

July 8 : Scriptures Proverbs 10-12

SUMMARY

Now things start getting a little more fun. The previous nine chapters had large blocks of themes and topics, and now we dive into the collections of proverbs. I'll try to focus on some that are culturally unique or have a twist to them. You can read the rest since they're straightforward. But just because they may *seem* simple and clear, let the Holy Spirit guide your thinking and application. I'm telling you, the Book of Proverbs is jam-packed with good stuff!

Here we go with Proverbs 10. "The son who gathers during summer is prudent; the son who sleeps during harvest is disgraceful" (10:5). The comparison is stark between the prudent son and the lazy son. First of all, what does prudent mean? "Careful or wise in handling practical matters; exercising good judgment or common sense" (American Heritage Dictionary). So the prudent son stays on top of the practical things of life. He's involved with and aware of what's going on. In Israel, crops are gathered in the spring, summer, and fall. Much of the produce will be lost if the farmer misses the harvest window. More specifically, this proverb focuses on the summer crops that mature and are ready for harvest when it gets scorching and dry in Israel (mid-May to mid-September). Too hot? Too bad. The crops have to be harvested when they're ready. The prudent son knows this and gets to work regardless of discomfort. However, the lazy son sleeps during the summer harvest, possibly to avoid the heat. One denies self-comfort but gains a crop. The other gains comfort but loses the harvest. To me, it's wise to get the job done regardless of personal comfort. Comfort can be the enemy of productivity, even survival.

"The remembrance of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot." (10:7). Jewish families sometimes follow a custom of naming a child after a family member who has passed away. I did some internet surfing and came across this quote: "Among both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews, there is a custom to name a child after someone, usually a family member, who has died. The usual explanation for this practice is that the parents hope that in receiving the name of an admired family member, *the child will emulate in life the virtues of the deceased namesake.*" Of course, the practice has exceptions and adaptations, but I like the above reason. It keeps the memory of the admired person alive and sets a godly goal for which the young child can strive. Solomon got it right. It's a joy to remember people who are good and forget those who were bad. Even invoking their name stirs up unpleasant feelings for "their name will rot." Think of it. It's difficult to name your kid Adolph after WWII because it immediately recalls disgust and horror. Also, because of some names' terrible association with those who "wrecked them,"

people want to leave the name alone until it's forgotten. According to my commentary, "it was considered a curse to have no one remember you (Exodus 17:14) or to fail to pass your name to the next generation" (Psalm 109:13). I can't tell you joy it is that my son Aaron and daughter-in-law Tonya gave my name as a middle name to my first grandchild. It blesses me to know that my granddaughter will carry my name to another generation and on into the future. As the Lord has blessed me, I pray the Lord blesses her and more!

"Hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers all offenses." (10:12). What are you willing to tolerate? Hate wants to spring into abusive action, but love is willing to let things slide for the sake of love. Hate wants to return the pain it feels. Love is willing to overlook insults and outrages and forgive those who wrong us. In which of the two worlds would you rather live? If we're learning wisdom from Solomon, we should learn to let things slide off our backs, especially if they don't harm us. Remember the poem, "Sticks and stones?"

Here are some gems from Proverbs 11. "Dishonest scales are detestable to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight" (11:1). This is more than just fair business dealings. To me, it speaks about honesty and integrity. The point of having dishonest scales is for one person to cheat another, and that's stealing, which breaks one of the fundamental Ten Commands. Furthermore, in the Torah, Yehovah tells His people, "Do not have differing weights in your bag, one heavy and one light. Do not have differing dry measures in your house, a larger and a smaller. You must have a full and honest weight, a full and honest dry measure, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. For everyone who does such things and acts unfairly is detestable to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 25:13-16). Imagine that. Cheating another person is detestable to the Lord! Take a moment to consider how people do this to one another. One way that comes to me is having two standards of justice – one for "our guys" and a different one for "those guys." This proverb can be applied to all sorts of ways we measure things. We could call this the "Even Steven" proverb.

"When the wicked person dies, his expectation comes to nothing, and hope placed in wealth vanishes" (11:7). My social media and news sites are filled with stories about the "glorious" people who strive for the good things in life. When I was growing up, one of the hottest TV shows was "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." It was fun to see how the uber-rich people live and all the luxuries in which the wealthy wallowed. But as I grew older, I realized how much work it would take to protect all that money and material stuff. With the advent of the internet, I began to read more and more stories about how some people gained their wealth through deceit, insider trading, illicit activities like

drugs, and human trafficking. I began to see to what terrible lengths wicked people would go to for wealth and achieve what they expected from life. *And then they keel over and die.* Nothing they've gained goes with them except a tremendous and terrible judgment that was hanging over their heads. They should have learned from Job, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life" (Job 1:21). No wonder King Solomon realized the rush for wealth was worthless.

"A beautiful woman who rejects good sense is like a gold ring in a pig's snout" (11:22). I'm not going to lie. I enjoy looking at a beautiful woman. But then she opens her mouth, and all her beauty suddenly fades into the background as a lack of good sense spews out. Now take this from the Hebraic/Jewish cultural background. Pigs are unclean animals. No amount of dressing it up makes a pig any less repulsive to the Israelites. So it is with a woman who lacks sense, *and I would apply this equally to man-pigs.* You know the type of guy. So, what's Solomon's point? *Strive for good sense.* In Hebrew, the word means "discretion, judgment, reason, taste, understanding." What was it about Abigail that David found so utterly attractive? "May your discernment be blessed, and may you be blessed" (1 Samuel 25:33). Beauty fades with time. Good sense only grows more profound and valuable as it ages.

"One person gives freely, yet gains more; another withholds what is right, only to become poor. A generous person will be enriched, and the one who gives a drink of water will receive water" (11:24-25). There is a beautiful principle here that many Jesus followers have proven in many ways. We often fear giving money or material things to others in need for fear that we will go without them. Don't let that stop you! Give for God's sake, and let the Lord bless you for your generosity. I've often found out that filling a full cup is tough, and standing water often becomes stagnant and evaporates over time. Only as the cup's water is poured out can the cup be refilled with fresh water. Pour out to be filled!

Here are some good ones from Proverbs 12. "The one who works his land will have plenty of food, but whoever chases fantasies lacks sense." (12:11). This brought back some painful memories. I remember how I got sucked into "get rich quick" schemes as a young man. Whether it was pyramid sales, a "hot tip," or simply sitting around and dreaming about being rich, the result was the same. *NOTHING!* Absolutely nothing. This proverb is about being diligent vs. dreaming about success, chasing foolish dreams like the lottery, or waiting for an inheritance from out of the blue to drop on you. Diligence = a productive life. Dreaming = disaster. But some people need a little disaster to get them motivated to get them off their duffs.

“A fool’s way is right in his own eyes, but whoever listens to counsel is wise” (12:15). This proverb is not so much about the fool’s way (how to live life). It’s about listening to counsel. A fool who only believes the way he is doing things is right won’t listen to another person’s guidance, often because they’re convinced they know best. It leaves no room for options or procedures, or approaches that might be better. A wise person listens to counsel because they know they don’t know everything, and the thing they haven’t heard just might be the best way to go. I guess it comes down to pride vs. humility. A prideful fool won’t listen, but a humble, wise person is open to suggestions.

“Anxiety in a person’s heart weighs it down, but a good word cheers it up” (12:25). I’ve met many people who want to “know the ministry Jesus has for them.” Besides the obvious “Go and make disciples” command (which includes being a disciple first, i.e., learning Jesus’ commands and living them), a great ministry that we can all serve in is *the ministry of encouragement*. To encourage a person means to put courage in them. An anxious heart discourages us. Discouragement takes courage out of us because we just know a matter won’t work out, making us anxious. But when a person comes along and says something that helps us see that a matter could work out or will work out, that instills in us the courage to keep pushing through the situation. Who can you encourage today? Who can you talk with to strengthen their resolve and impart courage to keep going? Encouragement is a much-needed ministry that touches those who know the Lord and those who don’t because knowing the Lord doesn’t exempt us from discouragement. Go forth and encourage!

INSIGHT

Want to have a more enjoyable life? Become a wise guy. Seriously. Ask God to show you through the Proverbs how to be a wise person. Look for all the “wise guy” proverbs and rephrase them into a list such as, “A wise person...” and then start writing them all down. Go through the list. Then do the same with the foolish person, “A foolish person...”. It will be quite enlightening and spare you a lot of grief if you take the Lord’s counsel (unlike what a fool would do).

July 9 : Scriptures Proverbs 13-15

SUMMARY

Let's dip into Proverbs 13. "Every sensible person acts knowledgeably, but a fool displays his stupidity" (13:16). I can tell you precisely who you are by watching you over time. Who we are inside eventually comes out for all to see. Jesus taught, "out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). It doesn't just pertain to words. It works with actions, too. As Forrest Gump's mom said, "Stupid is as stupid does." That's a perfect summary of Solomon's proverb. How we act reflects who we are. We can claim to be virtuous, God-fearing people, but what happens when a driver cuts you off during rush hour traffic? How do you respond? We can claim to be sensible people, but do we do stupid things that belie our claim? One of the best ways to evaluate ourselves is by asking others for feedback. Good honest feedback. "How do I project myself? Judging by my actions, would I fit the sensible or foolish category?" Now *that* takes courage.

"Desire fulfilled is sweet to the taste, but to turn from evil is detestable to fools." (13:19). According to my Study Bible, the word "taste" is *nephesh*, soul. So what is the desire that, if fulfilled, is sweet to one's soul? The following line gives us a clue. What is detestable to fools? Turning from evil. So if we use the principle of parallelisms, then the desire that would be sweet to the soul is to turn from evil. To turn from evil is to turn toward God, and that's what's sweet to our souls. Fools desire to stay turned toward evil because they don't like what is good, i.e., God or that which is of Him.

"The one who will not use the rod hates his son, but the one who loves him disciplines him diligently" (13:24). This is counter-intuitive to our culture. I've seen parents refuse to discipline their kids because of the pain and tears it can cause, and I'm not just talking about physical discipline like correctly performed spankings. Some parents think loving their kids is catering to their whims or letting them "do their own thing" regardless of the negative impact on those around them. They haven't trained their children to do right and the pleasure that brings to society. Refusing to discipline children is training them in selfishness and lack of personal restraint and self-control. Such monstrous children become monstrous adults. Better a little pain and discomfort now than a lifetime of pain later. If a loving parent wants their child to live a good, productive, and godly life, then discipline is part of the child's training. Disciplining a child also means the parent must themselves be self-disciplined and learn how to discipline their kids in an effective and lasting way. A parent is doing their child no favors by letting them run wild because eventually, the pain comes either through the adult "child" hurting someone or getting hurt because of their selfish and unrestrained actions.

As I read Proverbs 14, I'm struck by all the comparisons between wise/foolish, honest/dishonest, wicked/upright, and so on. Here are a few proverbs that jumped out to me during today's reading. "Where there are no oxen, the feeding trough is empty, but an abundant harvest comes through the strength of an ox" (14:4). The word for "empty" is also "pure, clean." It's simple. Don't work if you want your workplace to remain clean and put together. But if you want to be productive, things will get messed up and need to be cleaned up. I've envied parents that can keep their home in immaculate shape even though they have children. That requires an awful lot of work and discipline. So, don't produce children if you want a tidy and clean house. But even though a house is messed-up because of children, there are often excellent accompanying memories.

"A mocker seeks wisdom and doesn't find it, but knowledge comes easily to the perceptive" (14:6). Why is that? Because it's all about receptivity. Mockers aren't interested in learning or understanding, but the perceptive (discerning) are. The perceptive person appreciates wisdom because it increases their ability to discern.

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (14:34). This proverb is for a nation, not an individual. However, the principle remains the same. Just as a person is blessed living a right-with-God life, so it goes for a nation. Being right with God leads us to live wisely with self-respect and keeps us out of trouble. So it is with a nation when the government chooses to follow God's principles. George Otis, Jr, who tracked revival movements in countries around the world, noticed a "lift" in the nation's standard of living when many of its people embraced Jesus. On the flip side, we can look at countries that embrace ungodly or anti-God lifestyles to see darkness manifested in societal pathologies. It happens on a city level, too. Who can look at San Francisco, which has adopted unrighteous laws and tolerated sin, and not say there's a negative effect? Much of those adverse effects have brought great shame to that city.

Proverbs 15 has a couple of similar verses regarding how to approach contentious situations. The first verse is "A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath" (15:1). It's fun to look up the words in a Hebrew dictionary to get some of the associated meanings, or you can look at other translations to get the "color" of the words. A fun one is the word "wrath," as used here. The Hebrew reads "hot of nose" as in "nostrils flaring in anger." Pretty vivid, huh? So, this is how this verse reads to me, "A soft and tender response turns away furiously heated emotions and rage, but painful responses cause intense anger to rise in the other person." Solomon advises his son to take it easy in a dispute with another person. Disputes aren't bad, but how we handle them matters. Calm and collected is the way to go.

The second verse is similar. "A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but one slow to anger calms strife" (15:18). The word for hot-tempered is the same word for anger in 15:1, furiously heated emotions and rage. A hot-tempered person is prone to anger. They "stir things up" as in contend, provoke, and meddle, producing strife and quarrels. As my daughter used to say, "No good can come of that!" However, the opposite is presented. The person who is "slow to anger" suffers for a long time without resorting to anger ("hot of nose" again), and that approach calms and settles down whatever strife or contention that may erupt.

The previous two verses are about righteous and wicked ways, the fruit of which is peace vs. contention depending on which approach is taken. This verse is about the Lord observing *all* people. "The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, observing the wicked and the good" (15:3). The meaning of this verse is not buried in word meanings but the simple fact that Yehovah sees all. He is the all-knowing, all-seeing, everywhere present God. He doesn't just watch good people to reward them nor wicked people to punish them. He watches all to note everything they do, reflecting who they are inside. Nothing misses His eye. That doesn't mean God doesn't have specific targets to observe, as in "For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the *earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him*. You have been foolish in this matter. Therefore, you will have wars from now on" (2 Chronicles 16:9 italics author). Yes, the Lord does look for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him, but as He's aware of the devoted ones, He also notes those who aren't.

INSIGHT

As the Lord observes people – the wicked and the good – one of the things He observes is the "fruit" we produce, our actions based on who we are. Angry, contentious people who stir up disputes bear the fruit of the wicked. Peaceful, long-suffering people who calm situations bear the fruit of the good people, those who are devoted to God. What kind of fruit do you offer a world of strife around you?

July 10 : Scriptures Proverbs 16-18

SUMMARY

Here are some of my favorites from Proverbs 16. The first is “Commit your activities to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (16:3). Another translation is “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans” (NIV). Generally speaking, this means not just specific things we do throughout the day but everything we do daily. However, I’ve done this for particular tasks such as fixing my car’s back window. Seriously! I’m no car guy. I admit it. But when the window let loose and fell into the door, I had to put on my big boy pants and “git ‘er done!” So I asked the Lord for help and His leading, i.e., dedicating the task to Him. First, the Lord impressed me that I needed info on how to fix the window, so I went to YouTube and found the required steps and tools. Second, as I was fixing it, I kept asking the Lord to give me wisdom and prompt me so I wouldn’t miss any steps, misplace parts, etc. I kid you not. It was one of the easiest repairs I’ve ever completed. And as I was about to place the window on the track, the Lord prompted me to check a piece of the mechanism. Sure enough, it was on wrong and had to be reseated. Finito! So seriously, give daily activities to the Lord, especially specific ones. You’ll experience God in a remarkable way.

Next, here are some verses to help us learn *how* to commit our activities to the Lord and why we should do that. “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, *do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*” and “Whatever you do, *work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters*” (Colossians 3:17, 23) and “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, *do it all for the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31). There’s a starting point for you: Commit your activities to the Lord by doing it in Jesus’ name, as working for Him, and to His glory. To me, it makes every task more manageable.

“A person’s heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps” (16:9). Oh, this is a long-time favorite proverb. I memorized it over forty years ago and have experienced it often. It’s been instrumental to me in selecting schooling, jobs, assignments, projects, and especially finding my excellent wife, Jeanne. The key to this is staying flexible with what you plan. A river often changes course as it follows gravity downward through a forest. As we follow the Lord, trusting His divine guidance, He will often steer us via thoughts, impressions, positive changes (Do this!), and negative changes (Don’t do that!). Again, it’s a fun way to experience our Living God.

This proverb follows on the heels of the previous one I just shared, “There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death” (16:25). Why should we dedicate

our activities to the Lord and allow the Lord to direct our steps? Because many times we *think* we know what's best or the proper way to move forward, but we have a Living God who sees everything ahead of us and will steer us out of the way. Also, as fallen creatures learning to walk Jesus' path, our ways may seem right, but they are not the Lord's way. The Lord's ways are meant to bring us life. Our ways may seem to lead to life, but in the long run, they can lead us to disaster, especially when we're deceived. For example, "I can flirt with this other person because my spouse is being so cold to me," or "I can make this investment without talking it over with the Lord," even though the Lord sees the economic downturn or job loss coming. The Bible is filled with examples of people who followed their way to their harm. Be smart. Ask Jesus for His best path for you to do anything.

Proverbs 17 gives us another one of my favorites, "A crucible for silver, and a smelter for gold, and the Lord is the tester of hearts" (17:3). This is parallelism comparing the smelting process with the Lord's examination of our hearts. A smelter uses high heat to determine whether a metal is what it appears to be. It also burns off or separates impurities. Our Heavenly Father does the same thing through His Holy Spirit. The Spirit knows the very depths of our being. He knows what's genuine life-of-the-Lord gold in us and what's just Fool's Gold. If we listen, the Spirit will show us what's inside us if we let Him. Case in point, I had a terrible relationship breakup in college. As the trauma subsided, I turned toward the Lord in prayer and asked Him to show me what went wrong. I had no idea what was coming. Within a few minutes, the Spirit showed me my self-deception, duplicitous behavior, and callous disregard for my girlfriend – you know, all those wonderful things you love to have stare you in the face. Like a smelter, the Spirit separated and pulled up the bad and the good I had within the core of my being (my heart). Because I did that and committed myself to ditch the garbage and learn from the Lord, I met my future wife nine months later. Those lessons the Lord revealed to me? What I learned from the "smelting" process laid the foundation for the start of our relationship and subsequent marriage. Yeah, the Lord's ways work pretty well.

"A bribe seems like a magic stone to its owner; wherever he turns, he succeeds" (17:8). Is Solomon saying we should use bribery to help get us through life? Absolutely not. It's his observation of how life works on earth. Sadly, bribes sway people, and some cultures thrive on bribery to get things done. But bribes are not God's way. Proverbs 17:23 condemns bribery. Other verses fiercely condemn bribes, such as "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent" (Exodus 23:8; also Job 15:34, 36:18, Ecclesiastes 7:7). For an eye-opening study, go to an online Bible site or a Bible app on your phone/tablet and enter the word "bribe." You'll learn a lot about how God feels about bribery.

“Acquitting the guilty and condemning the just—both are detestable to the Lord” (17:15). Yehovah is a just God. Period. Injustice is when right is deemed wrong or wrong is considered right. The issue of right justice is a big one throughout the Bible. The innocent should not be punished for crimes they don't commit, and the guilty should not be set free without paying their penalty. Injustice isn't just something the Lord dislikes or doesn't favor. The wording is extreme. Injustice is “detestable,” i.e., abominable, loathsome, and morally disgusting. Oh, would our justice system in the United States line up with God's just guidelines!

As we start with Proverbs 18, there's a doozy right away in verse 2, “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions” (18:2). This is another of my favorite proverbs. As a Bible teacher, I've often experienced this from new class members, especially those who believe it's their “spiritual gift” or obligation (snarky tone here) to teach/correct the teacher regardless of the teacher's training and education. Hey, I get it! The teacher can be wrong. We don't know everything. But we know considerably more than our students on some topics and strive to deliver that with wisdom and the best understanding we can. However, some students are so obviously wrong while they think they're so obviously correct that it's humorous. But does that stop them? Nope. They just have to share their opinion, even if it's wrong. But this isn't limited to the classroom. We've often met people who like to talk more than listen, especially when they simply must give you their opinion on any given matter. But God gave us two ears and one mouth to remind us we need to listen more than speak. We may have an opinion, but it's wise to hold our tongue and listen for a while to see if we need to change our opinion or how it fits into the discussion rather than just pridefully displaying our thoughts.

This next one follows closely. “The one who gives an answer before he listens—this is foolishness and disgrace for him” (18:13). Yup, you know the person. You're trying to make a point, and you can see they're thinking more about what they will reply to you rather than listening to what you're saying. This makes for a very rough and frustrating dialogue. I've seen this often during theological “discussions,” and it is often accompanied by the Proverbs 18:2 issue – not delighting in understanding, but (delighting) in giving one's opinion. That's why I practice active listening. Active listening is when you listen to the other person, then repeat what they said to them and ask if that's what they meant. Granted, it slows the discussion but makes it more precise and productive. Listen to Solomon. Resist the urge to regurgitate your opinion before you hear what your discussion partner has to say. We, on the other end of the discussion, thank you.

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (18:21). Any child knows this well. We can think back and painfully remember hurtful things a parent, sibling, or peer said. Even after decades, these hurtful things often still resonate and have, sadly, shaped our lives. How many young women suffer from anorexia or bulimia because someone said to them that they’re “fat”? A single word can devastate a person and set the course of their life. How much worse is it to live in such a toxic verbal environment? Knowing what I know about some of my friends and their childhoods, it’s amazing they survived as they have. On the flip side, I’m amazed at parents who have learned how to use their speech to impart wisdom, comfort, grace, encouragement, and blessing to their kids. Let’s face it, the world will dump on our children. Let’s not contribute to it. Let’s strengthen their spiritual, emotional, and mental foundations with “seasoned” speech. And yes, this doesn’t apply just to kids. Everybody is subject to the power of life or death emanating from our mouths. Furthermore, life or death words flow from our fingertips to the keyboards of our laptops, tablets, or phones and into the social media world. We can rephrase this proverb: “Death and life are in the power of the fingertips, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” But this proverb also has a stinger at the end. It’s not just the person receiving the words that are affected by the death or life of the spoken words. It’s the “sender” as well. Since the power of life and death are in the tongue, those who “love” the tongue, i.e., embrace its power for good or evil, will experience life or death themselves, depending on how they use it.

INSIGHT

The worst injustice in human history is when a completely innocent Jesus was crucified for crimes He didn’t commit. If that were the end of it, the injustice would stand. However, a more significant and profound justice changed that injustice into true justice. God explained the principle through the pictures embedded in His sacrificial system under Moses’ law. God allowed an innocent animal to take the punishment for a guilty person to satisfy a judgment against that person. For example, I may be guilty of a traffic violation, but the court allows someone else to pay my fine. Under God’s law, the person who sins should die (Ezekiel 18:1-4) for the wages (the penalty or “fine”) for sin is death (Romans 6:23). But from before creation, our Heavenly Father allowed for a substitute death so that our death fine could be paid without us dying. Yes, it was injustice for Jesus to die for sins He never committed. But as the innocent sacrifice, He became the source of God’s justice for every person who claimed that payment on their behalf. Imagine that. Through an injustice, justice is served.

July 11 : Scriptures Proverbs 19-21

SUMMARY

Here are some selections from Proverbs 19. "Kindness to the poor is a loan to the Lord, and he will give a reward to the lender" (19:17). This one has long encouraged me to give to the person in need. I don't keep track of my giving, but I give to family and friends in need or proven ministries with established accountability procedures. I just want to make sure what the Lord gives me goes where it should and is not squandered on life's non-essentials. However, I've observed that my household has not gone without what we need in keeping with the second part of the proverb. Yes, my wife and I try to be responsible for what the Lord gives us, but it amazes me how He keeps us in a positive balance even when unexpected bills come in. And we don't give to the poor to get something from God. We do it because it's, as we say, "The Torah thing to do." We leave the results up to the Lord, and He's been wonderfully faithful to us. Give it a try!

"A person with intense anger bears the penalty; if you rescue him, you'll have to do it again" (19:19). Sometimes, it's good to help someone whose anger gets them into trouble. At other times you have to stand back and let the person take the severe consequences so they can learn their lesson, especially if intense anger has led to their troubles. My father calls that a *significant emotional experience*. Some people learn by listening and observing, and some learn by experience. Don't resist the urge to help another person, but with the Holy Spirit's counsel, decide if you should and how to do so. And speaking of counsel...

"Listen to counsel and receive instruction so that you may be wise later in life" (19:20). I've learned that it's wise to learn from other people's experiences and wisdom rather than make the mistakes that bring wisdom. This approach gives me a leg up on the wisdom learning curve, and many of those early times of sound counsel and instruction have contributed significantly to a more balanced life and kept me out of trouble. Take it from me. Listen to the wise ones as early in life as you can. Take their instructions to heart. And, of course, the best sort of counsel and instruction is the Bible.

Cruisin' Through Proverbs 20 brings these great proverbs. "Honor belongs to the person who ends a dispute, but any fool can get himself into a quarrel" (20:3). In other words, any idiot can start a fight. To stop one is the honorable thing to do.

"Counsel in a person's heart is deep water; but a person of understanding draws it out" (20:5). Okay. This one's a bit cryptic. I get the part where a person of understanding can draw deep things out of another person, but what's with the counsel part? So, I need a little help from my study Bible. (Pause and read.) What? It has nothing? Fine. So I look at

various translations and found this from the *Complete Jewish Bible*, "The heart's real intentions are like deep water; but a person with discernment draws them out." Got it! A person's genuine motives are deep within them. They often bury those motives or mask them. But a discerning person can discover a person's true intent for their behavior. Yes, that takes skill and patience. So, what can we learn from this? People are complex. We need to listen carefully and with discernment to understand why someone behaves as they do rather than assume.

"Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am cleansed from my sin'"? (20:9). Ummm, no one and anyone. Lemme explain. The word for "cleansed" here is *taher*, related to *tahor*, which means a ritual cleansing, i.e., spiritually clean and able to approach God. Solomon is right. No one can make themselves pure and without sin. That's the "no one" part. We're born in an impure state and need something or someone to make us clean and pure as God wants us to be so we can approach Him. The Temple sacrificial system instituted a sacrifice that would bring cleansing and purification from sin. Well, actually, it only *covered over sin* so people could draw close to God (Hebrews 10:4). However, Jesus' sacrifice makes us completely clean and pure in God's eyes so His Spirit can live in us and we can come into His presence at death. It's available to all who call on our Heavenly Father to do that for them (Acts 4:12, 2:21). That's the "anyone" part. Solomon knew the human condition but not God's solution in Jesus.

Proverbs 21 has some beauties in the chapter. The first is "A king's heart is like channeled water in the Lord's hand: He directs it wherever he chooses" (21:1). We often think that rulers such as U.S. presidents, governors, senators, and representatives are nearly sovereign. At least many of them think so, it seems. But as a representative republic, our leaders' authority is curtailed by the citizens (supposedly, right?). Well, Solomon was a king, and he knew about a king's sovereignty. But Solomon also knew about God's sovereignty, a sovereignty that trumps any human authority on earth. A king may think he's autonomous and all-powerful, but the Lord steers the person as He sees fit. This simple proverb reminds us that despite everything, God controls everything all the time.

"Doing what is righteous and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (21:3). Some of God's most stinging rebukes were to people who thought religious duties excused them from right living, God's way. But Yehovah wants obedience from His people more than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). Yes, God appreciates sacrifice, but only if it's "seasoned and basted" with obedience (Ecclesiastes 5:1). Best of all is when we present ourselves as a "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship" (Romans 12:). The spiritual actions are good, but living an obedient life to God is the best sacrifice we can ever offer.

“Better to live in a wilderness than with a nagging and hot-tempered wife” (21:19). I can just see the head-nodding right now. “Amen, Pastor Jay. Solomon hit that nail on the head. That wife of mine sure makes my life miserable.” Uh-huh. And you’re a peach to your spouse? We want to point to the other person, but do *we* make life unpleasant for our spouse? This proverb carries truth. Solomon had a multitude of wives and concubines. I’m sure one or two had a bad day and made life miserable for him and the others. But this proverb should remind us not to make life miserable for our spouse or “significant other.” Rather than being hot-tempered or nagging, how about cultivating patience and cooperation? Which do you think creates a better atmosphere at home? Kind of a no-brainer question.

INSIGHT

“Listen to counsel and receive instruction so that you may be wise later in life” (19:20). What’s worse than a young fool? An old fool. I’m just going to leave that right there.

July 12 : Scriptures Proverbs 22-24

SUMMARY

And we start the day with Proverbs 22. "Start a youth out on his way; even when he grows old he will not depart from it" (22:6). That's an okay translation, but I like the one I grew up on, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." It captures the essence of the ancient Israelite culture. Children were regarded as adults around age 13. In today's Jewish community, it's 13 for boys and 12 for girls. Solomon posits that parents should work hard to instill God's word into their children before they face the world on their own. Their child needs a firm moral base and training in godliness to enter the adult world. Otherwise, they're easily led astray, as we see in our culture today. Not only are many kids left to learn on their own, but disengaged or absentee parents let the schools and the culture raise them, instilling the most horrendous, ungodly values in their mushy heads. I've often noticed that I fall back on much of what I learned and memorized from the Bible as a young person to help guide me through college and into my own family life. Now, there's no guarantee that your godly training will take. However, I've seen rebellious adults transform at critical times of their lives because of what their parents or grandparents taught them in their early years. As a teacher once shared with me, education is like a time bomb. It may not be making an impact now, but when the trigger is tripped, living faith in God can explode in their heads and hearts and bring them back to center on Him. This proverb encourages us to work hard at teaching our children well about God and His word.

"The slacker says, 'There's a lion outside! I'll be killed in the public square!'" (22:13). True, lions were real in ancient Israel. Israel is part of the African Rift Valley. It wasn't uncommon to see African animals roaming through the countryside. But this is different. A lion in the public square? That's wild. That's absurd. That's just an *excuse*. A slacker comes up with all sorts of excuses to avoid their responsibilities. This proverb tells us that making excuses could indicate slackness creeping into our character. Just buckle down and do it! And speaking of buckling down and doing things...

"Do you see a person skilled in his work? He will stand in the presence of kings. He will not stand in the presence of the unknown" (22:29). Contrasted with the slacker is the diligent person who has worked hard to develop their skills. Capable, highly-skilled workers are still a hot commodity in our nation's workforce: high skills = a highly sought-after employee. I was watching the movie *Armageddon* the other day. Once the asteroid was detected and the plan was crafted to drill into it and plant nuclear bombs to blast it into two halves, the government didn't look for just any team to do the job. They looked for the best. They found Bruce Willis' oil drilling team and succeeded. Do you want a

recipe for success? Learn wisdom from Solomon. Perfect your skills! Strive to become the best you can be in your field. You will make a mark on the world!

Proverbs 23 speaks to us about dealing with fools. "Don't speak to a fool, for he will despise the insight of your words" (23:9). The fool in this verse is someone who's flat-out stupid. Someone whose elevator doesn't go to the top floor. Not all of the lights are on in their marquee. They're two fries short of a McDonald's Happy Meal. These people wouldn't recognize wisdom if it slapped them in the face. Sometimes we have to realize we can't waste our breath on some people. Yes, I know that sounds rough and judgmental. Go ahead and try it. You'll see Solomon's wisdom if you try to speak to a "fool," and they turn and mock or hate your insight. If so, it's best to let it go and move on.

"The father of a righteous son will rejoice greatly, and one who fathers a wise son will delight in him. Let your father and mother have joy, and let her who gave birth to you rejoice" (23:24-25). I know this to be true. Some of the most rewarding times in my life have been to see my children do things right and wisely. Sadly, the reverse is also true. Watching grown children make morally wrong and foolish decisions hurts "because I thought I taught them better than that!" Right? We can't live our children's lives for them after they leave the nest, but we can still be advisors at the ready. Plus, it brings a parent great joy to see their child live as wise and righteous people before the Lord. I know because I've experienced it.

This last proverb in 23:29-35 is lengthy, so I'll just let you read it. In short, it's a warning against drunkenness. I've seen too much of that and how alcoholism destroys lives. Now I'm seeing even more devastation with the legalization of some drugs. The pot grown today is *far more potent* than when I was in college. It affects young adults' lives, and Junior and Senior High Schoolers are getting messed up with it. I just read an article today about how pot addiction is climbing the charts and another article about how journalists in Washington D.C. are micro-dosing (and macro-dosing) psychedelic mushrooms because it "improves their thinking." Really? The person in the proverb thinks they're invincible while drunk and are obviously suffering from alcohol-induced hallucinations. Take Solomon's advice – don't drink to excess and avoid that which messes with your head.

Proverbs 24 has a great proverb in verses 5-6. "A wise warrior is better than a strong one, and a man of knowledge than one of strength; for you should wage war with sound guidance—victory comes with many counselors" (24:5-6). I glean two things from this – an affirmation of the "Work smarter, not harder" proverb and how beneficial it is to have

many peoples' input to make you smarter when embarking on a new course. Hopefully, that doesn't include war plans.

"Though a righteous person falls seven times, he will get up, but the wicked will stumble into ruin" (24:16) is an interesting proverb. Seven is the number of completion. Therefore, even though a righteous person falls to the point of being unable to get up, they will still rise. However, a wicked person's single stumble can bring them down. The comparison is how each person walks. The righteous person walks right with God, and though they fall, even if it's a terrible fall, they can rebound. Why? God is with them. Not so with the wicked. Their walk is described as tripping and stumbling along because of the evil they do. That's the reading for "stumble into ruin," stumbling because of doing evil. Ultimately, with the Gospel in view, the righteous person may fall but will live in the afterlife. The wicked person will not because of the evil in which they walked.

Proverbs 24:26 is a short and sweet affirmation of the pleasantness of honesty. "He who gives an honest answer gives a kiss on the lips" (24:26). Let's face it. We're all tired of the lies and deception from politicians, money-swayed scientists, and so-called "experts" who are more expert at twisting the truth than telling it. I'm glad I don't have a brick near my couch because I often want to throw something through my TV as I watch the news. How refreshing it is when someone tells the truth! As Solomon says, it's like a kiss on the lips. What can we take away from this proverb? Let's be good kissers! Let's strive to speak honestly with others, especially the Lord.

Bonus proverb: "Complete your outdoor work, and prepare your field; afterward, build your house" (24:27). Why? This is very practical. Before we "settle down," we need to secure our income stream. What good is it to spend time and energy on a house if we won't have the income stream to support ourselves and ultimately lose it all? Seems wise to me.

INSIGHT

Have you noticed how practical the proverbs are? They're not only instructive, but they reveal life as it is. Yes, honesty is appreciated, hard work pays off, and bribes work even if they're not right. So to be wise, let's make those observations into guidelines. Let's strive for honesty and diligence. Instead of bribes, let's offer something of value to the other person they might desire, like our help, talent, or support. This is a fun way to put the proverbs to good use.

July 13 : Scriptures Proverbs 25-27

SUMMARY

We come to Proverbs 25 and find some good proverbs to mull. "Remove impurities from silver, and material will be produced for a silversmith. Remove the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be established in righteousness" (25:4-5). Why do people refine the dross from silver? Because if silver has dross, the impurities will affect the final product. Solomon draws on his experiential wisdom as king to create an illustration of his wise advice. If a leader has wicked people around him, the final product, his governance, will be affected because of their influence, their dross/impurity. In Israel, the king was to copy the priest's scroll of the Law (a Torah scroll), keep it beside his throne, and read from it daily. Doing so would make God's word his primary source for guidance resulting in a righteous kingship. But if the wicked are his advisors, evil counsel would morph into corrupt governance. That's why it's crucial for any leader – church, business, government, or whatever – to make sure they have morally good people by their side and remove toxic, unrighteous people from their organization.

"A word spoken at the right time is like gold apples in silver settings" (25:11). This proverb is a great companion to the previous "He who gives an honest answer gives a kiss on the lips" (24:26). It's a rare gift for someone to be able to know just what to say at the right time. I've found that such well-spoken words can set or reset the course of the listener's life. Gold apples in a silver setting are a beautiful thing. So are gracious, encouraging, and wise words shared at just the right moment.

However, on the other end of the spectrum, the not-so-helpful end, "Trusting an unreliable person in a difficult time is like a rotten tooth or a faltering foot" (25:19). Why? A rotten tooth will break, and a faltering foot will let you down, literally. Both will hobble you if not dealt with, and both have the potential to let you down and bring you pain. Reliability is an excellent trait for a person to cultivate. Can people depend on us? When we give our word, do we follow through? When started on a task, can we be relied on to carry it through to completion? Ask your friends and family if they think you're reliable. You may or may not like their answer. Perhaps this is a trait you can work on more.

Wow! Proverbs 26 has a lot of "fool" proverbs. "A proverb in the mouth of a fool is like lame legs that hang limp" (26:7) is funny when you think about it. Lame legs that hang limp are useless, so a proverb in a fool's mouth is... *worthless*. Why? Because the fool may speak the wise proverb but won't live it. This example reminds me of Christians who know God's word and can speak it but don't live it. According to this proverb's principle, would that make them... useless to God? Food for thought.

“Giving honor to a fool is like binding a stone in a sling” (26:8). This proverb is interesting because you have to know the ancient culture to get it. A sling was a long leather strap or string with a pouch in the middle. You’ve undoubtedly seen this in pictures of David’s famous battle with Goliath. A stone is placed in the leather seat, and the sling is whirled around in a circle. At the right moment, one end of the strap is released, the sling unfurls, and the stone flies out of the seat like a bullet. Now, this gets funny. If someone were to bind their stone into the leather seat and go through the same motions, when the strap is released, the stone would remain, fling around and smack the slinger in the head, likely doing some significant damage. Perhaps it would be one of those “significant emotional experiences.” Guaranteed, the untrained slinger would never do that again. Giving honor to a fool is dangerous, and Solomon implies that it will ultimately come around to hurt us. Why? A fool will not live up to the honor bestowed upon them. Honoring a fool not only reflects poorly on the person who honored them, but depending on the situation, it can bring great harm.

And we have another “fool” proverb! “As a dog returns to its vomit, so also a fool repeats his foolishness” (26:11). I can’t say it better than in my Study Bible – “Because a fool doesn’t accept correction (1:22; 23:9), he never advances, but returns to what everyone else can see is repulsive” (HCSB commentary). “Seriously, dude, why would you do that again? What are you, a fool?” Oh yeah, we’ve all known people like this.

Proverbs has a lot of good comparisons in it, as you’ve probably seen – fools vs. wise, the righteous vs. the wicked. Proverbs 27:6 is a solid one. “The wounds of a friend are trustworthy, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive” (27:6). Solomon is right. I would rather have a friend wound me than have an enemy show me affection. Why? Because my friend is genuine and has my best interests in mind. If my enemy shows me affection, that’s an assumed deception or flattery. It’s not genuine, and they don’t have my best interests in mind. So, depending on the nature or relationship of the one bestowing an action on you, it can significantly change the worth of the action.

“If one blesses his neighbor with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be counted as a curse to him” (27:14). Don’t you hate morning people? Well, I’m one, so go easy on me. My brother once nick-named me “Happy mouth” because I would wake up happy and go steadily uphill all day. Know what that’s like to someone who’s not a morning person? *Annoying!* And that’s one of the interpretations of this verse. Or it could be that someone in a hurry to greet their neighbor might have a not-so-good reason for doing so. An over-eager person might have ulterior motives. “Hey, Frank! How are you this morning, ol’ buddy?” “Great, Bob. What do you want this time?” See what I mean?

“Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and whoever looks after his master will be honored” (27:18). This proverb is excellent advice to employees and employers. As the saying goes, “It’s tough to find good help.” Good help is a reliable, capable, competent, and considerate employee. I’m not talking about employees sucking up to their bosses to get benefits or perks from them. I’m talking about the dedicated employee doing his job for God’s glory and their employer’s best interests. Bosses can spot good and bad motives a mile away. Tend to your employer’s concerns, and you’ll likely enjoy the fruit of your attentiveness and consideration. Do I hear “promotion?” And on the flip side, when an employer finds such a good employee, it would be the righteous thing to do to care for them equally. The fruit of such care goes both ways.

INSIGHT

The difference between a wise person and a fool is often defined by whether they follow God’s ways or not. It’s that simple. But we can’t follow God’s ways if we don’t know them. That’s one reason I’m writing this commentary, *Cruisin’ Through The Bible*. Hopefully, it will enlighten your reading time and help you live the way Jesus wants you to and thus, become wise.

July 14 : Scriptures Proverbs 28-31

SUMMARY

Proverbs 28 gives us some sobering proverbs about leadership and those in whom we place our trust. "When the righteous triumph, there is great rejoicing, but when the wicked come to power, people hide" (28:12). I like the Amplified Bible's translation, "When the [uncompromisingly] righteous triumph, there is great glory and celebration; but when the wicked rise [to power], men hide themselves." Look at any nation that has freed itself from oppressors and put righteous laws and practices in place, and you'll see celebrations. The American Revolution is a prime example. The parallel is when wicked people take power, as in the French Revolution. Those who openly celebrated hide from the authorities. Why? Because wickedness doesn't tolerate righteousness. Learn from the rise of the Communists or the Nazis. Wicked rulers threaten citizens to keep them in line, especially when righteousness opposes evil. The rule citizens tell each other is "keep your head down (hide), and nothing will happen to you." Also, I find the order of the parallels in this proverb interesting. First comes the rule of the righteous and then the wicked. That's the way societies degrade over time. They start with a burst of energy and freedom, but society becomes self-indulgent and lax over time, allowing political leaders into power who will "take care of them." These leaders become increasingly evil (unless they have a solid moral base) because they find they can buy support and eventually feel invincible. Therefore, they start doing anything they wish. Either there is a profound societal regeneration to end the tyranny, or the society will collapse, and another will take its place.

This second proverb is much like the previous one, "A leader who lacks understanding is very oppressive, but one who hates dishonest profit prolongs his life" (28:16). I'm amazed when I compare the ages and intellects of our Founding Fathers with the same in our current national leadership. The Founding Fathers were relatively young and highly educated people with a profound grasp on many matters, especially spiritual. Judging by the ridiculous things I hear many of our modern "leaders" espouse, I'm left concluding that being an imbecile who can be bought off to do the bidding of their masters is a requirement for political office. How we've squandered our national birthright and blessing! The Founding Fathers understood personal freedom and worked to set the conditions for our freedoms. Yes, slavery was still operational, but the founding documents were clear – "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL." Because slavery was so entrenched, it took time to end, but we did it at a high cost! However, we've replaced it with slavery to the State today. Many of today's leaders lack the biblical knowledge, values, and thinking that was poured into the foundation of our nation. Thus, they rule by their own misguided ideas. The result? "Do it my way or be punished." And much of

their way is directed by the campaign cash and pay-offs they receive. Prove me wrong. That's why this proverb is so relevant to our day.

And finally, we have this one in chapter 28, "The one who trusts in himself is a fool, but one who walks in wisdom will be safe" (28:26). Why is the one who walks in wisdom safe? Because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Reverence for the Lord means we look to Him as our protector and guide. So, learn to trust the Lord with all reverence and let Him guide your decisions.

Proverbs 29 has a couple of good proverbs that stick out to me. "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise person holds it in check" (29:11). Ah yes, a hot-headed person. What a delight to be around! The danger is that this fool's uncontrolled anger is like a lit cannon rolling around on a wooden ship's deck. It could go off in any direction and needlessly sink the ship. It's wise to keep one's distance from such a person unless the Lord has led you to be their friend and influencer. You really don't want to become their collateral damage.

"Without revelation people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy" (29:18). This is a much-misused verse. Many ministers and ministries have used an inaccurate translation of this verse and left off the second half, so it reads, "Without a vision, the people perish." The errant teachers/preachers then say that we need a vision from God to direct the church's/ministry's/person's goals and how to achieve them. Wrong. Yes, wrong. This proverb is about people who refuse to stay locked on God's word meant to direct their life. If they're not dedicated to God's word and refuse to follow it, they run wild. The term "wild" is the same one used to describe the Israelites who cast off restraint/ran wild at the Golden Calf episode (Exodus 32:25). God's word restrains wild behavior, but only if people embrace it. As for the second half of the verse, those who follow God's "divine instruction" (*Torah*) are happy because God's Torah tells them how to live so that their lives are good and not evil.

With Proverbs 30, we move to the "Words of Agur." Who? We don't know. And we don't know who the recipients, Ithiel and Ucal, are either. But Agur's words are part of scripture, so we can go with that. I pulled up two for consideration that mean a lot to me. "Two things I ask of you; don't deny them to me before I die: Keep falsehood and deceitful words far from me. Give me neither poverty nor wealth; feed me with the food I need. Otherwise, I might have too much and deny you, saying, 'Who is the Lord?' or I might have nothing and steal, profaning the name of my God" (30:7-9). When I first became born again in November 1976, this was one of the sections that jumped out at me within a couple of months of reading the Bible. Since I had a problem with lying as a

child, I was especially touched by the verse. I asked the Lord to keep me from lying and deception. Even today, I'm very sensitive about not stretching the truth, lying, or misleading people. I really don't like it when they do so to me. I also used the financial prayer as my own, that I would neither become too wealthy nor destitute because I didn't want to forget God or besmirch His name by resorting to stealing to support my family. True to His word, the Lord has sustained my wife and me, and we're comfortable. We're by no means wealthy. We have enough to pay the bills with some to spare. And when finances came up short (but never destitute), the Lord worked things out as we stayed faithful to Him.

Here's the second in Proverbs 30, "For the churning of milk produces butter, and twisting a nose draws blood, and stirring up anger produces strife" (30:33). I like this one because it's so vivid! Both churning milk and twisting a nose always lead to an expected result. Therefore, Agur writes that anger will inevitably lead to strife. What's the wise solution to stopping strife? Avoid anger. Even if a situation angers us, like the person on the road in front of you driving slow, don't let that anger you. It will inevitably lead to strife, even road rage. Good advice!

And now we reach the end of Proverbs. Proverbs 31 has the words of King Lemuel. Who was Lemuel? Scholars aren't sure, and he certainly wasn't an Israelite king. Likely King Lemuel was a foreign king who converted to Israel's God, and his words were included in the Hebrew scriptures. He has excellent advice for kings and a beautiful ode to what a wonderful wife can be!

INSIGHT

Anger is a big problem for many people. In my quest to determine why I get angry, I learned that frustration leads to anger. I don't know if I read it or realized it myself, but it's true. When I get angry, I've learned to calm down (mostly) and ask what's frustrating me. Taking the time to do that helps me defuse the anger bomb in me. Then I address what's frustrating me. It's remarkable how effective that has been for me! Try it sometime.