an airplane and become a pilot for Jimmy Doolittle. As he flew over Japan, his plane was shot down and he was captured by the Japanese.

The weeks that he was in prison turned into months and the months into years. While he was in prison, a POW in Japan, Jacob Deshazzar watched as three of his companions were tortured, cruelly, bitterly tortured and then killed before him. He alone continued to live. There was a man who was in charge of cruelly tormenting and punishing him whose name was Captain Kato. Deshazzar told about how he spent all of his time thinking, "Someday I am going to kill this man, with my own bare hands, I will kill this man." And he lived on with the bitterness within him.

While he was in prison, a fellow prisoner gave him a small little New Testament, and having nothing else to read, he read through this little New Testament. He read through it once; he read through it twice and as he read through it the third time – just reading God's Word – he met the Lord Jesus Christ, and received the Lord Jesus Christ, never to be the same.

The war ended. Jacob Deshazzar got out of the POW camp, came back to the states, and God called him to preach. Beyond his call to preach God called him to missions and they prayed as to where God would have them to go – and God pointed to Japan.

Jacob Deshazzar and his wife even went back to the very place that he had bombed and there he began to share with them the good news of Jesus Christ. One night, Jacob Deshazzar was preaching in a large auditorium, over 2,000 people were there that night and that night he preached on forgiveness, and how we need to forgive because God has forgiven us.

When he had finished preaching that night, he gave the invitation to come and receive Christ and His forgiveness. Out of that huge congregation of over 2,000, scores of people made their way to the front, but only one face stood in front of Jacob Deshazzar, who walked down off of the platform and walked down there to him – this man who had done cruel things to him. This was the man that Jacob Deshazzar had vowed, "One day, with my bare hands, I will kill." He walked from that platform and hugged him and shared forgiveness with him and Captain Kato received Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.

Can you imagine what would happen if that thing that has been eating you up inside would be set aside never to pick it up again.

Dr. S. I. McMillen in *None of These Diseases*, writes:

"The moment I start hating a man, I become his slave. I cannot enjoy my work anymore because he even controls my thoughts. My resentments produce too many stress hormones in my body and I become fatigued after only a few hours' work. The work I formerly enjoyed is now drudgery. Even vacations cease to give me pleasure ... the man I hate hounds me wherever I go. I cannot escape his grasp on my mind.

When the waiter serves me steak with French fries, crisp salad and strawberry shortcake smothered with ice cream, it might as well be stale bread and water. My teeth chew the food and I swallow it, but the man I hate will not permit me to enjoy it ... the man I hate may be miles away from my bedroom, but more cruel than any slave-driver, he whips my thoughts into such a frenzy that my innerspring mattress becomes a rock of torture."

You've got ill will. There is only one answer – forgive.

IV. Backbreaking Fears Proverbs 3:24-26

One of the things that will eat us up inside is fear. Winston Churchill once said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" – but that is really not true.

We have so many fears – Backbreaking Fears – Solomon says you don't have to live in that fear.

One of the great fears of man is death. Hebrews 2:25 says that Christ came to take away the fear of

death.

I don't care how strong you are or how young you are, unless Jesus comes, we must all face death. What are you going to do about it? Only one thing you can do – Jesus is the life giver. He stood before a tomb to say, “I AM ...”

What is it that has been eating You?

THE WAY UP IS DOWN

Proverbs 29:23

Many theologians believe that pride is the “sin of all sins,” for it was pride that changed an angel into the devil (Isaiah 14:12-15). The rallying cry of proud, godless humanity is “Glory to man in the highest.” Because of our corrupt hearts, we tend to be prideful and we shy away from humility. Yet, God hates the proud and honors the humble. God says that pride will bring you low, while humility will raise your honor level.

Most of us are not complimentary of people who are humble. We equate humility with being timid, retiring, or soft. A humble person is regarded as being easy to persuade or push around. But what about the biblical view of humility? Humility is a grace; it cannot be achieved in our own strength. Humility is given to us by God. It is an outgrowth of our relationship with Him.

Because of our sinful, corrupt nature, we learn a basic principle of the Christian life: The way to succeed in this life is to do the opposite of what comes naturally ... to act contrary to our natural inclinations. Examples:

1. Instead of holding to our lives, we should give up our lives.
2. Instead of hating our enemies, we should love them.
3. Instead of retaliating against an offender, we should forgive our offender.

Matthew 20:26-27: “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.”

- The world says, “Look out for number one.” Jesus says, “Look out for others.”
- The world says, “Destroy your opposition.” Jesus says, “love your opposition.”
- The world says, “Hold on to your rights.” Jesus says, “Give up your rights.”
- The world says, “Promote yourself.” Jesus says, “Humble yourselves.”

As Solomon deals with Pride and Humility in the Book of Proverbs, one theme is found: Pride is a prerequisite for failure; humility is the prerequisite for success. God promises that the person who is infected with pride will ultimately fail, while the person who demonstrates humility will ultimately succeed.

The Book of Proverbs gives warnings against pride:

- Proverbs 8:13: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the forward mouth, do I hate.”
- Proverbs 11:2: “When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.”
- Proverbs 15:25: “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.”
- Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”
- Proverbs 16:19: “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.”
- Proverbs 18:12: “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility.”
- Proverbs 29:23: “A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.”

I. The Expressions of Pride

What is pride? Pride is the attitude that credits ourselves with our successes and blames others for our failures. A prideful person believes that every good thing in his life is the result of his own hard work.

He believes that in any conflict he is right and the other person is wrong. He has a large estimation of himself.

Years ago, when Mohammad Ali was the heavyweight boxing champion, he had just been seated in the first-class section of a jumbo jetliner that was preparing for takeoff. The flight attendant came by and politely asked Ali to fasten his seat belt. Ali looked at the woman and said, "Superman don't need no seat belt." That's pride! Without hesitation, the flight attendant replied, "Superman don't need no plane!"

There are four Hebrew words that are translated by the English word "pride;" each of them giving a little different shade of meaning.

1. "Gaah" – Represents that which is lofty and that which is high. The individual who, for example, takes a high seat at a public gathering is exercising pride if he takes that by choice.

Proverbs 27 – Refuse to honk your own horn. Refuse to be your own press agent. Let other people handle that for you. We tend to think that if we don't tell others about our accomplishments, they will go unacknowledged. The truth is that when we try to shine the spotlight on ourselves, we only set ourselves up for humiliation.

Luke 14:8-9: "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him. And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou being with shame to take the lowest room."

Matthew 23:12: "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall be humble himself shall be exalted."

1. "Gavah" – Speaks of arrogance. This conveys the idea of posture more than it does to action. The very way a person walks and the way he holds his head is indicative of the condition of his heart when this word is used. Some folks can strut sitting down! How does God feel about a person of arrogance?

227

Proverbs 6:16-19: These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."

The very first one on God's list of hate is a proud look – the person filled with arrogance. He hates it. There is something utterly repulsive to Him about it.

Why?

Because this kind of pride produces in us ingratitude. We assume that every good thing in our life is the result of OUR giftedness and OUR luck, and we fail to express to God our proper gratitude.

Such ingratitude naturally leads to independence. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we are responsible for our successes, then we come to the conclusion that we really don't need God.

Romans 12:3: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

I Corinthians 4:7: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

2. "Zadown" means "presumptuous." The suggestion is that is a person presumes to do something which God has expressly forbidden in the Word of God, then he is acting in pride and not in humility.

Proverbs 25:5-7: "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness. Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen."

Rather than assuming a place of honor for oneself, it is better to take a position of humility. Those whom the king delights to honor will be brought forward openly. Those who have thought too highly of themselves will be publicly degraded by being asked to move to a lower position.

3. "Rachab" – Pictures one who thinks that he is higher and better than others and his opinion of himself is such that he can ignore the rules and regulations by which other people operate. He may say, in so many words, "You poor, ignorant folk probably need those laws, but I'm in a class by myself and don't need any such rules and regulations."

Chuck Swindoll retells a story about a young man named Walter who was hired by the largest corporation in the world. The director of personnel told Walter that he must begin at the bottom and work his way up the corporate ladder, so Walter began working in the company mail room. Although Walter enjoyed his job, he could not help but fantasize about what it would be like to become president or even the chairman of the board of the world's greatest corporation.

One day while Walter was sorting the mail, he spotted a cockroach in the corner. Instinctively, he went over to step on it, but before he delivered the death blow, he heard a voice crying out, "Don't kill me. I'm Milton the cockroach, and if you will spare my life, I'll grant you all your wishes." Walter correctly surmised that this was a good deal so he allowed Milton to live.

Walter's first wish was to become vice president of the company, and as he had promised, Milton the cockroach granted him his wish. In fact, Milton kept granting all of Walter's wishes until Walter became the chairman of the board of the largest company in the whole world. Walter often gazed out of his office on the top floor of the world's tallest building and mused to himself, "I'm Walter, and I am on top of the world. No one is more important than me."

One day Walter heard footsteps on the roof of the office building, and he went up to investigate who it might be. He discovered a little boy on his knees, praying. "Are you praying to Walter?" he asked. "Oh no, mister, I'm praying to God."

This greatly disturbed Walter, so he returned to his office and summoned Milton the cockroach. "I have one other wish. I want to be like God." Milton granted Walter's wish. The next day Walter was back in the mail room.

II. The Evidences of Humility

Humility doesn't mean having a low opinion of yourself, or to put yourself down, or to look at yourself as unimportant or insignificant.

1. The humble person is happy, and is not threatened by other people.

Proverbs 22:4: "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life."

True humility and respect for the Lord leads a man to riches, honor, and long life."

2. Fullness of life comes through humility.

Fullness of life comes when we give up our right and turn them over to God.

Matthew 16:25: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

3. True humility leads to a disciplined life.

Matthew 25:27-28: "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents."

Gorging one's self on excess sweets makes them sick. If you have too high an opinion of yourself, it will make others sick! Humble men have a disciplined spirit.

4. Humility brings obedience to God.

Proverbs 10:8: "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall."

5. A humble man shows wisdom by listening to counsel.

Proverbs 12:15: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that harkeneth unto counsel is wise."

III. How to Achieve Humility

A. Admit your mistakes Proverbs 28:13

B. Share credit with others I Corinthians 4:7

John Wooden, who served as coach of the UCLA Bruins basketball team, offers good advice:

Talent is God-given, be humble

Fame is man-given, be thankful

Conceit is self-given, be careful

C. Refuse to honk your own horn Proverbs 27:2

Man is a strange creature. When you pat him on the back, it often causes his head to swell.

D. Be willing to give up your rights Matthew 20:28

The perfect example of humility is found in our Lord Jesus. Philippians 2:3-11

THE PROBLEM OF GOSSIP

Gossip is a serious problem ... even among Christians.

All of us have the tendency to listen to gossip and to repeat gossip.

Read Psalm 15

Let me ask you to do something: Take a week to write down all that you hear that is gossip or rumor – don't repeat any of it, but write down any gossip or rumor that could be hurtful to someone.

Let me show you what you will find:

1. Most, if not all, of what you hear will have some element of untruth in it.
2. It is easier to repeat what you hear than it is to find out the truth about a matter.
3. We tend to listen more about the failures, the troubles, and the sufferings of a person than we

do the good things and the things that would cause us to rejoice with the person or celebrate good with them.

4. Sometimes gossip among Christians is prefaced by these spiritual sounding words ... “I want you to pray with me about ...” and we share something that should never be repeated or shared.

Three things I want you to see:

I. The Characteristics of Gossip

A. A gossip is one who spreads slander because his heart is not right.

- Proverbs 10:18: “Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.”

How often have you heard someone say ... “Now don't repeat this but ...” or “this comes from a very reliable source ...” or “I wouldn't lie to you ...” “I'm just trying to inform you.”

Slander is maliciously untrue statements made about someone.

B. A gossip reveals secrets.

Even when information is accurate, one is to avoid talebearing.

- Proverbs 11:13: “A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is a faithful spirit conceals a matter”
- Proverbs 20:19: “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.”

C. A gossip stirs up and sows strife and division.

- Proverbs 10:12: “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking but he who restrains his lips is wise.”
- Proverbs 16:28: “A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates best friends.”
- Proverbs 26:20

D. A gossip is one who repeats a matter.

- Proverbs 17:9: “He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.”

The context makes it clear that the “matter that is repeated is a wrong done” – maybe a wrong done to the one who repeats it. How much better it would be that when a wrong is done against us, we conceal the matter rather than revealing the matter.

- Proverbs 21:28: “A false witness shall perish, But the man who hears him will speak endlessly.

Both the one who spreads the gossip and the one who willfully listens to gossip is guilty.

E. A gossip does evil to his friends.

- Psalm 15:3: “The eyes of the Lord are in every place keeping watch on the evil and the good.”

F. A gossip likes to hear gossip.

- Proverbs 18:8: “The words of a gossip are like tasty morsels and go down into the innermost body.”

Hearing gossip is like eating a tasty morsel. Therefore, like food being digested, gossiped news is assimilated in one's inmost parts (i.e., is retained and remembered).

- Proverbs 26:22

II. The Consequences of Gossip

A. Gossip destroys a reputation.

- Proverbs 11:9: "The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor."

Some suffer years later ... even a whole lifetime ... because someone spoke falsely against them.

- Matthew 5:11-12: Blessed are ye ... say all kinds of evil ... falsely.
- Proverbs 25:8-10

B. Gossip separates friends.

- Proverbs 16:28: "A whisperer separates the best of friends."
- Proverbs 17:9

C. Gossip produces anger.

- Proverbs 25:23: "A backbiting tongue brings forth an angry countenance."

I've heard folks say to someone they've gossiped against, "Well, don't get mad." And I want to say, "Well, what did you expect? You caused them to get mad."

Just as one can predict that the North wind brings rain, a slanderous tongue brings anger.

D. Gossip will not go unpunished.

- Psalm 101:5
- Proverbs 19:5, 9: "A false witness will not go unpunished."
- Proverbs 26:27: "Whoever digs a pit will fall into it." Sin boomerangs!!!

III. The Control of Gossip

I'm going to use the word "desire," and I want each of us to examine our hearts to see what the desire of our heart is.

We can control gossip:

- If there is a desire to protect people.
- Proverbs 10:12: "Hatred stirs up strife; But love covers all sin."
- Proverbs 11:13
- Proverbs 12:23: "A prudent man conceals knowledge; But the heart of fools proclaim foolishness."
- Proverbs 17:9
- I Corinthians 13:7: "Love bears (covers) all things."

1. If there is a desire to forgive.

Is the desire of your heart to point out wrong or to forgive?

- Proverbs 19:11

"A prudent, patient man is not easily upset by people who offend him, in fact he overlooks offenses, knowing that to harbor resentment or attempt revenge only leads to more trouble. Overlooking them is his glory, that is, it is honorable."

2. If there is a desire to know the truth.

- Proverbs 15:7, 14: “The mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.”
- Proverbs 18:15: “The ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

3. If there is a desire to heal.

- Proverbs 12:18 (Heal ... don't hurt.)

4. If there is a desire to know all sides of a matter.

- Proverbs 18:17: “The first one to plead his case seems right until his neighbor comes and examines him.”

5. If there is a desire to be careful.

- Proverbs 10:32

Some folks say, “I just tell it like it is.” Telling the truth is important, but how you tell the truth is just as important.

- Proverbs 15:28: “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer; But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”
- Proverbs 21:23: “Whoso guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.”

6. If there is a desire to love others.

- Leviticus 19:15-18
- John 13:34-35

OUR MOUTHS, OUR LIPS, OUR TONGUES, OUR WORDS

We live in a world of words. They can be used to make things clear or to make things confusing. They can be used to accomplish great things or destroy great things. They can be helpful or hurtful.

- A judge speaks some words and a guilty prisoner is taken to a cell on death row.
- A gossip makes a phone call and a reputation is blemished or perhaps ruined.
- A cynical professor makes a snide remark in class and a student's faith is destroyed.

Sometimes folks say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That is one of the greatest lies of all time. The truth is, words do hurt. Long after our broken bones are mended, we still feel the sting of thoughtless or careless words. For example:

- A cruel nickname others bestowed on you as a child.
- A comment about your appearance you overheard as a child.
- Belittling words spoken by your mate during an argument.

Never underestimate the power of words. Solomon was right: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21). Speech is a matter of life or death. When something has that much power, we ought to use it wisely.

Here's a frightening thought: Every time we open our mouth, we run the risk of sinning. The more we talk, the greater the risk!

The tongue and lips are one of the most frequently mentioned topics in the Book of Proverbs. They are used some 150 times in the Book of Proverbs.

We can summarize what Proverbs teaches about human speech with four important propositions:

- I. Speech is an awesome gift from God.
- II. Speech can be used to do good.
- III. Speech can be used to do evil.
- IV. Only God can help us use speech to do good.

"The plans of the heart belong to man,
but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord."

I. Speech is an Awesome Gift From God

Proverbs 16:1

The ability to speak comes so naturally that we are apt to forget what a miracle it is. When God created our first parents, He gave them the ability to speak and understand words. Made in the image of a God who communicates, human beings have the wonderful gift of speech.

Proverbs 16:1. Man has the ability to think through issues and consider options but his ability to express his thought through words is a gift from God.

God spoke to Adam and gave him instructions about life in the Garden, which he later shared with Eve; they both understood what God told them (Genesis 2:15-17). Adam was able to name the animals (Genesis 2:18-20) and to give a descriptive name to his bride (Genesis 2:22-24).

Satan used words to deceive Eve (Genesis 3:1-5) and Eve used words to persuade Adam to eat (Genesis 2:6). The Garden of Eden was a place of communication because God gave Adam and Eve the ability to understand and use words.

The images used in Proverbs for human speech indicate the value of this divine gift that we not only take for granted, but too often waste and abuse.

1. Wise words are compared to gold and silver

Proverbs 10:20; Pr. 25:11-12

Proverbs 10:20. In Scripture choice silver symbolizes redemption. The speech of the redeemed, righteous man has been purified; cleansed from its impurities and thus has the highest value. Only redeemed lips can speak with authority on the truly important issues of life.

Proverbs 25:11-12. A word "fitly spoken" is like a picture of golden apples (oranges) and set in a frame of beautifully worked silver. There is a beauty in words that are spoken at the right time and under the right circumstances – words spoken at the appropriate time. Sometimes it's a good word. Sometimes it's a word of rebuke. But the words were necessary and they were fitly spoken.

Too many of us have a knack of saying the wrong thing at the right time or the right thing but at the wrong time.

There was a dear saint of God who lived in the country in middle Tennessee years ago who had the reputation for always saying something very nice to the preacher at the end of every morning service. People longed to hear what she had to say, because sometimes they couldn't think of anything good to say about the sermon that they had heard. One time they had a visiting preacher who was the worse any of them had ever heard. They all wondered how in the world the lady could say anything nice about the sermon he had preached. So when she went out she said to him, "Preacher, I want you to know that I did enjoy your sermon, because this morning you had one of the most wonderful texts in Scripture." Now that was a word fitly spoken. If you look hard enough you can find something nice and fitting.

"Earrings of gold" describes the effect of a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.

2. Wise Words are Compared to Refreshing Water

Proverbs 10:11;

Pr. 18:4; Pr. 13:14; Pr. 14:27

Proverbs 10:11. The righteous man utters words of wisdom, comfort, and edification. The picture is of a fountain instead of a well that is vibrant, bubbling with morally strengthening speech. God, Himself, is called the Fountain of Living Waters (Jeremiah 2:13) and the holy man, drawing from this supply, sheds life and health all around.

3. Wise Words are Compared to Nourishing, Health-giving Food

Proverbs 15:4; Pr. 10:21; Pr. 16:24; Pr. 12:18; Pr. 15:4

A wholesome tongue speaks gentle words that help and heal, build up and encourage. It is speech that pours oil on troubled waters to bring peace.

II. Speech Can Be Used to Do Good

No matter what may be wrong with us physically, when the doctor examines us, he or she often says, "Stick out your tongue." A lot is revealed by examining the tongue. The same is true in the Christian life, for the tongue reveals what the heart contains. Matthew 12:34; James 3:10.

Our words can bring value, refreshment, nourishment, and healing to the inner person. How?

1. Our words can bring peace instead of war.

Proverbs 15:1, 18

A soft, gentle, tender response to an angry person usually defuses the situation. It requires two to make a quarrel, and when one keeps his temper and will not be provoked, anger must subside.

I think about the account of Eli and Hannah in I Samuel 1:2. Hannah had no son. She was barren, bitter, and broken. She came to the Temple, prayed in silence to God; her lips moved but no sound came forth. She prayed, "Lord, if You will give me a son, I'll give him back to You."

Eli saw her lips; moving, but heard no sound and he wrongly accused her of being drunk. If she had been some woman I know, she would have pinned his ears back, priest or no priest, and the angry woman would have given Eli a piece of her mind. "Drunk! Who are you to accuse me of being drunk? You have two sons who make themselves vile with women at the Temple door and you accuse me of being drunk?"

But Hannah's soft answer turned away wrath. "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful heart. I have drunk nothing, but poured my soul out before the Lord." Eli's wrath was disarmed. He was ashamed and could have bitten his tongue. Now he says, "Go in peace and may God grant your petition."

Once again, the key issue is the condition of the heart. If there's a war in the heart, then our words will be destructive missiles instead of healing medicines. James 3:14, 17

2. Our words can help restore those who have sinned. Proverbs 25:12; Pr. 28:23; Pr. 10:17

Proverbs 25:12. "Earrings of gold" describes the effect of a wise reprover upon an obedient listening ear. It isn't easy to reprove those who are wrong, and we need to do it in a meek and loving spirit. Galatians 6:1

Proverbs 28:23. Paul asked the Galatians a question: "Am I therefore become our enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16).

While the initial impact of rebuke may sting, reflecting on the rebuke will "afterwards" produce a favorable reception. One who cares for others will rebuke them when necessary in order to help them. This will bring him more appreciation than one who tries to curry favor through flattery. James 5:19

3. Our words can give instruction to those who need it.

Proverbs 15:7; Pr. 16:21

Wisdom and knowledge need to be shared; not buried in one's mind. Every local church is but one generation short of extinction. If we do not teach the next generation the truth of God, they may not have a church.

Whether it's parents teaching their children (Deuteronomy 6:1-13), older women teaching the younger women (Titus 2:3-5), or spiritual leaders in the church teaching the next generation of believers (2 Timothy 2:2), accurate instruction is important to the ongoing of the work of God.

4. Our words can rescue the perishing. Proverbs 14:25; Pr. 24:11-12

While this verse can be applied to our own personal witness for Christ in rescuing the lost, the context is that of a court of law. If my testimony could save an innocent person from death in a capital crime, and I refused to speak, then my silence would be a terrible sin. Whether it's rescuing prisoners from execution or lost sinners from eternal judgment, we can't plead ignorance if we do nothing.

5. Our words can encourage those who are burdened. Proverbs 12:25; Pr. 15:23; Pr. 16:24

Proverbs 12:25. Anxiety and care in the heart bring dejection, depression, and despair. But a right word, a good word can bring gladness, comfort, and encouragement.

Proverbs 15:23. Few things are more satisfying than when one says the right thing at the right time in the right way.

A cartoon portrayed an irate passenger standing at an airline ticket counter. A flight had been canceled and a long line of people were waiting for the next available agent. One pompous businessman who was annoyed by the inconvenience and used to getting special treatment, said to the agent, "Young man, do you know who I am?" The harassed agent turned to his colleague and said, "Fred, do you think you can help this passenger? He's in serious trouble. He doesn't know who he is."

The Royal British Navy has a regulation which reads, "No officer shall speak discouragingly to another officer in the discharge of his duties." We need to practice that regulation in our homes and churches! Each of us needs to be a Barnabas, a "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36-37).

III. Speech Can Be Used to Do Evil

From Satan's speech to Eve in Genesis 3 to the propaganda of the false prophet in the Book of Revelation, the Bible warns us that words can be used to deceive, control, and destroy.

There are many ways to turn words into weapons and damage others. Whether it's political double-talk, seductive advertising, or religious propaganda, today's "spin doctors" know how to manipulate people with words.

James describes the tongue's destructive power and explains the tongue's deceptive potential – James 3:2-12. (See Proverbs 5:1-2; Pr. 10:14; Pr. 18:7; Pr. 21:23.)

There are four kinds of speech that Solomon warns us to avoid if we want to experience true success in life.

A. False Speech

No one has to teach their children to lie; we have to teach them not to lie. Psalm 58:3

I heard about a man and his family who were visiting Washington, D. C., and they wanted to see the White House. He pulled into a gas station and asked the attendant, "Can you tell me how to get to the White House?" The man responded, "Lie a lot!"

1. Lying

God hates lying. Why? Because lying is the very opposite of God's nature – Numbers 23:1; John 14:6; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18.

Satan, on the other hand, is the father of lies. You and I are never any more like the devil than when we lie. John 8:44

Satan's first recorded words in the Bible were a bold-faced lie and he hasn't stopped lying since. When we lie we behave more like a child of Satan than a child of God.

Solomon warns against lying:

- a. Proverbs 4:24 – This is fraudulent, deceitful speech; that which twists, distorts, or misrepresents what is true.
- b. Proverbs 6:12
- c. Proverbs 12:19 – Even the most elaborate fabrication will fail in the end, but truth is consistent and enduring. A lie has no legs! In the end all lies must fail, but nothing will destroy truth. The lie will eventually be exposed.
- d. Proverbs 21:6 – The getting of wealth by fraud and falsehood is like smoke that is blown away by the wind or like a mirage of the desert, which deceives travelers with the hope of cool waters and refreshing shade.

Why do folks lie?

(1) Because we are unfaithful and unreliable.

- Proverbs 14:5 – The faithful man is reliable in his speech; he will not lie; nor will he swerve from the truth by threat or bribe. But a false witness breathes lies. The picture is of one whose very breath is untrustworthy.
- Proverbs 14:25 – A true witness speaks up and saves the person who is in danger of losing his life because of a false witness in a court of law. A false witness misleads the judge of the case and he causes the defendant to be wrongly convicted.
- Proverbs 25:19 – Refers to those who make false promises. To suffer from one of these – either a bad tooth or a foot out of joint – is bad enough, but to suffer both at the same times is intolerable. Each brings gnawing, nagging, crippling pain. A person cannot bite with a broken tooth and he cannot walk with a broken foot. Both let their victim down painfully at the point of need. So does an unfaithful man. His friends think they can trust his promises are sincere, but they promise more than they perform. Sometimes right from the start they have no intention of fulfilling their promises.
- Proverbs 19:5 – The law not only strictly forbade false witness, but it enacted severe penalties against offenders, and they were to receive no pity: "Life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." Sooner or later lies come home to roost.

One of the marks of liars is that they enjoy listening to lies. It's a basic rule of life that the ear hears what the heart loves, so beware of people who have an appetite for gossip and lies.

- Proverbs 17:4 – A liar is always ready to believe a lie. Sometimes a liar even believes his own lies.

(2) We lie because we have hatred in our hearts,

Proverbs 26:24-28

Pr. 26: 24 – This man should not be taken at face value. While his heart is filled with hate, he hides his feelings through honeyed words and a smiling face while all the time plans some deceptive ace to satisfy his wrath.

Pr. 26:25 – When his voice changes to a winning, agreeable tone, put no trust in him, for his heart is filled with “seven abominations” (completely taken over with wickedness in his desire to gain superiority.)

Pr. 26:26 – This man's mask will sooner or later be ripped off.

Pr. 26:27 – A man digs a pit to trap his enemy but falls into the pit himself. Then he rolls a stone toward the top of a hill, intending to send it down upon his enemy. He slips or loses his balance and the stone rolls back on him. The point in both cases is that one's evil intentions toward others will rebound with harm upon the person who plans the evil.

Example: Haman was hung on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai.

Pr. 26:28 – Evil speech has serious potential to harm others.

Lying is serious and God hates it – Proverbs 6:16-19; 12:22

Whatever you gain through lying will not satisfy – Proverbs 20:17.

Initially, gain gotten through lying and deceptive practices seems sweet, something upon which to congratulate yourself, but in the end it leaves you with a mouth full – not of sweetness, but gravel and sand.

2. Flattery

Here's the difference between gossip and flattery: Gossip is saying behind a person's back what you would never say to his face; flattery is saying to his face what you would never say behind his back.

You must be on guard against people who are constantly stroking you verbally – they have a hidden agenda, an ulterior motive, of sorts. Because of our ego, we tend to believe what we hear that's good about ourselves. That's the flatterer's trap!

Proverbs 29:5 – The word for “flattereth” means “to cause to be smooth, slippery.”

Flattery becomes a net, a snare that will trap the neighbor if he believes the flattery.

Whether the flattery is intentional or not, a man who overvalues himself on the basis of flattering words sets himself up for a great fall. A flatterer is no true friend because if the person he flatters listens to such words and believes them, he is self-deceived and doesn't know his own condition.

I heard about a young preacher fresh out of seminary who preached at a new church and really thought he did a great job. After the service a little white-haired lady said to him, “Young man, has anyone ever told you that you are a great preacher?” Trying to be humble,

he said, “No, no one ever has.” Then she said, “Well, where did you get the idea than?” Now, that's more like it.

Proverbs 28:23; Pr. 20:19

3. Bragger

Proverbs 25:14; Pr. 27:2; Galatians 6:3; James 3:5, 14

Proverbs 25:14 – Here's a man who boasts about what he has given or about what he will give, but he only brings disappointment. He is like the dark clouds and rushing wind that promises rain but bring none.

Proverbs 27:2 – Self-praise displays pride. For this reason, Solomon advises that we should not praise ourselves. We should let others recognize the value of our accomplishments and let them praise us. “He who toots his own horn draws attention to his own self.”

A good example of humility is John the Baptist. He was the Lord's first cousin, but he never said so. He was the prophet who broke the silence of 400 years, but he never mentioned that. (Note: John 1:19-23; John 3:30)

B. Divisive Speech (False Speech)

Gossip

Gossip is a serious problem – even among Christians. Someone has said that the fastest form of communication is the Baptist Grapevine!

Words have a way of spreading like a fire on a windy day ... and, we are prone to believe what we hear – true or not.

Winston Churchill was attending an official ceremony in London and there were two men behind him who recognized him and began to whisper behind his back. One of them said, “They say Churchill is quite senile now. Yes, they say he's doing England more harm than good. They say he should step aside and leave the running of the government to younger and more dynamic people.” Churchill turned around and with a loud voice said, “They also say Churchill is quite deaf, but that's not true either!” You never know who's listening.

Let me show you what you will find in most gossip:

1. Most, if not all, of what you hear will have some element of untruth in it.
2. It's easier to repeat what you hear than it is to find out the truth about the matter.
3. We tend to listen more about the failures, the troubles, and the sufferings of a person than we do the good things and the things that would cause us to rejoice with the person or celebrate good with them.
4. Sometimes gossip among Christians is prefaced by these spiritually sounding words, “I want you to pray with me about ...” and we share something that should never be shared.

1. Some Characteristics of Gossip

- a. A gossip is one who spreads slander because his heart is not right – Proverbs 10:18
The word “slander” means “malicious untrue statements made about someone.”

- b. A gossip reveals secrets Proverbs 11:13; Pr. 20:19

Proverbs 11:13 – “A talebearer” is one that you cannot trust to keep anything in confidence. Even if the information is true, one is to avoid talebearing.

The greatest talebearer in the universe – the one that you can trust the least to keep confidence – is Satan. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the accuser of our brethren and he accuses them before God day and night. Although he is a liar and the “father of lies” (John 8:44), he does not go into the presence of God to tell lies about us. It would never do for Satan to go before the throne of the All-knowing God and tell lies about us. Besides, Satan doesn't have to tell lies about us. Sadly, he only needs to tell the truth about us. A talebearer is one who reveals secrets, but a faithful man is one who retains what is committed to him.

Proverbs 20:19 – This blabber cannot keep his mouth shut. He lets out any secret entrusted to him; so be careful what you say to such a person. I have oftentimes been sorry for having spoken, but never for having kept silent.

“When I utter a word, it has dominion over me, but when I utter it not, I have

dominion over it.” “The silent man has his shoulders covered with the garment of security.”

Solomon gives good advice concerning the talebearer: Don't meddle with him. Have nothing to do with him!

- c. A gossip stirs up and sows strife and division Proverbs 16:28; Pr. 26:20-22

Proverbs 16:28 – The ungodly person sows strife or sends forth strife or scatters strife by distorting truth or giving the wrong impression through gossip, slander, spreading rumors and with evil motives to separate friends, turning one against another with malicious words.

Proverbs 26:20-22 – The gossip, who likes to furnish fuel to feed the fire of strife, is like a moral arsonist. When the wood (words) is removed, contentions cease.

- d. A gossip is one who repeats a matter Proverbs 17:9; 21:28

Proverbs 17:9 – The context makes it clear that the “matter” that is repeated is a wrong done – maybe a wrong done to the one who repeats it. If we bear patiently and silently and conceal something that was done or said against us – just let the wrong lie with us and refuse to pass it on to others, we put love into practice, because love covers a multitude of sins.

He who conceals a personal injury practices the law of love, but he who uncovers the injury and holds a grudge, causes a breach in friendships and will destroy friendships.

Proverbs 21:28 – The idea is that the man stops long enough to hear the opinions of others so that he cautiously determines the facts of a matter.

- e. A gossip likes to hear gossip Proverbs 18:8; Pr. 26:22 (a repeat)

The term “wounds” is misleading. The word literally means “to swallow greedily.” It is better translated “dainty morsels.” “Talebearer” is better translated “whisperer.” It is a commentary on man's insatiable appetite to hear gossip that is whispered in his ear. The gossip is tasty to eat; man greedily take it in and eagerly swallows every word. Like tasty food being digested, gossiped news is assimilated in the innermost parts by the eager listeners. The gossip is treasured up in the memory, retained, and ready to be used as the opportunity presents itself. Both the one who spreads the gossip and the one who willfully listens to gossip is equally guilty.

2. Some Consequences of Gossip

- a. Gossip can destroy a reputation Proverbs 11:9; Pr. 25:8-10

Proverbs 11:9 – The word “hypocrite” is better translated “profane” or “godless.” The potential harm that lies and false insinuations has is the destruction of a neighbor. Some may suffer years later, and for a whole lifetime, because someone spoke falsely against them.

Proverbs 25:8-10 – Don't enter hastily into strife of any kind. If you have any quarrel with a neighbor or if you are drawn into a controversy with him, deal with him privately in a friendly manner. Go to him, sit down with him, and try to resolve the problem with him.

Do not bring a third party into the controversy. We may be sorely tempted to cause trouble without tongues, but we should resist the temptation if we can, because we will reap trouble if we can't (Verse 10).

Do not use anything entrusted to you privately by another person to support your cause. Disclosing secrets is a breach of trust and reflects badly upon your character when the one we have betrayed hears that we told something that was shared in

confidence, we will lose a great deal of credit with others.

A man was urged by his friend to share some spicy piece of gossip. He said to him, "Can you keep a secret?" He assured him he could. "So can I," he said, and refused to say any more.

- b. Gossip separates friends Proverbs 16:28; Pr. 17:9

Proverbs 16:28 – Gossiping words have an effect upon friends. The malicious gossip can turn one friend against another.

Proverbs 17:9 – Gossip causes a breach in friendships and alienates the best of friends.

- c. Gossip produces anger Proverbs 25:23

As surely as a rain cloud brings the rain, gossip and slander against another, when found out, produces anger. I've heard folks say to someone they've gossiped against, "Well, don't get mad about it." And I want to say, "Well, what did you expect? You caused them to get mad with your long tongue."

- d. Gossip will not go unpunished Proverbs 19:5, 9; Pr. 26:27

Proverbs 26:27 – Sinful words boomerangs!!!

3. Some Controls for Gossip

- a. We will control our gossip if there is a desire to protect people.

Proverbs 10:12 – Hurt people hurt people. If you love someone who has hurt you, you will not gossip or spread how they have hurt you, but love covers a multitude of sins. "Love is the companion of blindness."

Proverbs 11:13 – A faithful person refuses to bring out into the open what has been told to him in confidence.

Proverbs 12:28 – The righteous person studies through ... thinks through ... weighs carefully his words before he speaks. He exercises restraint and speaks what he knows at the appropriate time.

- b. We will control gossip if there is a desire to forgive. Proverbs 19:11

"A prudent, patient man is not easily upset by people who offend him; in fact he overlooks offenses, knowing that to harbor resentment or attempt revenge only leads to more trouble. Overlooking them is his glory, that is, it is honorable."

- c. We will control gossip if there is a desire to know all sides of a matter Proverbs 18:17

A man can usually make a good case for himself – until someone comes along with the other side of the story and cast a different light on the matter. The wise man listens to both sides of an issue, hears all the facts, and makes a through and complete investigation before making a judgment.

There are three kinds of gossips: The collar button type – always popping off; the vacuum cleaner type – always picking up dirt; the liniment type – always rubbing it in. All three can be hazardous to a person's health.

Why do we gossip so much?

- Sometimes it's because of Lack of Control.
We simply don't pay attention to what we say to others.
We speak before we think.
- At other times, the Lack of Concern .

We don't consider what our words will do to the person's life.

We do not tune in to the other person.

- The problem at other times is Lack of Commitment.

A true commitment to God includes a controlled tongue because on the recognition that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Gossip is not cute. It is destructive. Before you speak, stop and think!

C. Premature Speech Proverbs 18:17; Pr. 25:8

Solomon understood the danger of speaking too quickly or making premature judgments. He advised that if you are the one trying to persuade others to your point of view, allow everyone else to argue his case before you speak. Why? Every lawyer knows it is the final speaker, not the first speaker, who has the advantage. Proverbs 18:17.

Proverbs 25:8 – Why? Because you may not have all the facts or the facts you think you have may be distorted.

William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, offered this word of advice about rash words:

“Silence is wisdom, where speaking is folly, and always safe. Some are so foolish as to interrupt and anticipate those that speak, instead of hearing and thinking before they answer, which is uncivil as well as silly. If thou thinkest twice, before thou speakest once, thou wilt speak twice the better for it.”

D. Unnecessary Speech Proverbs 10:19; Pr. 11:12; Pr. 13:3

Here's an interesting statistic that you can file away for future use. Did you know that the average person speaks between ten thousand and twenty thousand words each day? Those are enough words to fill a small book, and yet the average person does not read one book in a single year. So much output and so little input can lead to empty and often harmful words.

Solomon understood the wisdom of silence. Proverbs 10:19 – “A talkative person will not avoid sin, because talkativeness leads to exaggeration, untruthfulness and unkind words.”

“Speak little, because for one sin which we may commit by keeping silent when we should speak, we commit a hundred by speaking on all occasions.”

Proverbs 17:27-28:

Verse 27: Avoid the temptation to talk without having something worthwhile to say. A talkative person usually betrays his ignorance, but someone who keeps his mouth closed conceals his foolishness and secures the respect of others.

Verse 28: “Were fools silent they would pass for wise.”

James 1:19: “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak ...”

Proverbs 13:3:

- Ecclesiastes 3:7 – There is “a time to keep silence and a time to speak.”
- Psalm 141:3 – “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

IV. Taming the Tongue – Only God Can Help Us Use Speech to do Good

I love the story about the man who walked into the shoe store to try on a pair of shoes. “How do they feel?” asked the clerk. “Well, they feel a bit tight,” replied the customer. The clerk noticed that the tongue of the shoe had slipped into the shoe with his foot. “Try

pulling the tongue out and see how it feels then.” The customer answered, “Well, theyth sthill feelth a little tighth!”

While pulling out our tongues may be the ultimate answer to controlling our speech, let me offer some less painful “tongue tamers” to help control the beast in your mouth.

1. Refrain from any unnecessary words.

Remember, you never have to explain what you don't say.

2. Refuse to criticize anyone until you have talked with him or her personally.

There is a vast difference between correcting someone and criticizing someone. The goal of correction is restoration, while the goal of criticism is condemnation.

The person who is interested in restoration will deal as privately as possible with an offense; the person bent on condemnation will deal as publicly as possible with a transgression.

The corrector works with the precision of a skilled surgeon, while the critic works with the precision of a nuclear explosion.

Proverbs 12:18 – While Solomon advises us to overlook personal offenses as much as possible, there are also times when we must lovingly correct another person. In Matthew 18, Jesus outlines the steps for correction, and the underlying principle behind Jesus' words is: “Deal as privately as possible with the wrongdoer.”

Before you criticize another person, ask yourself, “Have I talked with this person yet?” If not, keep quiet. And before you listen to criticism about someone else, ask the gossip or slanderer, “Have you talked with him?” You will be amazed at how quickly the conversation stops!

– Remember: It takes no size to criticize!

3. Remove all lies, exaggerations and distortions from your speech. Ecclesiastes 4:25

An old Arabian poem gives us three filters through which to screen our words:

If you are tempted to reveal
A tale to you someone has told
About another, make it pass,
Before you speak, three gates of gold.
These narrow gates: First, “Is it true?”
Then, “Is it needful?” In your mind
Give truthful answer. And the next
Is last and narrowest, “Is it kind?”
And if to reach your lips at last
It passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, not fear
What the results of speech may be.

4. Remind yourself of the need to purify your heart.

D. L. Moody once observed, “If a man developed a camera that could photograph the inner-most thoughts of the heart ... he would die of starvation for lack of business.” We don't want folks knowing our innermost thoughts or our secret desires.

Yet there is an instrument capable of revealing those thoughts and desires: the tongue. Our speech is simply an indicator of what we are thinking and what we desire.

- The person consumed with lust tells dirty stories and makes sexual innuendos.
- The person controlled by greed talks incessantly about the stock market.

- The person who spews venomous words is consumed by bitterness.

Matthew 15:11 – Our tongue is like a bucket that reaches down into the well of our heart and brings out what is really there. That is why, ultimately, the only way to change our speech is to change our heart.

5. Remember your accountability to God for your words.

One day you and I will give an account to the Judge of the universe for every word we speak. Matthew 12:36-37.

I don't pretend to understand all that this means, but at least this much is clear: Words that are abusive, misleading, divisive, or simply unnecessary do not drift off into the atmosphere,

never to be heard again. Instead, our words will one day come back for God's careful review. What a powerful incentive to control what we say, to be sure that our words are loving, true, uplifting, wisely chosen, and pleasing to God.

THE HEART

Sometimes when the Bible speaks of the “heart” it is referring to that muscle inside our chest that pumps blood, but most of the time the word “heart,” as it is used in Scripture, refers to the mind, the will, and the emotions of man.

The Hebrew word for heart is “leb” and is related to the feelings, to the will, and to the intellect. The root word means “the innermost feelings of our personality.”

The Greek word for heart, “kardia,” speaks of the source of physical life, but also suggests that the heart is the center and the seat of spiritual life.

The soul or the mind is the seat of thought, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purpose and endeavors.

The Book of Proverbs mentions several types of hearts:

I. The Wise Heart

Proverbs 10:8. The wise man recognizes good advice and accepts it. He is not too proud or conceited to accept directions from others – from his father, his superiors or from God's Divine Law. He is not above learning from others; but at the same time, he makes no display of his wisdom.

The word “prattling” is literally “word-mouthing” – he is one who is always talking. He is wise in his own conceit. He is not affected by any advice. He's too busy running off at the mouth. His talk is his own undoing. He will be chastised by his own lips and his words will literally be thrown down or fall back upon him, and causes him to suffer punishment.

Proverbs 14:33. The wise man is not always blurting out and making a display of his wisdom. He lets wisdom reside within him, quietly still and hidden until there is occasion to use it effectively.

The fool is all too quick to speak his mind, to give forth what he thinks is wise.

Proverbs 15:14. The wise man knows that he knows nothing, and is always seeking to learn more. Like many who was always setting at the feet of Jesus, wanting not only to worship Him, but to learn from Him.

The fool, on the other hand, is always devouring every sill, slanderous, or wicked word that comes his way and then he cannot wait to share it with others.

Proverbs 15:28. The good man deliberates before he speaks, takes time to consider his answer, lest he should say anything false or injurious to his neighbor.

The wicked man “pours out” wicked speech. He follows the impulses of his wicked heart and therefore gives bad advice.

Proverbs 18:15. The wise man is a discerning person who is open to new sources of information. He considers new ideas and increases his knowledge as a result. He continually grows in its knowledge and understanding of matters.

II. The Foolish Heart

Proverbs 12:23. A wise man is careful not to come across as a know-it-all. He knows his knowledge will be more effective if he saves it for the appropriate occasion.

A foolish man cannot help exposing the stupid ideas that arise in his mind, which he considers wisdom.

Proverbs 15:7. The wise man knows when to speak, when to be silent and what to say. He shares what has come out of his experience.

The heart of the fool is not safe. He leads himself and others astray.

III. The Froward Heart

The word is not misspelled. It is not a “Forward” heart, but a “Froward Heart.” The word “froward” means “willful, contrary, or stubborn.”

Proverbs 11:20. It is sobering to realize that our lives are constantly under God's eye. How terrible it would be to hear Him sum up one's life as an abomination.

Proverbs 18:3. A man's foolishness leads him to suffer terrible consequences of his own doing. He blames God for his misfortune. He says, “It's God's fault I'm in this mess or I'm suffering.” The word means to go into a rage against God, blaming Him for our troubles.

IV. The Heart as Related to the Soul or Spiritual Experiences

A. A Backsliden Heart Proverbs 14:14

Backsliding begins or starts in the heart. A person is filled with his own ways; that is, the backslider gets bored with himself. There is nothing so miserable in the world as a man who is out of fellowship with himself.

A backslider doesn't lose his salvation, but he loses his fellowship with God and he is satisfied with himself, caught up in the moment and having no thought for the future.

B. A Proud Heart

Proverbs 16:5. The word “proud” has the basic meaning of “height.” A high heart is an abomination – is disgusting to God.

“Though hand join hand” presents the picture of two people going arm in arm to carry out some evil. He will not go unpunished.

Proverbs 18:12. The man who lifts himself up in pride will be humbled with destruction, while the man who minimizes himself in humility will be lifted up in honor.

John 3:30. There is none greater among men than John the Baptist.

Proverbs 21:4. When a man's spirit is lifted up, all he does is sin, even the breaking up of fallow ground

C. A Sound Heart

Proverbs 14:30. A sound, healthy, controlled heart and spirit is at ease whatever situation it faces.

On the other hand, one filled with strong emotional feelings of envy, jealousy, or bitterness will eat away at you until there is complete destruction.

Proverbs 13:12. You can just keep hoping for something that doesn't come to pass – that will make the heart sick. How much better it is to accept the reality of the situation in which God has placed us.

D. A Heavy Heart

Proverbs 12:25. Care and anxiety will make your spirit stoop or bow down, leaving you in depression.

An encouraging word will gladden you and lift your spirits.

Proverbs 14:13. Laughter cannot mask the heavy heart. When the laughter ends, the grief remains. Sometimes folks who are laughing on the outside are crying on the inside.

E. A Merry Heart

Proverbs 15:13. The countenance usually reflects the attitude of the inward man. A merry heart, one that is filled with joy, will be reflected on the face. The face is the mirror of the soul. There is a parallel work of grief. Sorrow breaks a person's spirit. Joy lifts a person up, filling him so that joy overflows on his face. Grief smites a person, beating him down with sorrow.

Proverbs 15:15. Proverbs 15:13 introduced the effect of the emotions. This verse also gives the impact that emotions have in a person's life. The word "afflicted" indicates one undergoing some personal distress.

The word "merry," when used of the emotions is glad or happy and in his heart has a continual feast, that indicates that all is well with him.

Proverbs 17:22. A cheerful, contented disposition enables a man to resist the attacks of disease and the mind has a powerful influence over the body.

The word "medicine" means "healing" or "relief." "A cheerful heart makes a good dealer and a good reliever."

Glad hearts prolong one's days, but a broken spirit destroys all life and vigor.

F. A Bitter Heart

Proverbs 14:10. Neither our joys nor our sorrows can be wholly shared with another. Not even our best friend can feel either our bitterness or our joy. Even when we try to share our feelings with others, they cannot know the depth of feeling that we experience.

That's why we need to be careful in saying, "I know how you feel." You really don't.

Proverbs 19:3. A foolish man – one with an ungodly attitude – when things go wrong in his life “frets” – storms, rages – against God. He blames God for his woes.

G. A Clean Heart

Proverbs 20:9. The implied answer is “no one can.” No one can pronounce himself morally clean. The heart is cleansed by self-examination and repentance. Only God can cleanse a dirty heart.

GOD'S OVERRULING PROVIDENCE

Proverbs 15:3, 11

When the Bible talks about the Providence of God, it is referring to God as the Guiding Power of the universe.

Providence is the skill or wisdom of preparation for the future. It is providing for future needs by exercising one's foresight.

God is omniscient. He knows the end from the beginning.

When God created the heavens and this earth, He knew how long this world was going to last. He knew what the plants would need to live. He knew what His creatures, of all kinds, would need to survive on this planet until the time He was finished with our planet.

Down through the ages, man has said, “The earth is running out of room; so, there needs to be a control on human population.” or, “The food supply will not last.”

The truth is, God planned it all in advance. He knows what we need and He has provided for it.

The problem is man makes plans without God. He determines he is going to do something, and what he has planned would alter God's providential desires. When that happens, God has to overrule man and his plans.

God's omniscience – the fact that God knows everything – is inseparably related to God's overrule providence.

How does God's overruling providence work?

Proverbs 15:3:

This proverb makes a direct statement about God's omniscience. The first half makes a broad statement that God sees man's actions; the second fills in the details, noting that God sees both evil and good.

Your life and mine is an open book before God. You may think no one knows what you do or say. You may look to the left hand and to the right hand and think nobody is watching you, but God is watching. God sees you!

The word “beholding” means “to lean forward as from a tower or high place and wait.” It is as though God is leaning over the battlements of Heaven surveying the activities of good men and bad men and awaiting the working out of His eventual purposes in their lives.

Proverbs 5:21:

The context is a warning to the young husband who gives in to unfaithfulness to his wife.

Again, God sees all. We do not get away with transgression. It is impossible for any action or attitude or thought to escape God's notice.

The consciousness of that fact is to be a restraining motive in our life.

The Lord not only notes our actions, but He also reflects upon the nature of our actions.

The Lord ponders such things as the amount of Spiritual light we have and the spiritual maturity we have and will use that as a gauge of judging our sine.

The word “ponder” means that God wonders why we act and say what we do. God must get really puzzled by some of the things we do and say.

The fact that God sees all and knows all can either be a comfort or a threat.

Proverbs 15:11:

The word “Hell” is the word “Sheol” – the place where the dead are consigned; the place of departed spirits, whether good or bad.

The word “Destruction” is the word “Abaddon.” IT is the lowest depth of hell, the abyss. The place of destruction ... of the living dead ... of eternal separation.

God's eye penetrates even the most secret corners of the unseen world.

The Lord looks into hell and He looks into hearts. He knows what's going on in both.

Job 26:6

Revelation 9:11. The bottomless pit is a prison house which incarcerates fallen angels.

If God knows the secrets of the world beyond the grave, how much more does He know the secret thoughts of men on earth.

Remember that the overruling providence of God is inseparable related to the sovereign intervention of God in the affairs of men.

I. God's Sovereignty of Purpose Proverbs 16:4

This verse means that God has made everything with good and for a distinct purpose. Nothing is here by chance.

A more literal translation is, “The Lord has made everything for its answer or for its day.”

God did not create the wicked. Man, having a free-will, can reject the gracious purpose of God, that is, that all men should be saved, and render the means of salvation void in their lives.

God allows the wicked to have their day in this world for His own purposes. They serve as a black backdrop against which the righteousness of the righteous shines forth. The wicked also serve to test the righteous, and one day they will allow God to show His holiness in judgment.

“Even the wicked people are fitted for their role in the day of calamity and evil by virtue of their disobedience to the revealed truth of the Word of God.

II. God's Sovereignty Over the Heart Proverbs 21:2

Very few of us feel we are wrong about anything. We are right in our own eyes and heart – man's actions satisfy him.

But the Lord ponders – weights and evaluates the motives behind the actions, taking note of selfishness, pride, anger, and a host of other attitudes that can affect behavior.

III. God's Sovereignty Over the Will of Man Proverbs 19:21

Very closely related to the hearts of men is the will of men.

The “devices” of a man's heart are his plans, ideas, and goals that course through his mind. Man's

devices – plans, ideas, goals – may be shortsighted, but God's purpose for him are certain.

Example: The overruling Providence of God in Relation to Rulers Proverbs 21:1

How does God change the course or direction of a natural stream? Here's a natural brook running across a pasture. A tree falling across it or the cave-in of a bank to dam it may very likely set it along a new course. In exactly the same way, the heart of a king is under the Lord's control. He guides the nation's government so as to give that nation what He decrees best. He may send prosperity and freedom; He may send hardship and slavery. In it all, the king's decision are under the influence of a Sovereign God.

Notice the last three words of that verse: "Whithersoever He will." Whithersoever He will, God is in charge of the governments of the world. He puts up men and He puts men down. He can turn the hearts of the rulers of the world in the direction that He wills, just as He directs the water courses of the world.

See Ezra 6:22. The king had opposed the building of the Temple after the exile, but God had "turned his heart" and allowed them to build the Temple.

256

IV. God's Sovereignty in Relation to Casting Lots Proverbs 16:33

The casting of lots is not something we do today, but it was done in the Old Testament. The lots (black and white stones) were cast into the lap of the High Priest, and decisions were made on the basis of the way the lots fell.

Somebody may say, "That's luck. That's gambling ... spinning the wheel ... tossing coins." No! No! Men cast the lots, but the way the lots fell were determined by the Lord.

AMP Bible: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly of the Lord; even the events that seem accidental are really ordered by Him."

Let me remind you that there are no accidents in the life of the child of God. God is ordering our lives.

Example: God Intervenes in Man's Plans Proverbs 16:9

Have you ever made plans to do something and you were sure you were going to carry them out, but then something changes your mind?

God must smile to Himself with some of the explanations of why we didn't carry out what we planned to do. We give explanations, but God intervenes.

Another example: God Intervenes in Preserving His Word Proverbs 22:12

The word for "knowledge" could just as well be translated by "the Word of God." God intervenes in the affairs of men to preserve His Word so that the Bible, that we hold in our hands, is in a form as pure as though we had the original manuscripts. No other book has been so protected in the face of attacks from evil and ungodly men.

All through history men have tried to destroy the Word of God. Some have ordered the Bibles burned or they have banned the Bible from the people of a nation, but God has preserved it down through history and will continue to do so.

Another example: God's Intervention in Man's Thoughts Proverbs 16:1

The "preparations" of the heart are the organized thoughts of a person. You order your thoughts – you plan what you are going to say – and God causes something entirely different to come from your lips.

New English Bible suggests: "A man orders his thoughts, but the Lord inspires the thoughts he utters."

In the case of Balaam, God overruled his wishes to curse the people of God and instead of uttering cursing, he blessed them.

We have looked at some EXAMPLES of God's overruling providence; now let's look at some EXHORTATIONS concerning His overruling providence.

1. How Can Man Understand His Way?

Proverbs 20:24

Man cannot understand his own way – the paths of life that he ought to take. Our problem is that we don't have a wide enough perspective. We cannot see the end from the beginning, but God can.

Picture a man driving along a narrow country road between rolling hills. He is hedged in on either side. His perspective is limited. He is in unfamiliar territory, he may have no idea where he is going.

Picture another man flying over the same countryside in broad daylight. He can look down and see the motorist. The pilot has a much better idea of his "goings." He can see the road behind and in front of the motorist. The pilot can see every twist and turn of the road. God's perspective is like the pilot's and our perspective is like the motorist's.

Let's follow the one who said that He was "The Way"!

2. Commit Your Works Unto the Lord

Proverbs 16:3

The word "commit" means "to roll." The picture is of you and me rolling our problems, our cares, our troubles, our responsibilities over on the Lord.

If we do this it will not only lighten our load, it will also cause our thoughts and wills to become agreeable to His will.

Here is the secret to success: Recognize the overruling providence of God in the affairs of your life and give way to it.

THE DIFFERENCE CHRIST MAKES

The principle we are going to look at from Proverbs is, "The Difference Christ Makes."

That may sound strange since the story of Christ's redeeming grace is not presented personally until we come to the New Testament, but the Old Testament also shows us the difference between a righteous man and a wicked man.

A righteous man is one who has been touched by God and God has made a difference in everything about his life. The New Testament principle for that truth is 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things are new."

The Book of Proverbs tells us that God makes a difference in the life that He touches.

Proverbs 12:10:

The Living Bible: "A good man is concerned for the welfare of his animals, but even the kindness of godless men is cruel."

Paraphrased edition: "The righteous man careth for his beast, but the wicked man is cruel of heart."

There is a difference. A righteous man has a different kind of heart than the wicked man. A wicked man makes a difference in the way that he treats his beast ... his family ... his children ... and everything he does. There is a difference in the heart and the life of the individual who has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

While God has given dominion over animals to man, He expects that there will be kindness shown to them even while using them for service or for food.

God's mercies are over all His works. He commanded that the rest of the Sabbath should extend to the domestic animals (Exodus 20:10); that man should help the over-burdened beast, even of his enemy (Exodus 23:4-5); that the ox should not be muzzled when he is treading the corn (Deuteronomy 25:4); that the sitting bird should not be taken from her little brood (Deuteronomy 22:6).

When revival broke out in Wales, many of the coal miners were saved. When they went back to the mines, there was such a change in them that it is reported that the ponies that had been pulling the coal cars refused to work. They were not used to kindness. All they had known before were kicks and curses, so when the saved miners spoke to them in kindness and without obscenity and blasphemy, the poor animals didn't know how to respond because they didn't know what was being said to them.

I. There is a Difference in the Saved's Attitude and Actions Toward the Poor

Proverbs 14:21:

The "neighbor" in the first part and the "poor" in the second part both refer to the response to the poor.

When asked who your neighbor was, Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan was the only one who treated the poor man who had been robbed in a godly way.

The merciful spirit in the life of the child of God is proof that our soul is in union with God.

Most of the Mosaic Law was designed to protect the poor:

1. Money loaned to the poor, for instance, was not subject to interest. If to secure a loan, a man's mantle was taken, it had to be returned to him by nightfall if that mantle was all he had to keep himself warm (Exodus 22:25-27).
2. Nobody was to be stingy to the poor on the contrary, the poor were to be dealt with generously (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).
3. At harvest time the gleanings of field and orchard had to be left for the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10).

Proverbs 19:17:

Our attitude toward helping the poor is summed up in the verse.

Living Bible: "When you help the poor you are lending to the Lord – and He pays wonderful interest on your loan."

Have you ever stopped to think that when you have pity on the poor and you help to meet their needs, because you are a believer, you wind up lending it to the Lord?

As a believer, when you expend some of your money to help the poor, don't look upon it as an expenditure. Look upon it as a loan that you are making to God, and you will be surprised at the rate of interest. You won't be sorry that you made a loan like that.

That's the difference Christ makes. Those who do not know the Lord are not always interested in the needs of the poor, except maybe in some impersonal way, but those who know the Lord look upon every appeal as one which should be considered in light of our relationship to the Lord Jesus.

It is a beautiful thought that by showing mercy and pity to the poor we are, as it were, making God our debtor.

Matthew 25:40: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

II. There is a Difference in the Saved's Attitudes and Actions Toward Associates

Proverbs 12:26 American Standard Version:

"The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray."

The phrase "more excellent than his neighbor" means he "directs him in the right way" or "gives good counsel to his friend."

The phrase "the way of the wicked seduceth them" means "causes them to err" or "leads them astray."

Here is the difference between the saved and the lost when it comes to our attitude toward our associates: we are to be a guide to our neighbor ... an example. Their eyes are on you. You don't need to wave a red flag and say, "Watch me as I do this, so you will learn how to do it." They will be looking.

The wicked don't care what their examples are or if they lead their neighbor astray.

III. There's a Difference to the Witness We Give

Proverbs 14:25:

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, He is living in your heart and life, and you are going to be vitally concerned about your witness and its effect on others. You will want your witness to be such that it will be used to deliver souls.

The wicked man doesn't care if his life leads others astray. He says and does whatever comes to his mind without any regard to the negative influence it has on others.

Proverbs 19:11:

Because the believer's influence is important to him, he tries to restrain his anger and overlook insults.

Rather than becoming angry, the merciful man is long-suffering and is known by his patience. He understands angry reaction to a bad situation will only make it worse. It is a real triumph and glory for a man to forgive and to take no notice if injuries or insults that come his way.

When a godly man passes over a transgression, he imitates God Himself.

Micah 7:18: "Who is a God like you? Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?"

IV. There is a Difference in Relation to Faults that are in Others

Proverbs 10:12:

Another rendering: "Hate is always picking a quarrel, but love turns a blind eye to every fault."

Hatred keeps old feelings of revenge alive and seeks opportunities to satisfy that revenge. But love puts aside, forgets, and forgives all offenses.

When the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves turning a blind eye to faults of others. This isn't to say that we condone or overlook the fault in the sense that it doesn't matter and everything is alright. It is simply saying that

the love of God in our hearts doesn't call attention to the faults of others to their detriment.

It doesn't mean we make light of evil or ignore sin, but when love replaces hate, it's amazing how many faults can be overlooked. (That's true in the marital relationship.)

V. Christ Makes a Difference in Friendships

Proverbs 17:17:

A friend is a friend in the world, but a friend is a brother when individuals come to know the Lord Jesus as Savior. Christ does make a difference.

Christ in the heart of an individual causes him to realize that we are all members one with another, members of the Body of Christ; and if one member suffers, then every member suffers with him.

Friends rely upon one another. For this reason, it is wise to make friends with those who have a wholesome influence. True friends act consistently, no matter what circumstances arise.

It's a wonderful thing to have a friend like that. If someone doesn't love you at ALL times, that person is not your friend. It is one of the disappointments of life to have someone profess to love you and be your friend, then when the chips are down, you find he really does not love you after all. He was a Judas Iscariot or an Absalom, who betrayed you.

Jesus ought to make a difference in every part of our life and He ought to make a difference as far as our attitudes and actions toward others are concerned.

DRUNKENNESS:

THE PROBLEM OF INTOXICATING BEVERAGES

Few things have ruined lives, destroyed families, and corrupted our nation more than alcohol.

Now I know none of you would ever touch the stuff, but I wanted to share with you what the Book of Proverbs says about drinking alcoholic beverages so you can help those who do drink.

I heard about a Sunday School teacher who was going to try to teach her class of juniors the harm of drinking alcohol. She brought to class a jar of water and a jar of alcohol. Then she had a can of worms. She dropped a worm in the jar of water and the worm swam around real happily.

Then she dropped a worm in the jar of alcohol and it drew up and died. The teacher asked, "What lesson did we learn here today?" One little boy raised his hand and said, "We learned that if you ever get worms, drink lots of alcohol." Well, that's not the lesson I want us to learn today.

I. Some Regulations Concerning Alcohol

Let me give you some statistics about alcohol:

1. Alcohol is a drug.

Some deny it is a drug, but scientist have clearly classified it as a drug.

Alcohol claims more addicts than any other drug in America.

- a. Alcoholics in America outnumber drug addicts ten to one.
- b. Alcoholic deaths outnumber drug deaths three to one.

2. Alcohol causes more deaths in America than AIDS, cocaine and marijuana combined.

3. Alcohol is an intoxicating beverage.

The word “intoxicate” means “to poison or to have a poisonous effect; to affect the nervous system so as to cause a loss of control.”

4. Seventy-one percent of Americans who drink has doubled in the last 25 years.
5. Seventy-five percent of all high school students drink and the average age for them to begin drinking is 13.
6. One-half of all ordained ministers drink.
7. Forty-eight percent of Baptists drink at some level.
8. Regularly drinking alcohol will reduce one's life span by 10 years.

Yet those who are Christians and drink try to justify their drinking by saying, “Well, Jesus turned water into wine, so it must be alright.”

In the first place, it is blasphemy for a person to use Jesus to justify their carnal desires and appetites to drink alcoholic beverages. Then, too, wine in Jesus' day was made from grain or grapes and was one part wine and four parts water. It was not used to get intoxicated.

The summery verse in Proverbs on intoxicating drink is Proverbs 20:1.

The Bible actually speaks of only three drinks: wine, strong drink and mixed wine (usually the product of adding spices to wine).

Proverbs 20:1

“Wine” means “fermented wine” – the intoxicating beverage of that day.

“Strong drink” means “an intense alcoholic drink.” We have no light concerning this other than fermented wine.

Their Effects:

“Mocker” literally means “to make mouths at; to make fun of,” as children make faces at other children when they want to tease them or hurt their feelings.

The drunk can expect to be mocked. The drunkard is laughed at because drunks often make themselves ridiculous.

The words “strong drink” means “to be agitated.” Agitation is created by drunken people who beat their wives, brake up the furniture, harm their children – none of which they would do if they were not under the control of alcohol.

“Deceived” means more than being fooled. The users of alcohol pretty well know what the outcome will be. The word has three meanings:

1. Transgress – drunkenness is a sin; the person who transgresses by drinking wine is not wise.
2. “To reel” – denotes the kind of walk for which drunkards are noted.
3. “To wheel” – to be brought down.

II. Some Results of Drinking Proverbs 23:29-35

Proverbs 23:29 – “Who has woe ... sorrow ... contentions ... complaints ... wounds without cause ... redness of eyes ...”

From The Believer's Study Bible on Proverbs 23:29-35:

This is a vivid picture of a drunkard. Drunkenness is supposed to be characterized by joy and merriment, but this is overshadowed by problems, heartaches, quarrels, or anxiety,

violence, and poor health. The warning is to avoid even looking at the alluring wine, which is like the subtle poison of a serpent, entering a small opening but affecting the entire body with its deadly consequences. Drunkenness prepares the way for other lust (Pr. 23:33). Even the victim's senses are so distorted that he is void of control over his own faculties (Pr. 23:34-35).

Paul gives this challenge: Ephesians 5:18: "Be not drunk with wine ... be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Proverbs 23:30 answers the six questions in Verse 29. Wine can produce several bad effects:

1. Unfulfilled Desires Proverbs 23:29

"Who has woe?" Liquor has a way of stirring up the hearts of men and the desires of the old, fleshly, carnal nature. Those ungodly desires may be pretty well under control, but liquor has a way of bringing those desires to the surface to be fulfilled.

2. Poverty Proverbs 23:21

The word "sorrow" in Proverbs 23:29 is translated elsewhere as "ant." In Verse 21 we are told: "The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty." You may know some who drink that are not at the point of poverty, but if they continue to drink until they become a slave to alcohol, they will be at that state eventually.

3. Contentions and Babblings Proverbs 23:28

"Contentions" includes quarrels, brawling, and strife – all of this goes along with the intoxicated condition of those who tarry long at the wine. They get themselves into all kinds of fusses and fights.

"Babbling" means "to talk to oneself," often in sorrowful thoughts, showing itself in complaining, regret of lost fortune, ruined health, and alienated friends. It also means talking to yourself and not making sense.

"Wounds without cause" – wounds which might have been avoided, because a sober man would have never engaged in the quarrel. How many times has the drunkard come home with his head split open and doesn't even know what happened. He has wounds he cannot explain.

4. Mental Problems Proverbs 23:32

Those under the influence of alcohol are often overcome with delirious trembling and they imagine snakes, spiders, and all kinds of crawling creatures crawling all over them and you cannot convince them otherwise. The only thing that can settle them down is another drink.

5. Stirs Up Sexual Passions Proverbs 23:33

Wine and women – intoxicating beverages stir the passions of men and then behold – look out for or search out strange women – prostitutes and the adulteress.

6. Warped Perspectives Proverbs 23:34; Pr. 31:4-5

The drunkard finds himself in a dazed and unconscious condition, exposed to all kinds of dangers, but being unable to take care of himself.

Beverages that intoxicate warp the judgments of folks. Some say, "I can do a better job after I've had a drink or two." Yet, the truth is they lose control of their thinking.

7. Insensibility Proverbs 23:25

He loses sense of pain. He gets hurt and doesn't know how it happened. He doesn't feel the blows of one who beats him until he sobers up.

8. Addiction Proverbs 23:35

I don't know anyone who started out to be a drunk. They even make promises to their mates that it will not happen again, but they become addicted.

III. Some Reminders Concerning Drinking Alcohol

A. The Practicality of Biblical Prohibition

Every child of God should be concerned about the prohibitions which are given in the Word of God. There are some prohibitions given in the Word of God concerning the personal use of alcohol by individuals, whether the individuals are Christians or not.

Notice Proverbs 23:31. The important words in that verse are "look not." The problem is not with the rest of the verse: "when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." Some Bible scholars feel that these words refer to fermentation; you should not look upon the wine when it will create an intoxicating condition. Others feel it refers to the attractiveness of the wine to man when it has developed a good taste. I don't think it is important which view you hold. But I do think it is very important that you notice the injunction in Verse 31: "Look not upon the wine." This means to have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with it.

B. Social Drinking Prohibited Galatians 5:18-21, 24

I can say without fear of contradiction that if you tarry long at the wine, you are not walking in the spirit of God.

C. Drinking Prohibited for Church Leaders I Timothy 3:1-3, 8

D. Prohibited for the Sake of Our Testimony I Peter 4:3-5; Romans 14:21

E. Providing Liquor for Others is Prohibited Habakkuk 2:15

You may not touch alcohol, but if you make it easy for the man who uses it to get the bottle, God says, "woe" to you.

A Saloon Keeper's "Calling Card"

Many years ago a saloon keeper in Flagstaff, Arizona, had a business card which tells the real truth about alcoholic beverages. As impossible as it may sound, the business card has been authenticated.

It is factual. We repeat it word for word:

"J. J. McMurtrey, Dealer in whiskies, wines, beer, and cigars, "The Temple Bar Saloon," Flagstaff, Arizona.

"Friends and Neighbors: I am grateful for past favors. Having supplied my store with a fine line of choice wines and liquors, allow me to inform you that I shall continue to make drunkards, paupers, and beggars for the sober, industrious, respectable part of the community to support. My whiskies will incite riot, robbery and bloodshed.

"They will diminish your comforts, increase your expenses, and shorten life. I shall confidently recommend them as sure to multiply fatal accidents, and incurable diseases. They will deprive some of life,

others of reason, some of character, and all of peace. They will make fathers fiends, mothers widows, children orphans, and all poor. I will train your sons in infidelity, dissipation, ignorance, lewdness and every other vice. I will corrupt the ministers of religion, obstruct the Gospel, defile the church, and cause as much temporal and eternal death as I can. I will thus 'accommodate the public,' It may be at the loss of my never-dying soul, but I have a family to support – the business pays, and the public encourages it.

“I have paid my license and the traffic is lawful, and if I don't sell it somebody else will. I