

July 1 : Scriptures Psalm 136-138

SUMMARY

Psalm 136. Yes, this psalm seems repetitive. However, in Hebrew poetry, repetition is about *emphasis* (like how we use italics). What's being emphasized? "His faithful love endures forever" (136:1). This faithful love is *chesed* (*heh'-seh'd*, with the throat-clearing guttural on the first syllable), a covenant love which is a deep commitment that's sworn to another. Therefore, the whole psalm recounts the ways the Lord has shown His deep commitment by who He is and the marvelous, mighty, awe-inspiring works He's done. To help you appreciate the psalm, try reading just the first line of each verse. The psalmist is singing God's praise for creating the world, saving Israel from Egypt, defeating the nations as Israel entered the Promised Land, providing for the Israelite's daily needs, and beating their enemies. You could even add in your examples of how the Lord has shown you His love and commitment to you.

Psalm 137. Psalm 137 is a lament written by the exiled Jews living in Babylon. As they sat by the many canals of the great city, those who held them captive were taunting them, "Let us hear you sing one of your songs of Jerusalem now, exiles!" How depressing. The writer makes a vow never to forget and always exalt Jerusalem at the risk of losing his life skills. And as the psalmist remembered his beloved Jerusalem, so he asks the Lord to "remember" (payback) the Edomites (descendants of Israel's brother, Esau) for the harm they did to their "cousins" by helping the Babylonians defeat and kick the Jews out from the land. The Edomites did so because of their long-standing family feud over Jacob getting the birthright and blessing from Esau. The song ends on a down note. The psalmist includes an imprecatory prayer against their captors. It's not just a song of lament but divine retribution.

Psalm 138. This psalm is a beautiful song of thanksgiving by David. It carries much of the same themes as previous Davidic psalms – heartfelt unabashed praise, thankfulness to the Lord for answering his call, God's exalted status, and how all the nations will eventually know Him. Of course, David includes some final verses from his experience as a warrior – confidence in the Lord's protection in the thick of battle and a prayer for His continued care.

INSIGHT

Following the theme of Psalm 136, the Lord's covenant love, I think of our New Covenant with our Heavenly Father through Jesus. He assured His disciples that "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Did you catch that? "To the end of the age." This endpoint will come much later than His immediate disciples would be alive.

Therefore, this includes us. How does Jesus remain with us always? Through His Holy Spirit living in us. Not only is Jesus with us, but He remains committed to us via the New Covenant every moment we're alive. Jesus' covenant promise is that "His faithful love endures forever."

July 2 : Scriptures Psalm 139-142

SUMMARY

Psalm 139. If you ever want the sense that God is very near to you, go through this psalm. It's one of my favorites because it thoroughly describes all the ways the Lord encompasses us. By the time you read to verse 5, it's easy to exclaim with David, "This wondrous knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty; I am unable to reach it. In other words, "this blows my mind, Lord. It's so far beyond my ability to grasp." And still, David isn't done. He goes on for another six verses about how not only the Lord knows all about him; he can never escape from Yehovah's presence. David knows that even in the land of the dead, Sheol, God is there. God created everything everywhere, so even hell is part of His domain. Even darkness can't hide David from the Lord (and if you're afraid of the dark, that's reassuring!).

Psalm 140. I've been reading a lot of disturbing things about The Great Reset. It's simply a plan by a consortium of global elites who believe they alone have the right and capability to rule the world. It seems increasingly apparent that they've been planning this for a long time. It will involve total financial and social control. After reading a recent article that outlines how they're doing it and their economic infrastructure designed to take over all banking transactions with extreme limitations unless you comply, it seems not to be fantasy but a rapidly approaching reality. I read this article *by chance* (right!) just before reading Psalm 140. I'm amazed at how fitting this psalm is as a plea to God. The writer asks to be rescued from the wicked and includes an imprecatory prayer for the downfall of the wicked. The tremendously encouraging parts of the psalm are verses 6-8, 12-13, where the psalmist declares, "Lord, my Lord, my strong Savior, you shield my head on the day of battle" and "I know that the Lord upholds the just cause of the poor, justice for the needy. Surely the righteous will praise your name; the upright will live in your presence." Amen!

Psalm 141. This psalm from David is another appeal for help, only this time from sinners and his own sin that would come from following such people. I have a strange but good application that came to me. "Lord, set up a guard for my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips. Do not let my heart turn to any evil thing or perform wicked acts with evildoers" (141:3-4). This prayer applies to what we post online, right? Because of cyber-distance or "anonymity, we often post things like a wicked person would post. You know, disparaging remarks, sarcasm, rudeness, and the like. If David were to write this today, I think it would read like, "Lord, set up a guard for my hands; keep watch over my fingertips. Do not let my heart turn to any evil thing or perform wicked acts with evildoers." Right? David continues he'd rather be struck by a righteous person than enjoy

the “delicacies” of the wicked. Those delicacies would be sinful acts, though pleasurable, are repulsive to God. When the wicked meet their end, what they’ve stood for will be revealed, and David will be vindicated (141:6). David proclaims his trust in God, prays for protection, and for the wicked to fall into their traps.

Psalm 142. If you’ve ever been in a place where you’ve felt helpless and despairing, then you can undoubtedly identify with David’s psalm of distress. The subheading certainly explains why David felt this way. It was based on a specific incident when he was pursued by Saul (the cave of Adullam, 1 Samuel 22) or trapped by Saul and faced death at Ein-Gedi (1 Samuel 24). David’s plea is honest and direct, “Rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me” (142:6), showing complete dependence on Yehovah, his God. Sometimes you have to sit down and cry out to the Lord. But take heart. The Lord hears and will answer you, just like He did His faithful servant, David.

INSIGHT

“You understand my thoughts from far away” (Psalm 139:2). This psalm is very humbling. God knows everything there is to know about me – my past, my present, and my future. He knows my every real-time thought, desire, impulse, motivation, and reaction, and He knows my sin better than I do. Sometimes I know I can ask the Lord for a genuine assessment of my spiritual/life condition, but I don’t because I’m afraid of learning the truth and how it may tear me up. It takes courage to do that, a lot of it. I know it’s necessary, and God has radically touched my life the few times I’ve done it. And yes, radically is a good word because it means “root.” When I’ve let the Lord show me what He already knows, it’s often hit the root of my life. The encouraging thing is that it’s helped me become a better person every time, even though it was painful. After an unexpected relationship breakup in college, I went to the Lord and asked Him to show me why it happened. He did. It was really tough, but it set a foundation for my next love, who agreed to marry me. A year and a half into my marriage, my wife and I were headed toward divorce. Again, I asked the Lord to “show me.” That was rough, too, but it adjusted and set the foundation for the next 38 years of marriage. After I was fired from my first ministry position, I again asked the Lord, “show me why.” It has profoundly affected how I relate to people and led to my doctorate study on the Subdue and Rule Mandate.

But it’s not all difficult. Sometimes when I ask, “show me,” I get a “You’re doing great,” even when I feel like I’m failing. You never know. But the Lord does. Our Heavenly Father will oblige and show you the truth if you have the strength to ask. Though it may be painful (and there’s no promise that it will be), it will do amazing things to you. It may transform your whole life as it has mine.

July 3 : Scriptures Psalm 143-145

SUMMARY

Psalm 143. Here comes another Davidic psalm, an appeal for help. I don't see a specific reason for this psalm, unlike Psalm 142, although it captures the same emotions. What sticks out to me (again) is David basing his cry for help on God's faithfulness (truth, vs. 1) and faithful love (*chesed*, covenant commitment, vv. 8, 12). David makes no plea based on his righteousness before God, "for no one alive is righteous in your sight" (143:2). Only God is right. This confession should be our attitude when approaching God. We're not to beat ourselves up as worms or wallow in shame (unless we deserve to) or self-deprecation (especially false deprecation). David knows it from his intimate relationship with the Lord. No one is righteous before God in this psalm's writing because the One who makes us right with God, Jesus, hadn't been born or accomplished His work. Even so, approaching Yehovah with great humility is an honorable and proper way to do so at all times. Because of his depressing situation (143:3-4), David falls back on his tried and true remedy – remembering God and all the great things He's done (143:5). He asks for God to save Him along with a special request that I would encourage you to add to your daily prayer requests – "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me on level ground" (143:10). Pray God's scripture back to Him. Simple.

Psalm 144. And here's another Davidic psalm. For information's sake, my HCSB commentary says, "This psalm has a number of similarities with portions on Psalms 8 and 18. Isaiah developed some of these same themes." You might want to page back and check it out for fun. I often speak and teach about covenants because they're a foundational part of the Bible and God's dealings with humanity, specifically the people of Israel. David is keenly aware that Yehovah is his covenant partner, his King who is sovereign over his life. King David faces an enemy in this psalm and calls on his covenant Lord to step into the battle. Though David knows his life is but a shadow and a breath, a fleeting moment in time, he knows the eternal, everlasting, all-powerful God who can enter the human fray and rout David's foes (144:5-8). That understanding is his confidence and hope. Therefore, David will sing and play his heart out to Yehovah (144:9-10)! The final stanza is a beautiful affirmation of the Lord's blessing after the wicked are taken down. Life becomes good!

Psalm 145. This psalm is a hymn of praise to Israel's Divine King and a beautiful exaltation of all He is and does. I highly recommend you take your time as you read through it verse by verse and let the thoughts sink in. Yes, this psalm has many things to reassure you and bless you but let the psalm focus your eyes on the Lord. Let Him fill your mind's eyes and thoughts. Get lost in the thoughts and themes for a while and see

how it lifts you, knowing such a great and awesome God embraces you. Here are some of my favorite verses. "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in faithful love. The Lord is good to everyone; his compassion rests on all he has made" (144:8-9). That alone is "worth the price of admission." And there's this "The Lord is near all who call out to him, all who call out to him with integrity" (144:18).

INSIGHT

"Lord, what is a human that you care for him, a son of man that you think of him? A human is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow" (144:3-4). The Bible is full of mind-blowing comparisons, and truths are often examined in light of two things on opposite ends of a spectrum. This verse is one of those truths.

God is the ultimate of everything. A person is a wisp of vapor. And yet, God cares for this little, insignificant, fragile, helpless creature. God loves each individual so much that He would have sent Jesus to retrieve just one person. God started with one person and created a multitude, but His eye is still on each individual as if they were the only child He has. That's breathtaking.

July 4 : Scriptures Psalm 146-150

SUMMARY

We've finally reached the end of the Book of Psalms. Congratulations! I hope your *Cruisin' Through the Bible* in the Psalms has touched your heart. They're deeply personal, emotional, real-life songs and poems that we can use to vent our frustrations or inspire us to give God the glory He deserves. Let's cruise through the last five psalms, shall we?

Psalm 146. These last five psalms are "Hallelujah" psalms because they start and end with "Hallelujah," "Praise to Yah," a shortened form of Yehovah. Go ahead. Scroll through them and check them out. I'll wait. (I'm humming and tapping my fingers.) See? Pretty cool, huh? I can't tell you how often I've read through the Psalms and never noticed that. This psalm is labeled "The God of Compassion" in my Bible, but I think "The God of All Help" would be more accurate. It starts with praise to God and then a warning not to trust in people whose lives are fragile and short. Instead, we should trust in *GOD, the Eternal Creator of Everything!* Frail humans compared to the eternal God. What a comparison, eh? I think I'll throw my lot in with God. The psalmist then presents the reasons why Yehovah is His help and hope. He's the Creator of all (good credentials) and our faithful and just Provider (also good). He cares for the vulnerable – the prisoner, and those who are blind, oppressed, righteous, foreigners, orphans, and widows, and He goes after the wicked. Best of all, Yehovah reigns across all generations! That's worthy of a *giant* "Hallelujah!"

Psalm 147. Again, the psalmist starts with praise. "Hallelujah! How good it is to sing to our God, for praise is pleasant and lovely." This opening verse strikes me as a typical overture to a musical piece as a musician. The main theme of this biblical "tune" is the restoration of Jerusalem, God's city, and Israel's people (147:2). For this, Yehovah deserves great thanks and praise. Not only for restoration, but God also deserves praise for His provision, strength, greatness, and, best of all, His word (147:19-20). As a side note, I love the picture we often get through the Hebrew scriptures. They're very earthy and vivid. Here's my favorite from this psalm, "he throws his hailstones like crumbs" (147:17). I don't think I'll ever be able to watch a hailstorm with the same eyes again!

Psalm 148. What can I say? This psalm is one big "Praise the Lord"! The psalm is divided into two sections. The first is a call to praise God in the heavens, spiritual (148:1-2) and atmospheric (148:3-6). The second is a call to praise God on the earth (148:7-12). The summary is for everything to glorify God (148:13) and how God's praise reflects upon His people (148:14). Seriously, what more can I say?

Psalm 149. Here we have a call for a psalm of praise to come from God's people. Why should they celebrate Him? Because He's their Maker and King, two fundamental reasons. The people are to let loose with vocal and instrumental praise. As I type this, I'm thinking about some of the big conferences, gatherings, and worship services where I've seen people "cutting loose" for the Lord. The music and dancing were joyous and unrestrained.

Furthermore, the psalmist tells us to rejoice even as we lay down to sleep, "Let the faithful celebrate in triumphal glory; let them shout for joy on their beds" (149:5). Now, here's an interesting take. The rest of the psalm depicts physical warfare coupled with singing praise to God. We see that in the scriptures like 2 Chronicles 20:21-23, where the Lord instructs King Hezekiah to send the Levites into battle *ahead* of the army. It sounds like cannon-fodder, right? But check this out. "Then he (Hezekiah) consulted with the people and appointed some to sing for the Lord and some to praise the splendor of his holiness. When they went out in front of the armed forces, they kept singing: "Give thanks to the Lord, for his faithful love endures forever." The moment they began their shouts and praises, the Lord set an ambush against the Ammonites, Moabites, and the inhabitants of Mount Seir who came to fight against Judah, and they were defeated. The Ammonites and Moabites turned against the inhabitants of Mount Seir and completely annihilated them. When they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped destroy each other." In this case, the Israelites praised God in anticipation of Yehovah's action against their enemies. But there's another way believers have looked at this psalm – as a form of spiritual warfare. Just as David's anointed singing and playing overcame the unclean spirits that tormented King Saul (1 Samuel 16:23), so when we worship, the atmosphere in the worship environment is spiritually super-charged with God's presence. This idea is based on "you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3). And when music was played, the Holy Spirit moved in the prophet Elisha and he prophesied. "Now, bring me a musician." While the musician played, the Lord's hand came on Elisha" (2 Kings 3:15). I believe worship changes the atmosphere of a place because we are making it a welcoming habitation for the Lord's presence and a repulsive place for our spiritual enemies.

Psalm 150. And we reach the last psalm, Psalm 150! It's a call to praise the Lord from the sanctuary, i.e., from the Temple. The description includes the various categories of instruments – percussion, strings, and wind instruments. "Strike up the band!" And it's a fitting conclusion that *everything that breathes* should praise the Lord! So what are you waiting for? Get singing!

INSIGHT

"He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and judgments to Israel. He has not done this

for every nation; they do not know his judgments" (147:19-20). At the time of this psalm's composition, the psalmist is right. God hadn't given His word to all the nations, only His people. However, God had a plan that began with His people but was going to include *all* the nations. Our Heavenly Father sent His spoken word to Israel at Mount Sinai. There, Moses converted it to the written word. About 1,440 years later, God sent His word in Living form, Jesus, who set the means to prepare the Jews and Gentiles to receive God's word in a new way – through Jesus coming to live within us via His indwelling Holy Spirit. What was the spoken and the written word became the Living Word to live inside us. Now, God declares His Word, Jesus, to *all* nations who have the opportunity to receive it and become a part of God's kingdom through faith. What a gift from God through the Jews!

July 5 : Scriptures Proverbs 1-3

SUMMARY

As we are *Cruisin' Through the Bible*, we hit a new genre of Wisdom literature – the proverb. While they may be arranged by theme, most are a collection of sayings that reflect practical truths and serve as superb life guidelines. I have had some memorized for decades, and they often pop up in my mind during various situations. Yes, they've kept me out of trouble and from making a fool of myself. Proverbs are often concise but carry a depth of meaning if you mull them for a while under the Holy Spirit's teaching. As a new Christian, I asked the Lord for wisdom since it's a much sought-after thing in the Bible. The Lord didn't disappoint me. I've had moments where a wise thought has popped into my head, but most of the time, it's scriptures that come to me at the right time, mainly from Proverbs. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

As we go through them, I'm not going to do expository teaching on each one because we're supposed to be *Cruisin' Through the Bible, not Meandering or Putt-Putting Through the Bible*. Where the chapters have an overarching theme, I'll point that out. Where the chapter is a collection of sayings, I'll point a few out and share some thoughts. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit and you. So, here we go.

Proverbs 1 gives us the writer, King Solomon (1:1, although there are other writers), and the purpose for proverbs (1:2-6). The foundation for all knowledge (and wisdom) is proper reverence for God, which a righteous person would do. But for a fool, though, they couldn't care less for wisdom or discipline (1:7). If we flip that around, a righteous person should crave wisdom and discipline. Why? It leads to a more healthy, productive, and godly life. FYI, the Hebrew word for "fool" used here means "one who doesn't have understanding" or "perverse."

Case in point. Our initial source of wisdom comes from godly parents because they've learned of the Lord and walked with Him. I've often said that knowledge plus experience leads to wisdom. You can write it in the margin of your Bible like this: k+e ->w. Such experiential wisdom protects our heads and hearts, "a garland of favor on your head and pendants around your neck" (1:9). Protecting our heads and hearts from wicked, ungodly people is crucial if we're to stay out of trouble. Here's a well-known proverb that sums up the enticement of sinners in vv. 10-19, "Bad company corrupts good morals." As opposed to the call of the sinners, the God-focused, reverential person should heed wisdom's call (1:20), personified as a woman. Wisdom calls to the unwise, foolish person, offering them help. If they reject it, wisdom will laugh at them for being fools. They had the opportunity to learn and to stay out of trouble, but "Oh well! That's on you, fool!"

(1:22-32). This is not so for those who listen to wisdom (the theme of Proverbs), for "...whoever listens to me will live securely and be undisturbed by the dread of danger" (1:33).

In Proverbs 2, we find out why it's so beneficial to seek out wisdom with everything we have. We start with a classic "if-then" type of statement – "If" (vv. 1-4), followed by two "thens" (vv. 5-8 and 9-11). As for the first, if we pursue God's word and seek understanding, it will bring us reverence for the Lord, knowledge of Him, and success and shield us as we go through life. This shield is often from the consequences of unwise and poor decisions. Secondly, as we pursue God's word and understanding, we'll understand how to live right, God's way, and what integrity and justice are. Growing discernment and understanding will guard our way as we accumulate wisdom and knowledge. From what, you may ask? The writer points out two types of people: Those who love doing evil (2:12-15) and the unfaithful woman (16-19). And it ain't just women, so I'd rewrite it as "It will rescue you from a forbidden married man or woman." I've watched too many marriages explode from foolish sexual betrayals to which unwise (okay, stupid, and morally bankrupt) people have surrendered. Chapter 2 ends with a "therefore" kind of lesson. Therefore, keep to the right path, and you'll live long in the land (commonly looked at as a prosperous and blessed life) instead of wicked people who won't.

Proverbs 3 has an interesting opening section per my Bible commentary. "In this section (3:1-12), the odd-numbered verses give a command and the even-numbered verses a promised result (in vv. 5-6, the commands spill over)." This observation is good because it helps us to understand the text.

To start, we're encouraged to grab hold of God's word and not let go. The benefits are outstanding – "many days, a full life, well-being, favor and high regard with God and people." I can't say I'd hate that. Now, if we follow the next set of commands (odd-numbered verses), it boils down to this – "Trust in the Lord, not your understanding, make Him your guide, don't try to be a know-it-all ('cause you're not!), tithe your best stuff, and don't hate the Lord's discipline." Good counsel! Therefore, we should look for God's wisdom as much as possible. Why? Because by His wisdom, God created the earth, the glory of His wisdom is evident when you look at His creation. So, we are to pursue wisdom as it will protect our way through life.

I like the practical wisdom from Proverbs 3:27-35. The verses are all about treating others in a godly manner. Don't delay help to someone in need, and don't harm others or falsely accuse them (don't you hate that when it's done to you?). And definitely don't desire to

be like the wicked because the Lord brings down the wicked person but supports the righteous one. I think it's funny how 3:35 reads. "The wise will inherit/obtain honor/glory/weight, but the Lord lifts up and displays the stupid person's disgrace/dishonor/shame." Yeah, I think I'll choose wisdom!

INSIGHT

According to the Bible, Solomon was the wisest person who has ever lived (2 Chronicle 1:11-12, 9:22-23). But when he was old, he fell into idolatry (1 Kings 11:4). I've often thought about this. It would have been better for Solomon to ask for wholehearted devotion to God than wisdom. That thought leads me to believe that some of the Proverbs were written by an elderly wise king who has learned his lesson. Wisdom alone is not enough and must be preceded by devotion to God. Without God, wisdom is steered by human desires. We need devotion to God, out of which comes Godly wisdom.

July 6 : Scriptures Proverbs 4-6

SUMMARY

Proverbs 4 starts as we've seen in the previous chapters: "My son, listen to your father." How did Solomon learn to seek after wisdom as the best thing to obtain? It's right here, "When I was a son with my father, tender and precious to my mother, he taught me and said..." (4:3-4). What Solomon learned from his father and mother, he passes on to his children. I find this fascinating because David and Bathsheba's relationship came about because David foolishly (unwisely) pursued a married woman. Keep this in mind as you read the coming chapters. This unwise act led to many family problems that severely rocked David's family. The son that was conceived via their adulterous affair died. To try to cover his adulterous affair, David had Bathsheba's husband killed via a planned military action veiled as a Killed in Action event. By God's decree, David suffered the near loss of his kingdom through Absalom's coup and the deaths of two sons, Amnon and Absalom. So, do you think King David warned Solomon about the evils of adultery? Of course. The most excellent "woman" Solomon could and should pursue is wisdom!

Next, Solomon tells us there are only two paths in life (ways of living); the paths of the wicked and the righteous. The path of the righteous is straight (easier to travel, can see what's coming and where to go) and "is like the light of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until midday" (4:18). You can walk it and not trip and fall. Not so the path of the wicked. Their path is dark, and because they don't have the illuminating light of God's word/guidance/direction, they trip and fall (4:19).

Proverbs often use the idiom of a "path" to refer to our "walk through life." A straight path is God's way. A crooked path is the way of the wicked. At the end of Proverbs 4, the straight path is examined. The words of wisdom should be followed for very practical reasons. They bring us life and health (4:22). It's fascinating to study people. You can see how living wisely or foolishly can profoundly affect a person's life and health. Living foolishly takes its toll on our minds and bodies. Living wisely teaches us to care for the earthly container God has given us to use during our days on earth. And within that container, one thing is most important to care for. "Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life" (4:23). The phrase "above all else" means "more than all guarding" (HCSB commentary). Why is guarding the heart so important?

Guarding implies keeping something from escaping and protecting it from attack (Ibid.). According to the Hebraic understanding, the heart is a person's core, and from this core flows all we are. Therefore, if we allow anything to attack our heart and overpower it, our way of living is severely changed. That's why some ungodly people are trying to

reeducate children to accept ungodly and anti-godly ideas. It's not just outward attacks we need to guard against. It's inward as well. Do we let the thoughts of our hearts wander into areas we shouldn't? Do we entertain feelings and thoughts that would bring anger or hatred, lust or other wickedness? As my commentary says, "The inclination of your heart directs your mortal life and determines whether you enter eternal life." Yes, it's that serious. The wicked do not spend their eternal life with God. Only the righteous do. Are you willing to risk it? If we want to stay on the right path, then we need to guard our hearts according to God's word, which brings us wisdom and helps us avoid evil (4:26-27).

Here in Proverbs 5, we get the sense that Solomon learned an important lesson from his father. Now while the perp of the proverbial adulterous relationship is a woman, the principles remain the same regardless of gender. Though an illicit relationship may seem appealing and sweet, it's as bitter and damaging as chugging battery acid (5:3). It ultimately leads to death. I'm sure Solomon knew of all the death that followed David's adultery. What's the solution? *Stay the heck away from the spouse that's willing to seduce others!* If you don't, you could be sued (yes, "alienation of affection" is a legal charge) and lose your income, possibly for a long time (5:10). If the cheater is promiscuous, the person could have a sexually transmitted disease and today, there are STDs that are incurable or fatal or both. Do you really want to take that chance with your health (5:11)? One of the harshest losses due to adultery is your reputation, and, in some circles, that can be irreparable (5:14). Solomon's remedy is not just to stay away from the adulterer/adulteress, but primarily taking joy in your spouse (5:18-19)! If you stray, remember who's watching you, GOD, and remember that the inevitable end of a wicked person is becoming entrapped by sin unto death. Nope, not a good thing to which to aspire.

Proverbs 6 is a sundry list of sound wisdom broken into sections. There's financial advice, a warning to maintain a diligent life (don't be lazy), avoiding an evil person, negative character traits, and the adultery warning. Solomon's warning regarding finances is to avoid money entanglements because you could wind up stuck with someone else's debts or locked into a terrible contract. When approaching any financial opportunity or situation, *ask the Lord for wisdom and warning if something is amiss.* Trust me. By doing that, my wife and I have dodged some economic bullets. Solomon's wise solution is so important. Make getting out of the financial trap your #1 priority.

Next, laziness harms no one but the sluggard. I've always been amazed at people who float along, doing the least they can or pursuing their muse when it obviously isn't helping to support them. And then they scream to others for help. For those who are able-

bodied, my “heartless” reply is always the same – go to work. For the Christian, this is doubly important because we were created to work, develop and shape the world around us, and we’ve been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit to empower and direct us in our work. As we work, we not only shape the world, but our lives are on display, and we have an opportunity to influence our co-workers. I can’t say the same for the “load” who sits in their basement playing computer or video games all day. “Heartless” me also believes hunger and lack are good motivators, eventually. Please don’t say, “What about ...?” I know the vulnerable and helpless deserve our help. I get it. I’m talking about the able-bodied lazy person. Okay, end of rant.

The last section on adultery is vivid. God’s commands via the parents’ counsel are lights to guide us. In the dark, the wayward spouse may seem attractive, but in the light of God’s commands, the seediness of the opportunity is clear. Yeah, it’s like the proverbial, “She looked good and single last night at the bar, but in the morning, she’s not, and her husband is about to pummel me.” What Solomon says is harsh but true. It would be better to visit a prostitute than sleep with another man’s wife (6:26). At least with a prostitute, you just lose some cash. With the adulteress/adulterer, you risk your whole life because you’ll have to live with what you’ve done. Memories, relationship damage, and reputation, right? “Oh, I can sleep with her. This bad stuff won’t happen to me,” says the fool. Solomon: “Can a man embrace fire and his clothes not be burned?” Nope. The damage is inevitable. So just don’t. And don’t forget, a jilted spouse will have no mercy on the perp (6:34-35).

INSIGHT

I’m struck by the verses, “Listen, sons, to a father’s discipline, and pay attention so that you may gain understanding, for I am giving you good instruction. Don’t abandon my teaching” (4:1-2). What is a child’s first source of wisdom? Their parents, specifically their father. Why? Again, knowledge is tempered by experience, and wisdom is forged in the fires of experience. Is it any wonder that so many fatherless children live so foolishly? I thank God for godly mothers who sacrifice so much and endure so much stress and pain to raise children with absentee fathers. I also applaud single fathers who endure the same with a dedication to raising godly sons and daughters. I would also encourage children, young adults, and adults – to “listen to your parents.” Yes, they aren’t perfect. No one handed your parent a “How To Raise Perfect Children” owner’s manual when you were born. Parents learn as we go and try to do the best we can. But out of that comes wisdom, which can benefit you and help you avoid trouble if you listen and take it to heart, as Solomon wrote.

July 7 : Scriptures Proverbs 7-9

SUMMARY

Proverbs 7 opens up with Solomon's counsel for us to bind ourselves to wisdom and make it the all-encompassing guideline for our lives. Of course, God's word is our ultimate guide, but from where does wisdom come? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his instructions have good insight. His praise endures forever" (Psalm 111:10). So, learn to revere the Lord, and His word will bring wisdom to you. Solomon's counsel to get tight with wisdom is for a particular reason and situation, the danger of adultery (7:5). Then Solomon relates a personal story of watching a foolish young man out walking as darkness falls, purposefully wandering close to a known wanton woman's home. Remember the old proverb, "Curiosity killed the cat?" Well, this foolish young man is about to be skinned alive, so to speak. The woman spots him and begins seducing him, promising him a rich and sensual experience, a night of all nights with her. He won't even have to worry about her husband because he's gone until the end of the month (cultural context: he took his money with him for business/the new moon signals the start of a new month). She pleads with the fool and flatters him until his impulses kick in, and he tosses reason, caution, and morals away. Annd, he's done. His life is affected forever. Therefore, Solomon cautions, "Don't let your heart turn aside to her ways; don't stray onto her paths. For she has brought many down to death; her victims are countless" (7:25-26)

In my opinion, Proverbs 8 should be read without the chapter designation getting in the way, i.e., reading directly from Proverbs 7:27 to 8:1. This juxtaposes the wanton woman calling out to the foolish young man with wisdom (personified as a woman) calling to all people. I find it interesting that Solomon is an Israelite writing to his people, yet he shows wisdom personified calling to the Gentiles as well, "People, I call out to you; my cry is *to the children of Adam*" (8:4, italics author). Yes, the Lord calls all His children to fear Him and gain wisdom and understanding. Verses 7-21 are wisdom's benefits for us and why it's good to seek wisdom. I especially like how Solomon puts it, "I love those who love me, and those who search for me find me" (8:17). To rephrase it, when we love wisdom, wisdom loves us, i.e., we get a ton of blessings from walking wisely. Solomon describes wisdom's supremacy via it being present with God before the world was even created (8:23). And wisdom was active as the world was being made (8:27). God and wisdom joyfully worked together as a team to create the world of men ("delighting in the children of Adam," 8:31). Great imagery, huh? The upshot is that since God created the world through His great wisdom, we who live in His world live best if we live with wisdom. Wisdom is the operating system of the world. But the choice is ours. "For the one who

finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but the one who misses me harms himself; all who hate me love death" (8:35-36).

Chapter 9 compares wisdom and folly, and both are personified as women. Wisdom "sets the table" for a banquet and calls out to the "inexperienced" person to come and receive freely and without limit. Why? Inexperienced people stay out of a lot of trouble when they listen to and heed the wisdom of others – knowledge + experience = wisdom. Wisdom keeps the inexperienced person out of a lot of trouble and builds experience-based wisdom, and on and on. One of the first examples that wisdom gives us is to whom we should offer correction. Mockers and the wicked aren't usually open to wise advice. They'll either scorn you or attack you. You see that all over the place today when a Christian gives a wise answer to the media and the foolish talking heads snidely *pooh-pooh* the Christian's wisdom or disregard the wise statement and make an *ad hominem* attack. Side note: I'm often amazed when reading Proverbs how human nature has remained static and predictable and how the book's wisdom is still so applicable!

If there's any verse to memorize in Proverbs, I would suggest starting with this one. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. If you are wise, you are wise for your own benefit; if you mock, you alone will bear the consequences" (9:10-11). This is an excellent summary of Proverbs.

Chapter 9 finishes with the rowdy woman "Folly," who, once again, projects the dangerous aspects of adultery. Be faithful to wisdom, the spouse that loves you and works for your benefit at all times.

INSIGHT

In Proverbs 7, I mentioned how adultery and illicit sex could forever affect a person's life. Well, Jesus said, "But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Jesus teaches us to guard the gate (the eye) that can let in lustful images that can fire up sexual desires that are, in essence, adultery because we've "interacted" with the woman in our mind and heart. Jesus sets a high bar. There is no "look, but don't touch." Sin begins inside and eventually works its way out in our actions. Nurturing ungodly sexual thoughts and desires will ultimately lead to some ungodly sexual acts. This is why pornography is wrong (among many other arguments against it). And just like adultery, pornography also affects our lives forever. Images remain in our heads. Our spouse "just doesn't measure up" to the ridiculous fantasy on our screens. And like adultery, pornography can (and often does) ruin relationships. Search sites that help people with their addiction to pornography, and

you'll read horror stories about abuse, insane expectations, and emotional shut-downs that destroyed marriages and families. Solomon is wise about illicit sex situations. Just don't go there. If you foolishly do so, you're risking your life, especially your spiritual life.