Proverbs 20-31 Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

Proverbs

Illustrations, Devotionals

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PROVERBS 20

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Proverbs 20
Today in the Word
April 20, 2013

Naaman, commander of the army of Syria, suffered from leprosy. His cure began with the faithful witness of a captured Israelite slave girl (2Kings 5). The girl spoke of the prophet Elisha and the power of the one true God to heal her master. That's exactly what happened, and to this day this child's actions are preserved in the witness of Scripture.

Today's verse takes on added significance in light of all the parent-child advice we've already seen in Proverbs (as in Pr 3). But there's more to it than just a direct truth for children—there's an implied truth for adults as well (Pr 20:11). If "even small children are known by their actions," how much more so adults! That is, what's true for children is even more true for adults, underscoring the importance of pursuing "pure and right" conduct. If they do, their children will be blessed (Pr 20:7).

In ancient Near Eastern culture, the relationship between king and people was not unlike the relationship between parents and

children. The responsibilities of kingship or leadership are another running theme in the book of Proverbs. In those days, a king's word was law. Pr 20:2 highlights the power of a king and the consequentiality of his choices. To be fair and just, he must be responsible, observant, and alert when using his authority (Pr 20:8). The picture of winnowing wheat from chaff shows what he must do (Pr 20:26). The fate of a nation hangs on his ability to discern and decide right from wrong. One might think that the king's position depended on strength or dominance, but in fact it depends on his relationship with his people. Ideally this is a relationship of love, loyalty, and trust (Pr 20:28), as in God's covenant relationship with His people.

Apply the Word - While consistently describing and recommending righteousness, Proverbs also acknowledges that the human heart is sinful and cannot claim to be pure (Pr 20:9). Humble self-examination is part of a life of wisdom. But who can truly understand their own heart (Pr 20:24)? Only God can see our depths. Our self-examination must include prayer and confession of sin.

Proverbs 20:3-7 A Perfect Father

The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him. —Proverbs 20:7

My father once admitted to me, "When you were growing up, I was gone a lot."

I don't remember that. Besides working his full-time job, he was gone some evenings to direct choir practice at church, and he occasionally traveled for a week or two with a men's quartet. But for all the significant (and many small) moments of my life—he was there.

For instance, when I was 8, I had a tiny part in an afternoon play at school. All the mothers came, but only one dad—mine. In many little ways, he has always let my sisters and me know that we are important to him and that he loves us. And seeing him tenderly caring for my mom in the last few years of her life taught me exactly what unselfish love looks like. Dad isn't perfect, but he's always been a dad who gives me a good glimpse of my heavenly Father. And ideally, that's what a Christian dad should do.

At times earthly fathers disappoint or hurt their children. But our Father in heaven is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy" (Ps. 103:8). When a dad who loves the Lord corrects, comforts, instructs, and provides for the needs of his children, he models for them our perfect Father in heaven.

How blessed are the children

Who in their fathers see

The tender Father-love of God,

And find their way to Thee. —Johnson

A life lived for Christ is the best inheritance we can leave our children.

Proverbs 20:3

Silly Arguments

I was watching two sisters prepare Thanksgiving dinner. They had made their special stuffing, spooned it into the turkey, and were preparing to pop it into the oven. They got out the aluminum foil and were ready to cover the meat to help hold in the juices.

Betty had started to place the foil on the turkey, when Paula snapped, "That's not right! You're supposed to put the shiny side out."

"That's ridiculous," Betty replied. "Everybody knows the shiny side goes on the inside." A heated discussion followed, and I'm not sure who got her way. I found out later that both sisters were right. It makes absolutely no difference which side is out.

I have an idea that a whole lot of arguments among Christians are just as unimportant—like what color carpet we should buy for the church sanctuary or whether God can make a rock so big that He can't pick it up. Paul told Timothy to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2Timothy 2:23). Fundamental doctrines need to be guarded, but arguments about trivialities are not beneficial and only divide us and draw us away from God's purposes for us.

Remember to be "gentle to all" and to practice humility (2Ti 2:24, 25). No more silly arguments! —Dave Egner

O Lord, help us to turn aside
From words that spring from selfish pride,
For You would have Your children one
In praise and love for Your dear Son. —D. De Haan

When we forget our priorities,
we argue about trivialities

Proverbs 20:5 Understand One Another

Read: Proverbs 16:16-22

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out. —Proverbs 20:5

One of the best ways for a man to love his wife is to understand her. Peter explains that it is imperative for a husband to “dwell with [his wife] with understanding” (1 Peter 3:7).

This principle works both ways. Husbands want to be understood as well. Actually, we all do. Everyone, married or not, longs to be understood by others at the deepest possible level. We’re born with that need, and we never seem to outgrow it.

It’s feeble avoidance to say we can’t understand one another. We can and we must. It takes time—time spent in one another’s presence asking questions, listening intently, then asking again. It’s as simple and as difficult as that. No one, of course, can fully plumb the mystery of another person’s heart, but we can learn something new every day. The wise man of Proverbs called understanding “a wellspring of life” (16:22), a deep source of wisdom to all who seek it.

Again, I say, understanding takes time—one of the most precious gifts we can give to others. How we choose to spend our time is the surest indicator of how much we care for those we love.

Ask the Lord today to give you the grace to take the time to understand the important people in your life.

To those whose lives we touch in life,

To whom our love we would impart,

The greatest gift that we can give

May be an understanding heart. —Branon

Listening is an open door to understanding.

Proverbs 20:6

Tried And True

We are often disappointed by the unfaithfulness of people. A family member promises to write, but months go by without a letter. A pastor says he will visit when we are sick, but he doesn't make it to the hospital or to our home. A friend agrees to be there for us in our bereavement but doesn't even call. Others tell us they will pray for us but quickly forget our need. Someone promises to do an important task for us but never follows through. We ask ourselves, "Who can find a faithful man?" (Proverbs 20:6).

We can do very little about the unfaithfulness of others. But we can do a lot about our faithfulness to others. When we make a promise we must keep it. When we tell someone we will pray for them, we need to follow through and do it. When we proclaim our loyalty and love for others, we can do little things that show them we mean it.

The apostle Paul said that one fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness (Galatians 5:22). God will create in us a steadfast spirit if we take seriously what we tell others we will do for them, and if we follow through.

Ask God to make you a person whom others can count on—a person who is tried and true.—David H. Roper

Lord, grant to me a faithfulness
In what I say and do
So others will be confident
That I will follow through. —D. De Haan

Faithfulness in little things is a great thing

Proverbs 20:7

What to Leave Children

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

ANXIETY about our family is natural, but we shall be wise if we turn it into care about our own character. If we walk before the Lord in integrity, we shall do more to bless our descendants than if we bequeathed them large estates. A father's holy life is a rich legacy for his sons.

The upright man leaves his heirs his example, and this in itself will be a mine of true wealth. How many me may trace their success in life to the example of their parents!

He leaves them also his repute. Men think all the better of us as the sons of a man who could be trusted, the successors of a tradesman of excellent repute. Oh, that all young men were anxious to keep up the family name!

Above all, he leaves his children his prayers and the blessing of a prayer-hearing God, and these make our offspring to be favored among the sons of men. God will save them even after we are dead. Oh, that they might be saved at once!

Our integrity may be God's means of saving our sons and daughters. If they see the truth of our religion proved by our lives, it may be that they will believe in Jesus for themselves. Lord, fulfill this word to my household!

Proverbs 20:7-17 A Mouthful Of Gravel

Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel. —Proverbs 20:17

A mouthful of gravel! What an unpleasant feeling! Proverbs 20:17 pictures a man who began eating a piece of sweet bread which he had obtained by dishonest methods, but then found that his mouth was filled with stones.

I know what it's like. A while ago I sank into a comfortable chair, tossed some peanuts into my mouth, and began chewing. Suddenly my teeth crunched on something other than a peanut. Like lightning, a stab of pain shot through my mouth. Spitting out the peanuts, I found among them a pebble and a piece of broken tooth!

Solomon used this imagery to speak of the bread of deceit. To expect that sin will not be punished is a delusion. He who lives only for pleasure and temporal enjoyment will find himself at last with only a mouthful of gravel.

Shady practices and questionable methods in business may seem to pay off at the time, but afterward they bring nothing but regret.

In sharp contrast, Solomon said, "The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him" (Prov. 20:7). If we live truthfully instead of deceptively, we will not end up with a mouthful of gravel.

Let worldly minds the world pursue,

It has no charms for me;

Once I admired its trifles too,

But grace has set me free! —Anon.

A deceiver's ultimate victim is himself.

Proverbs 20:11 By Our Deeds

Read: Matthew 23:23-31

Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right. —Proverbs 20:11

One night a clergyman was walking to church when a thief pulled a gun on him and demanded his money or his life. When he reached in his pocket to hand over his wallet, the robber saw his clerical collar and said: "I see you are a priest. Never mind, you can go." The clergyman, surprised by the robber's unexpected act of piety, offered him a candy bar. The robber said, "No thank you. I don't eat candy during Lent."

The man had given up candy as a supposed sacrifice for Lent, but his lifestyle of stealing showed his real character! According to the writer of Proverbs, conduct is the best indicator of character. If someone says he is a godly person, his words can only be proven by consistent actions (20:11). This was true of the religious leaders in Jesus' day as well. He condemned the Pharisees and exposed their sham for professing godliness but denying that profession with sin in their lives (Matt. 23:13-36). Appearances and words are deceiving; behavior is the best judge of character. This applies to all of us.

As followers of Jesus, we demonstrate our love for Him by what we do, not just by what we say. May our devotion to God, because of His love for us, be revealed in our actions today.

Spiritual words are mere distractions

If not backed up by our godly actions,

And all our good and beautiful creeds

Are nothing without God-honoring deeds. —Williams

Conduct is the best proof of character.

Proverbs 20:14-24

Don't Be Deceived!

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

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

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

Many seek and strive for wisdom
But find folly in disguise;
All too few seek first God's kingdom--
Only this can make them wise. --Anon.

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

Proverbs 20:22

Forget and Forgive

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

BE not in haste. Let anger cool down. Say nothing and do nothing to avenge yourself. You will be sure to act unwisely if you take up the cudgels and fight your own battles; and, certainly, you will not show the spirit of the Lord Jesus. It is nobler to forgive, and let the offense pass. To let an injury rankle in your bosom and to meditate revenge is to keep old wounds open and to make new ones. Better forget and forgive.

Peradventure, you say that you must do something or be a great loser; then do what this morning’s promise advises: “Wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee.” This advice will not cost you money, but is worth far more. Be calm and quiet. Wait upon the Lord; tell Him your grievance; spread Rabshakeh’s letter before the Lord, and this of itself will be an ease to your burdened mind. Besides, there is the promise, “He shall save thee.” God will find a way of deliverance for you. How He will do it, neither you nor I can guess, but do it He will. If the Lord saves you, this will be a deal better than getting into petty quarrels and covering yourself with filth by wrestling with the unclean. Be no more angry. Leave your suit with the Judge of all.

Proverbs 20:27

The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

See that row of unlighted candles, standing in silver sockets, chased and wrought with wondrous skill — such are the souls of men by nature, rich in attainments and generous impulses, highly educated, perhaps, apparently fit for high and glorious work, but they have no light. They are a puzzle to themselves and others. Whilst another, who has none of their powers or advantages, casts a glow on his age, which lingers long after he has gone. He is like a common candle, but lit. The spark from God has ignited his soul.

But remember that while the candle shines with the light of God, it wastes. The slowly-dwindling length shows the amount of the

inevitable expenditure. Our Lord said of the Baptist, “He was a burning and shining light.” There must be burning before there can be shining; we must suffer in order to serve. It is good to know this, for it gives purpose to pain. “I cried to Thee, O Lord, and unto Thee I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood?” What profit! If we only knew that, the pain might be borne proudly and lightly. Oh, never dare to think of blessing men, except at a cost of blood and tears, that may seem to thee as a guttering candle, the wax of which is flowing down in trickling streams, or curling up in rugged contortions!

“Therefore, O Lord, I will not fail nor falter. Nay, but I ask it; nay, but I desire— Lay on my lips thine embers of the altar, Seal with the sting, and furnish with the fire.

“Quick in a moment, infinite for ever, Send an arousal better than I pray; Give me a grace upon the faint endeavour, Souls for my hire, and Pentecost to-day.”

PROVERBS 21

Proverbs 21:1

The heart … as the watercourses. (r.v.)

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

Madame Guyon says that there are three classes of souls that may be compared to rivers flowing towards God as their ocean.

1. Some move on sluggishly and feebly. These are often discouraged, dwell much in the outer and emotional, and fail to seek God with their whole strength.

2. Some proceed decidedly and rapidly. These have large hearts, and are quick in their responses to God’s Spirit.

3. Some press on in headlong impetuosity.

This comparison of our hearts to watercourses filled with torrents from the hills is a very beautiful one, and is capable of great expansion.

Watercourses need fresh supplies of water from the hills: and our hearts are in constant need of freshets from the everlasting fountain of God’s nature.

Watercourses must fulfil their ministry in all weathers: and we must continue patiently in faith and well-doing, whatever be our circumstances or emotions. If we fail, the whole land will be smitten with drought.

Watercourses end in merging their waters with the ocean tides: so God will one day be all in all.

Will you let God lead your heart whither He will? Just as a husbandman will cut watercourses in different directions to conduct the flow of the water, so will you not let God lead your life? You can be a watercourse: He must give the water. Only be content, like the river-bed, to lie deep hidden beneath the waters; not noticed or thanked by those that stoop to drink the refreshing draughts. It is impossible for the water to pass through you without nourishing your own soul.

Proverbs 21

Today in the Word

April 21, 2013

People who enjoy puzzles like the challenge of figuring out how things mesh, what goes where, what visual clues or shapes match up, and how details fit together to make a big picture.

There are biblical proverbs especially for these people! The translation might be uncertain or unclear. The social or cultural background might be obscured by history. The reference to everyday life that made sense at one time is now mystifying. Careful study is needed to solve the puzzle. Today, we’ll consider three examples of such proverbs.

A first puzzle is one of meaning (Pr 21:18). What does it mean to say, “The wicked become a ransom for the righteous”? Why do the righteous need to be ransomed? Have they done something wrong? Why do they need a substitute? Or is it just a rescue? In the end, this saying may suggest something like Proverbs 11:8: “The righteous person is rescued from trouble, and it falls on the wicked instead.”

A second puzzle is one of interest (Pr 21:9). To say “A quarrelsome spouse is unpleasant” is obvious. What’s interesting here is the imagery used to underscore the point about our relationships. A mansion is not a blessing if we have to share it with someone with

whom we cannot live in harmony.

A final puzzle is one of sinful advice (Pr 21:14). This proverb seems to recommend bribery, yet other proverbs say bribes are bad (Pr 17:23). Linguistically and culturally, the differences between a “gift” and a “bribe” aren’t altogether clear. In context, the key seems to be whether it perverts justice or not. If not, it may be a legitimate strategy for appeasing someone’s anger.

Apply the Word - Author Gary Chapman, in his classic book, The 5 Love Languages, has identified “gifts” as one way that people experience love. Emotionally, a person might express love by giving gifts or feel loved in receiving gifts. This is what “fills their love tank.” Is this the love language of anyone you know?

Proverbs 21:1 God Still Reigns

Read: Daniel 4:28-37

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men. —Daniel 4:17

There’s a story from the Eastern Roman Empire of a Christian monk who was horrified by the wickedness of the emperor. He prayed to God and asked, “Why did You allow that evil man to become emperor?” God replied, “Because I couldn’t find anyone worse!”

Daniel saw wicked kings reign over God’s people in Babylon. It must have been extremely frustrating. In time, the Lord dethroned each proud king, but He replaced them with others just as evil.

King Nebuchadnezzar, for example, exalted himself until God caused him to live like an animal for 7 years. When he regained his mind, he praised God as the one true Ruler (Dan. 4:28-37). But the cycle of evil monarchs continued. Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s descendant, mocked God and used the sacred goblets from the temple in Jerusalem during a drunken orgy (5:2-4).

We must remember that history is God’s story. He reigns when the politicians we vote for get into office, and He reigns when those we oppose get elected. God is sovereign over the rulers of this world (Dan. 4:17). We can trust Him to do what is right because His “works are truth, and His ways justice” (v.37).

The Most High still rules over kingdoms of men,

He gives the control to whomever He will;

All people must bow to His sovereign plan,

And know that His purposes He will fulfill. —Hess

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. —Proverbs 21:1

Proverbs 21:2

Our Daily Bread

In an experiment years ago, researchers fitted people with special prismatic glasses that made things appear upside down, straight lines appear curved, and sharp outlines seem fringed with color. Even though the subjects continued to wear the glasses, within just a few days the unnatural shapes, tinted edges, and inverted landscapes gradually disappeared, and the world began to appear normal again. Their brains had overcome false data coming through the lenses. This adapt-ability in the physical realm is indeed a blessing.

Proverbs suggests, however, that the mind doesn't function very well in the spiritual realm. In fact, we are sinners whose deepest imaginations are evil, and our thought-life produces a world of illusions. We think of ourselves as pure, when in reality we are guilty before God. That is why, for example, many people shift the responsibility for their behavior to environmental factors or to faulty upbringing. They fail to see their own rebellion and selfishness and imagine themselves to be the helpless, innocent victims of circumstance. In this way, they justify thoughts, feelings, and actions that are obviously sinful. Their way is right in their own eyes.

As Christians, we should be aware of the deceptive nature of our hearts and allow the Holy Spirit to correct our vision through a knowledge of God's Word. —M. R. De Haan II

Salvation gives spiritual vision to sin-blinded eyes.

Proverbs 21:23

A Word From The Wise

James, a “pillar in the early church” (Gal. 2:9), recognized the great destructive power and the danger of an uncontrolled tongue. He

was not alone. Men and women in many cultures have warned us about the need to guard our speech. This bit of verse by an unknown writer says it well:

“The boneless tongue, so small and weak, can crush and kill,” declared the Greek.

The Persian proverb wisely saith, “A lengthy tongue, an early death.” Sometimes it takes this form instead: “Don’t let your tongue cut off your head.”

While Arab sages this impart: “The tongue’s great storehouse is the heart.”

From Hebrew wit, the maxim’s sprung: “Though feet should slip, don’t let the tongue.”

A verse from Scripture crowns the whole: “Who keeps the tongue doth keep his soul.”

Is it any wonder that James likened the tongue to a little fire that sets a great forest ablaze, or to the very small rudder that turns a mighty ship in a storm? (James 3:4-6).

O Lord, help us to learn a lesson from the wise. Help us to hold our tongue and not let it slip. —Haddon W. Robinson

There are some silent people

Whose praises should be sung;

They preach a mighty sermon

By guarding well their tongue. —Posegate

Wise is the person who knows what to say and when to say it

PROVERBS 22

Proverbs 22:1
Just A Moment

It takes years to build a reputation--and just a moment of indiscretion to destroy it.

I think of this when I recall a college friend who never got in trouble or caused any difficulty. But one day, in a moment of mischief, he threw a match into a waste can and started a fire that left part of our dorm scorched and his reputation burned beyond recognition. Whatever else he has done since then, his name remains associated with that reckless prank.

Often we think young people should be the most careful about their reputation, and indeed they need to protect their good name. But adults too can throw away their good name through one poor choice.

Think of David, who for many years bore the stigma of his sinful, adulterous liaison with Bathsheba. Even though he was forgiven, his reputation had been stained. We can't be sure of the specific occasion for the writing of Psalm 38, but in it David describes the agony of living with the results of his sin. To avoid such pain, Scripture tells us to guard our heart (Prov. 4:23), to walk wisely (Eph. 5:15), and to follow in Jesus' steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

It takes just a moment to destroy your good name and your testimony for God. Don't let it happen to you. —Dave Branon

THINKING IT OVER

Why do we think we can get away with sin?

What happened to David? (Ps. 38:2-12).

How did he react to his sin? (v.18).

To whom did he turn? (vv.21-22).

If we take care of our character, our reputation will take care of itself! --Moody

Proverbs 22:1-5 The Barking Lion

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches. —Proverbs 22:1

Visitors to a zoo were outraged when the “African lion” started barking instead of roaring. Zoo staff said they had disguised a Tibetan

mastiff—a very large dog—as a lion because they could not afford the real thing. Needless to say, the zoo's reputation was sullied and people will think twice before visiting it.

Reputation is fragile; once it's damaged, it's hard to restore. It is not uncommon to sacrifice a good reputation on the altar of power, prestige, or profit. This too could be our story. Scripture encourages us: "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Prov. 22:1). God is telling us that true value must be placed not in what we have but in who we are.

Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates said, "The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear." As followers of Jesus, we bear His name. Because of His love for us, we strive to walk worthy of Him, reflecting His likeness in our words and deeds.

When we fail, He picks us up again by His love. By our example, others around us will be led to praise the God who has redeemed and transformed us (Matt. 5:16)—for the name of the Lord is worthy of glory, honor, and all praise.

Lord, I do want to walk worthy of Your name

because You have made me Your own. I know

I can't live perfectly, but I want to reflect to others

a little of who You are. Please show Yourself through me.

The purest treasure mortal times afford is a spotless reputation. —Shakespeare

INSIGHT: The book of Proverbs is made up of several collections of wise sayings, with the majority coming from the pen of wise King Solomon. Solomon's proverbs of wisdom are contained in 1:8–22:16, which are then followed by the sayings of other wise men in 22:17–24:34. More of Solomon's wisdom, written down by Hezekiah's men, is found in chapters 25–29. The book of wisdom closes with Agur's wise sayings in chapter 30 and Lemuel's words in chapter 31. All of this combines to make the book of Proverbs a comprehensive collection of the wisdom of ancient Israel.

Proverbs 22

Today in the Word

April 22, 2013

Today we finish the main collection of Solomon's proverbs (Pr 10–22), so it's a good time to recall how he became so wise. Solomon's wisdom wasn't just a product of natural ability, education, or power, though these factors may have played a role. His wisdom was a special gift from the Lord, given to the young king when he ascended the throne of his father David (see 1Kings 3–4).

This is also a good time to review the key themes we've encountered so far in the book of Proverbs. One theme we've seen throughout this collection is the stark contrast between virtue and vice. Proverbs have a habit of dividing the world up into two categories—wisdom and folly, righteousness and wickedness, humility and pride, virtue and vice. In today's reading, we again see a number of qualities held up as interrelated virtues, including prudence, humility, fear of the Lord, good parenting, thrift, generosity, gracious speech, purity, and wisdom. And likewise we again see a number of qualities held up as interrelated vices, including laziness, adultery, injustice, unfaithfulness, mockery, and folly.

A second theme is that the righteous are blessed while the wicked are punished: "whoever sows wickedness reaps trouble" (Pr 22:8), but "The generous will themselves be blessed" (Pr 22:9). As another example, humility and fear of the Lord: "its wages are riches and honor and life" (Pr 22:4). Remember, these blessings may or may not be literal or material; the proverb simply presents a general truth in a way we can understand.

A third theme is the sovereignty of God. He made all (Pr 22:2), sees all (Pr 22:12), rules all, ensures justice, is the source of all wisdom, and deserves our worship. "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen" (Ro 16:27).

Apply the Word - What general themes or specific proverbs have meant the most to you this month? What unanswered questions do you still have about godly wisdom? If you were to tell a friend about what matters in Proverbs, what would you say? Today is a good day to reflect on and pray over what God has been teaching you through His Word.

Proverbs 22:1a

A Priceless Possession

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches. --Proverbs 22:1

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to be people of integrity. They are to be upright and honest, choosing a good name above riches (Pr 22:1) in a world that is seeking quite the opposite.

In a poll of executives, for example, Gallup discovered that 80 percent admit to driving while drunk, 35 percent overstate tax deductions, 75 percent take work supplies for personal use, and 78 percent use the company phone for personal long distance calls. A study by the Office of Technology Assessment determined that one-third of the US government's telephone bill is spent on personal calls.

Time theft and unauthorized absenteeism are also common offenses in the workplace. General Motors reports losing 9 percent of employee hours due to absenteeism. White-collar crime in the US is estimated at $40 billion per year.

The Lord desires that His people act in a different way. We are always to do what is right and to speak the truth (Ps. 15:2). Integrity pleases Him, and it also benefits us. It gives us blessings far better than riches: freedom from guilt, a positive witness for Christ, and an intimate relationship with God.

A good name is truly a priceless possession! --D C Egner

Help me, dear Lord, to be honest and true

In all that I say and all that I do;

Give me the courage to do what is right

To bring to the world a glimpse of Your light. --Fasick

Integrity is Christlike character in workclothes

Proverbs 22:1-8

Connected Actions

My son Steve was running the best cross-country races of his life. Just a high-school freshman, he earned a spot on the varsity team.

That's when Steve decided he wanted to go even faster—but not on foot. So he spent a Saturday racing a dirt-track motorcycle. All went well until he misjudged a jump and ended up with his leg under a Yamaha.

Nothing was broken, but having a banged-up calf muscle took a toll on his cross-country season. His times got worse, and he missed making the varsity team for the state finals.

Steve learned an important lesson: All of our actions are connected. Each action affects other areas of our lives.

Sometimes we try to keep parts of our lives separate from our faith in Christ. One example is thinking that watching immorality on TV does not affect our walk with God. But the Bible says, "He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow" (Proverbs 22:8), and "He who sows to his flesh will … reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will … reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:8).

All elements in life are inter-related. We must make sure that each thought, each action, and each word flows from a heart of Godliness—so that everything we do is for God's glory, honor, and praise. —Dave Branon

Surer than autumn's harvests

Are harvests of thought and deed;

Like those that our hearts have planted,

The yield will be like the seed. —Harris

The best reason for doing what's right today is tomorrow

Proverbs 22:4

True Satisfaction

Becoming rich and famous does not guarantee contentment. If it did, multimillionaire athletes would not jeopardize their careers by using illicit drugs. If it did, a wealthy lawyer would not have tearfully told me that he would gladly trade everything he had for a change in the behavior of his sons. If it did, the occurrence of multiple marriages among celebrities would not be commonplace.

Obviously, contentment must come from a source other than wealth and fame.

In Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon said that because sinful people rule the world, we shouldn't be surprised when the poor are oppressed and when justice and righteousness are denied (vv.8-9). The life of those who love money is not as rosy as it seems. They are never satisfied with what they have, and they face the emptiness of watching other people consume their riches (vv.10-11). The humble laborer, content with little, can sleep soundly, while the rich man lies awake at night worrying about his money (v.12).

How about you? Are you frustrated or satisfied? Paul wrote that we are "not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Only when we trust in the Lord will we find true and lasting satisfaction. —Herbert Vander Lugt

You may have much gold and grandeur,

Yet by God be reckoned poor;

He alone has riches truly

Who has Christ, though nothing more. --Anon.

Discontentment makes rich men poor; contentment makes poor men rich!

Proverbs 22:5

Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

This is due to the love of God, shown in the constitution of the world. It would have been malignity indeed to have placed us in the world without the warning signal of pain to show us where we are wrong, and to sting us when we go astray. By the pitiful mercy of our Creator, pain is the inevitable consequence of the breach of physical and moral law; thus men are shown that they are on the wrong path, and driven back in repentance and rectitude. The Greek motto said: “Pain is therefore gain.”

You say that there are many who suffer, who are among the holiest and meekest of mankind; and you wonder how it is that those snares have come so plentifully to their share. But you must remember that though an individual may not have broken the law himself in any special sense, yet he inherits broken law. By virtue of his union with a sinful race he reaps a harvest sown by others’ sins; and by bearing it meekly and lovingly he enters into union with some aspects of the death of Christ, and fills up that which is behind of his sufferings. When wrong is borne sweetly and uncomplainingly, some froward deed that started long before, and had been cursing the world, is for ever arrested and cancelled; as a cannon ball in a bank of sand.

But, in addition, there are some who suffer according to the will of God. Pain, beneath the touch of the Spirit of God, is in the highest degree disciplinary. As the angels watch the result on a soul of God’s sharp ordeal of suffering, they say:

“The keen sanctity, Which with its effluence, like a glory, clothed And circled round the Crucified, has seized And scorched, and shrivelled it”

Proverbs 22:6

No Pain, No Gain

Christian educator and author Howard Hendricks cautions parents not to bribe or threaten their children to get them to obey. What they need is firm, loving, and at times painful discipline.

Hendricks recalls being in a home where a bright-eyed grade-schooler sat across the table from him.

"Sally, eat your potatoes," said her mother in a proper parental tone.

"Sally, if you don't eat your potatoes, you won't get any dessert!"

Sally winked at Hendricks. Sure enough, mother removed the potatoes and brought Sally some ice cream. He saw this as a case of parents obeying their children rather than "Children, obey your parents" (Ephesians 6:1).

Many parents are afraid to do what they know is best for their youngsters. They're afraid their children will turn against them and think they don't love them. Hendricks says, "Your primary concern is not what they think of you now, but what they will think 20 years from now."

Even our loving heavenly Father's correction is painful, yet afterward (perhaps years later) "it yields the peaceable fruit of

righteousness in those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). As loving parents, dare we have less long-term vision than our heavenly Father has? —Joanie Yoder

As parents we must have this goal:

To teach our children self-control;

For firm and loving discipline

Can keep them from the ways of sin. —D. De Haan

The surest way to make life hard for your children is to make it soft for them

Proverbs 22:1-6 A Child's Potential

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. —Proverbs 22:6

Louis Armstrong was well known for his smiling face, raspy voice, white handkerchief, and virtuoso trumpet playing. Yet his childhood was one of want and pain. He was abandoned by his father as an infant and sent to reform school when he was only 12. Surprisingly, this became a positive turning point.

Music professor Peter Davis regularly visited the school and provided musical training for the boys. Soon Louis excelled on the cornet and became the leader of the boys' band. His life trajectory seemed to have been reset to become a world-famous trumpet player and entertainer.

Louis' story can be an example for Christian parents. The proverb: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6) can apply to more than the spiritual and moral aspects of our children's lives. We should also realize that a child's giftedness will often determine his or her area of interest. In the case of Louis, a little training in music resulted in a virtuoso trumpet player.

As we lovingly provide to our children godly instruction from God's Word, we should encourage them in their interests and giftedness so that they might become all that God has planned for them to be.

Our children are a gift from God

On loan from heaven above,

To train and nourish in the Lord,

And guide them with His love. —Sper

Save a child, save a life.

Proverbs 22:17-24:34

Today in the Word

April 23, 2013

In his recent book, Rich, Free, and Miserable: The Failure of Success in America, author John Brueggemann explores "market thinking," that is, the tendency to evaluate everything in terms of efficiency, productivity, and profit. It has invaded every aspect of American life, often at the cost of cherished moral values and nonmaterial priorities.

Anyone familiar with the book of Proverbs knows that material success doesn't lead to happiness (Pr 23:4–5). The path of wisdom is the superior choice (Pr 24:14). Today's reading is a section of Proverbs known as the "Sayings of the Wise." This is a separate collection by unknown authors, and the form and content has parallels with Egyptian wisdom literature of that day. Following the introduction (Pr 22:17–21), and excluding an extra group of proverbs at the end (Pr 24:23–34), there are "thirty sayings" (Pr 22:20) or proverbs of varying lengths between Proverbs 22:22–24:22.

Interestingly, these sayings are mostly framed as negative imperatives, that is, as advice not to do something. This is usually followed by a reason or consequence, making it more likely that the listener or reader will heed the advice. For example, we're told not to accept a stingy person's food, because such a person is worried about the cost and not extending true hospitality (Pr 23:6–8).

The moral order that was created by the Lord is quite logical. Wisdom = obedience = God's idea of what's best for us. For instance, we're told not to exploit the poor because God is their advocate (Pr 22:23–24; cf. Pr 23:10–11). Because the poor are vulnerable, we might be tempted to think we could get away with injustice. The reminder that we're accountable to God gives us additional

motivation to do the right thing.

Apply the Word - The verses in Proverbs on the value of wisdom would make a good study of their own! Meditating on Proverbs 24:3–7, 13–14 from today's reading reveals several benefits. "By wisdom a house is built" is sound advice for any endeavor. "Wisdom is like honey for you" points to its internal benefits for our souls.

Proverbs 22:1-16 Lessons for Little Ones

Start children off on the way they should go. Proverbs 22:6

When my daughter described a problem she was having in the school lunchroom, I immediately wondered how I could fix the issue for her. But then another thought occurred. Maybe God had allowed the problem so she could see Him at work and get to know Him better. Instead of running to the rescue, I decided to pray with her. The trouble cleared up without any help from me!

This situation showed my little one that God cares for her, that He listens when she prays, and that He answers prayers. The Bible says there's something significant about learning these lessons early in life. If we "start children off on the way they should go, … when they are old they will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6). When we start kids off with an awareness of Jesus and His power, we are giving them a place to return to if they wander and a foundation for spiritual growth throughout their lives.

Consider how you might foster faith in a child. Point out God's design in nature, tell a story about how He has helped you, or invite a little one to thank God with you when things go right. God can work through you to tell of His goodness throughout all generations.

Dear God, I pray that You will raise up believers in the next generation. Show me how I can encourage young people to trust in You.

We influence future generations by living for Christ today.

INSIGHT: The book of Proverbs is structured as a life manual from a father to his son (Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 7:1). The proverbs are not prophecies or promises, but are short pithy statements that express truths about human behavior. Parents are encouraged to teach God's Word to their children (Pr 22:6) and to discipline them (v. 15).

Proverbs 22:6 Looking And Learning

Read: Deut. 11:18-21

Train up a child in the way he should go. —Proverbs 22:6

As an umpire stood behind the plate at a girls' softball game, he heard a player's mother start chanting: "We want a new ump! We want a new ump!" Soon, other parents took up the chant. The ump smiled, then turned toward the crowd and yelled, "I want new parents! I want new parents!" The heckling died away.

It's important for parents to set a good example, because their children are watching them. Christian parents can encourage good habits and behavior by doing things like:

• Praying for and with them—so they learn how to talk with God. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it" (Col. 4:2).

• Reading and teaching them the Bible—so they learn God's truth. "Teach [God's commands] diligently to your children, … talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7).

• Telling them about Jesus—and leading them to faith in Him. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

The best way to set a good example for our children is to live out our faith in front of them. While they're looking—they're learning about what matters most.

Take stock of yourself and consider your child—

Your time and your thoughts are his due;

How would you reply to the Lord should He ask,

"What kind of parent are you?" —Anon.

Children may not inherit their parents' talent, but they will absorb their values.

PROVERBS 23

Proverbs 23:1-5

For Profit

We live in a materialistic age. Gadgets and luxuries with their glitter and glamour entice even Christians to spend too much energy and money to obtain them. That's why it's important to keep spiritual values foremost in our minds.

Have you been putting all of your energies into getting ahead in this world while neglecting heavenly values? Jesus said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life" (Jn. 6:27). Have you attempted recently to lead anyone to Christ and offered food that satisfies forever?

If you want to see how materialistic you are, take this little test: Suppose someone were to offer you a thousand dollars for every person you earnestly sought to lead to Christ. Would you try to witness to more people than you are doing now? Is it possible that you would do for money, even at the risk of blunders or ridicule, what you would hesitate to do otherwise in obedience to Christ's urgent commands? Is your love of money stronger than your love of God or the souls of people?

What is the prime goal of our lives? For what are we working? Jesus asks us today, as He did Peter, "Do you love Me more than these?" (Jn. 21:15). —Henry G. Bosch

Living for Jesus through earth's little while,

My dearest treasure, the light of His smile;

Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem,

Bringing the weary to find rest in Him. --Chisholm

Worldliness is living as if there is no eternity

Proverbs 23:4-12

Less Work, More Fun

A family counselor has identified what she calls "a salt-mine mentality" today. "In the 1980s it became all work, work, work," says Mori Freed, "earning as much money as you can." She says that people obsessed with making money get thrown out of balance. They become depressed and don't know why, even though they've met all the goals they've set. Other observers see a similar trend in education, where homework time for elementary school students has almost doubled in the past 20 years.

Solomon offered these words of wisdom for everyone who strives for success: "Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease!" (Prov. 23:4). Another translation says, "Have the wisdom to show restraint."

What's it like in our homes? Is there time for fun and laughter together, or is there constant conflict about work and school, with harsh words about getting the job done? What's it like in our hearts? Even Christian ministry can become an unhealthy obsession.

Whatever success and riches we seek are empty without balance and the blessing of God. It may be time to take a hard look at our involvements, then slow down, back off, and have some fun. —David C. McCasland

Thinking It Over

Are you too busy for relaxation and fun?

Are your priorities consistent with biblical values?

Set aside some time this week for family and friends.

All work and no play will take the joy of life away.

Proverbs 23:5

J R Miller

People are badly cheated in this world. They imagine that the things they can see are the real things, the gold, lands, and stocks are the true treasures. So they toil for those things and gather them into their possession, piling up what they suppose to be wealth. Thus they live in pomp, with their fine houses, and all their brilliant show. They call themselves millionaires. But one day their supposed riches take to themselves wings and fly away like eagles. Or they mat keep their wealth, perchance, and die at lasting the midst of it, and have a great funeral; but they find that they cannot carry a penny of it with them. "How much did he leave?" was

asked about a rich man who had died. "He left it all," was the answer.

If men only knew that there are things which will never fly away, they would no longer live for the wealth that perisheth; they would pass by thee glittering unrealities to lay hold of the true riches. He who is rich toward God is the millionaire.

Proverbs 23:5

J R Miller

People ofttimes think that gold, silver, houses, lands, and stocks are the real treasures. So they toil for these things and gather them into their possession, and pile up what they suppose to be wealth. Thus they live like Nabobs in their fine houses, and call themselves millionaires.

But one day their supposed riches take to themselves wings and fly away like eagles toward heaven. Or they may keep their wealth, perchance, and die at last in the midst of it, and have a great funeral; but then they find that they cannot carry a penny of it with them.

"How much did he leave?" was asked about a rich man who had died. "He left all," was the answer. If men only knew that there are other things far more worth setting eyes and heart upon - things which will never fly away - they would pass by these glittering unrealities to lay hold of the true riches.

We can lay up money in heaven only by using it for God.

Proverbs 23:13, 14

J R Miller

Some parents and teachers have such gentle hearts that they cannot bear to correct a child lest they cause it pain.

They forget that to leave in a child's heart an uncorrected fault, or to allow to grow up in its life unchecked any wrong tendency, is the greatest unkindness they could possibly do the child. To leave the roots of weeds growing in the garden among the flowers, is to insure the springing up of those weeds, by and by, to mar the beauty of the garden.

Any one should be glad to have a fault pointed out - not glad that the fault is there, but that it is now known, so that it may be put away. We should always deal with our discovered faults relentlessly. Even the right hand should be cut off, or the right eye plucked out, in order that the soul may be saved.

Nor should any tender feeling ever prevent a parent or a teacher from trying to correct a fault in a child. Love must always seek the best.

Proverbs 23:15-24

Happy Fathers

Some people have attributed to Mark Twain the statement, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in 7 years."

The attitude of children toward their parents changes as they grow older. Some young people show little respect for their fathers and mothers. It's disheartening to see this. But as they mature, many begin to recognize that Mom and Dad knew a lot more than they gave them credit for.

On the other hand, some young people come to realize with deep regret that if they had followed the counsel of their parents they could have avoided much heartache both for themselves and their family. The Bible says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'" (Ephesians 6:1-3). The book of Proverbs counsels, "Listen to your father who begot you … The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him" (23:22,24).

Remember—wise children make happy fathers! —Richard De Haan

Above all else that you can do

To make your father proud of you,

Be diligent, be kind, be wise—

Such traits are priceless in his eyes. —Fasick

Your parents brought you up; don't let them down

Proverbs 23:15-22

Our Daily Bread

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

According to a doctor at Johns Hopkins University, man is constituted "in nerve and tissue and brain cell and soul" to function best on faith. In other words, God made us so that we realize our greatest potential when we are free from the devastating effects of fear. Yet all of us have fears. Those who deny this are being dishonest with themselves. We are afraid of others, ourselves, the future, the past, unemployment, public opinion—the list is endless!

The Bible mentions no less than two dozen words relating to fear. They range in meaning from terror to timidity, and most carry a negative connotation. But one kind of fear—the fear of the Lord—is positive and health-producing. Scripture tells us that it is the "beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7) , that it is "clean" (Ps. 19:9) , that it gives "strong confidence" (Pr 14:26) , and that it is "a fountain of life" (Prov. 14:27). But most significantly, we can choose to be controlled by this fear (Prov. 1:29).

Moses expressed this kind of fear when God confronted him from a burning bush that was not consumed. Moses "hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exod. 3:6).

The fear of God is reverent trust. We stand in awe of God, His power, and His holiness. We believe His warnings, His commands, His promises. We hold His character in such high respect that we choose "to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13) , knowing that all His commands are for our good. By fearing Him we express our devotion to Him. It is the one fear that overcomes all others. —D. J. De Haan

Only the fear of God can banish the fear of men.

Proverbs 23:17

Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

I asked a working man the other day how he fared. His wife, the partner of many years, has died, and there is no one to welcome him on his return from work and prepare for him. His fellow-workmen, younger men, delight in tormenting him and increasing his arduous toils, because they hate his simple godliness. A physical weakness grows upon him distressingly. But he said that he was very happy, because he lived in God. All the way along it was Jesus — Jesus when he woke in the morning; Jesus when he went to bed at night; Jesus when he wrote a letter; Jesus when he went to the butcher’s shop to buy his little piece of meat for Sunday-said he, “He made the beasts; He must know what is good to eat.” And when I asked how he managed to maintain this life, he said, “I always ask Him to rouse me up early enough to have a good time in fellowship with the Master.” From the way he spoke, he reminded me of the priest’s portion of the shoulder and breast as symbolizing the strength and love of the Lord Jesus.

If we are in the love of God we shall be in his fear; for though perfect love casts out fear that hath torment, it introduces the fear that dares not cause needless pain to the Infinite Lover of souls. We fear to tear open his wounds again, to expose his heart to the spear-thrust, or to miss aught of his gracious pains to make us what He wants us to become.

“If ye keep my commandments,” the Master said, “ye shall abide in my love.” To abide in his fear is equivalent to abiding in his love. They are two sides of the same coin. Only they love who fear. The woman feared Solomon’s sword, because the babe was her own.

Proverbs 23:17–18

Cure for Envy

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

WHEN we see the wicked prosper we are apt to envy them. When we hear the noise of their mirth, and our own spirit is heavy, we half think that they have the best of it. This is foolish and sinful. If we knew them better, and specially if we remembered their end, we should pity them.

The cure for envy lies in living under a constant sense of the divine presence, worshiping God, and communing with Him all the day long, however long the day may seem. True religion lifts the soul into a higher region, where the judgment becomes more clear, and the desires are more elevated. The more of heaven there is in our lives, the less of earth we shall covet. The fear of God casts out envy of men.

The death-blow of envy is a calm consideration of the future. The wealth and glory of the ungodly are a vain show. This pompous appearance flashes out for an hour and then is extinguished. What is the prosperous sinner the better for his prosperity when judgment overtakes him? As for the godly man, his end is peace and blessedness, and none can rob him of his joy; wherefore, let him forego envy, and be filled with sweet content.

Proverbs 23:18

Today in the Word

Oct. 27, 2013

Deja vu is a French phrase that means “already seen.” It describes that uncanny sense of familiarity we sometimes have when going through an experience for the first time. Scientists think that one explanation for this phenomenon is that the mind recognizes the patterns of things around us by comparing them to previous experiences where similar items were arranged in the same way.

Proverbs 23:29-30

AUTO SAFETY

In recent months, we have heard a great deal about auto safety. Demands have been made that manufacturers provide certain safety features in cars as standard equipment in order to spare passengers serious harm. Although every one of us is in favor of doing everything possible in this way to cut down the tremendous toll on our highways, I cannot help but feel that the blame for many of the deaths and injuries has been wrongly placed. I have just read that 50 percent of our traffic deaths are attributed in part or in whole to drunkenness! This is shocking! Why is it then that while such a hue and cry is raised to in-corporate more safety features in cars, we hear very little about removing the real killers from the cars! Could it be that men are more concerned about the few tax dollars which accrue from liquor sales? Or is it possible that politicians are so fearful of losing a few votes that they refuse to take the necessary steps to stop this terrible slaughter on our highways? Personally, I believe the best way to promote automobile safety would be to get "King Barleycorn" off the road. We can produce cars with every conceivable safety device, but until this "monster" — the drunken driver — is barred from our streets, we will still have a major problem on our hands. Collapsible steering wheels, safety belts, and recessed door handles are all fine, but the most necessary change must be made at the upper end of the steering column!

The Bible graphically describes the unstable reactions of one under the influence of liquor as resembling a person who "lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast" (Prov. 23:34). True auto safety can never be achieved as long as men ignore the Scriptural warnings concerning the dread consequences of alcohol! Every government official who has any regard for human life and safety should take action in this matter!

'Tis well to note that few survive,

Who often drink before they drive! — H. G. Bosch

A "tight" driver is much more dangerous than a loose wheel!

PROVERBS 24

Proverbs 24:10-12
Will you tell them?

John, a friend of mine, was once addicted to drugs. Several times he nearly died. He was a broken man when he entered the Christian rehabilitation program that my husband and I established. By the end of the program, John had become a Christian.

One day as John strolled along a busy street, he began to see the bustling shoppers as God sees them—dying people. He had learned from God's Word that those who die without Christ will spend eternity separated from Him. With deep concern, John thought, These people don't have to die!

We all need to see people as God sees them. But that revelation also brings responsibility. Solomon pleaded, "Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter" (Proverbs 24:11). He also warned that once our eyes are opened we can't pretend we don't know what to do. God, who weighs our hearts and keeps our souls, knows that we know, and holds us responsible to act (v.12).

Think of people you know who are without Christ. They don't have to die without Him! Jesus said, "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26). Will you tell them this good news?—Joanie Yoder

If we really care for those

Who live beneath God's wrath,

The gospel must be shared with them,

To turn them from death's path. —Sper

Wanted: Messengers to deliver the good news

Proverbs 22:27 Money Talk

Read: 1 Timothy 6:6-12

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God. —1 Timothy 6:17

Marilyn and Steven had been married just a few years, and money was tight. But as she looked at their threadbare bedspread, she wanted to replace it. So she decided she would buy a new one with a credit card—hoping to somehow find the money to pay it off.

Her devotional reading for the day surprised her when it pointed her to Proverbs 22:27, “If you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you” (niv). Marilyn decided not to go into debt for a new bedspread that day.

Decisions about the way we spend our money are a personal matter between us and the Lord and can be difficult to make. But God hasn’t left us without help. He tells us: “Honor the Lord with your possessions” (Prov. 3:9), and “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matt. 6:24 niv).

With such truths in mind, we look further in His Word for help to use money wisely. We find this: “Beware of covetousness” (Luke 12:15). Another says, “The borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7). And in 1 Timothy we read, be “ready to give, willing to share” (6:18).

Money is a big issue. God, who provides for all our needs, can show us how to use it to bring Him honor.

Lord, sometimes money and finances are

overwhelming. It’s hard to know what decisions

to make, so please lead me and give the wisdom

to use my finances in a way that pleases You.

Never let gold become your god.

Proverbs 23:1-18 The Best Things In Life

Do not overwork to be rich. —Proverbs 23:4

An old adage says, “The best things in life are free.” There’s a lot of truth in that. Some people, however, believe that the best things in life are expensive or perhaps elusive. Recently I saw a sign that made me smile and think. It said, “The best things in life are not things.” What a great way to say it! The value of family, friends, and faith points us to the realization that what matters most in life is all wrapped up in people and the Lord.

Solomon was well qualified to speak about material things because he “surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (1 Kings 10:23). His advice? “Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven” (Prov. 23:4-5). His recommended course of action was, “Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge… For surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off” (vv.12,18).

The best things in life are the eternal riches that come from God’s goodness and grace in Jesus Christ. We do not hold them in our hands, but in our hearts.

The treasures of earth are not mine,

I hold not its silver and gold;

But a treasure far greater is mine;

I have riches of value untold. —Hartzler

Our greatest riches are the riches we have in Christ.

Proverbs 23:7 Common Ground

Read: Acts 17:22-31

That I might win those who are without law. —1 Corinthians 9:21

Roman emperors are not generally remembered for their wisdom, but there are a few exceptions. One great thinker was Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome from AD 161 to 180. Gifted with a brilliant mind, he was one of the great intellectual rulers in Western civilization.

Although he never became a convert to the new faith that would be called Christianity, he displayed remarkable insight. His wisdom reflects the law of God written in the heart of someone who did not have God's Word (Rom. 2:14-15). For example:

• The happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts.

• You have power over your mind—not outside events.

• Your life is what your thoughts make it.

These words sound similar to Proverbs 23:7, "As [a person] thinks in his heart, so is he." We can learn helpful principles from non-Christians and use their beliefs as common ground for sharing the gospel. When Paul stood on Mars Hill addressing some of the leading intellectuals of his day, he did not belittle their beliefs but established common ground with them and then gave the gospel (Acts 17:26-28).

Let's look for common ground with our neighbors, so that we may lead them to Christ.

What common ground do you share with your friends?

Books read Hobbies Travel

Children Sports Upbringing

Work A grief experience Military service

A faith worth having is a faith worth sharing.

Proverbs 23:1-5 For Profit

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life. —John 6:27

We live in a materialistic age. Gadgets and luxuries with their glitter and glamour entice even Christians to spend too much energy and money to obtain them. That's why it's important to keep spiritual values foremost in our minds.

Have you been putting all of your energies into getting ahead in this world while neglecting heavenly values? Jesus said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life" (Jn. 6:27). Have you attempted recently to lead anyone to Christ and offered food that satisfies forever?

If you want to see how materialistic you are, take this little test: Suppose someone were to offer you a thousand dollars for every person you earnestly sought to lead to Christ. Would you try to witness to more people than you are doing now? Is it possible that you would do for money, even at the risk of blunders or ridicule, what you would hesitate to do otherwise in obedience to Christ's urgent commands? Is your love of money stronger than your love of God or the souls of people?

What is the prime goal of our lives? For what are we working? Jesus asks us today, as He did Peter, "Do you love Me more than these?" (Jn. 21:15).

Worldliness is living as if there is no eternity.

Proverbs 23:12 There's An "App" For That

Read: Ephesians 5:1-7 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 14-16; Ephesians 5:1-16

Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge. —Proverbs 23:12

Remember when phones were for making phone calls? With the advent of the smart phone, what was once a way to talk to someone has become a storehouse of data. Add cell-phone applications (computer programs) to that, and you can read sports reports, play games, plan trips, find an apartment—or any of well over 100,000 other tasks available with an “app.”

That’s pretty amazing, but the “apps” for phones are nothing compared with the kind of “apps” Scripture gives us. The “applications” of the Bible are direct notes from God telling us how to apply the truth of His Word to all of life.

Take Philippians 2, for instance: The unity app (2:2), the humility app (2:3), the no-grumbling app (2:14), the shine-as-lights app (2:15). Or look at the apps of Ephesians 5: The imitate-God app (5:1), the walk-in-love app (5:2), the purity app (5:3), the tongue app (5:4). And the book of Proverbs? It’s teeming with applications.

You don’t have to wait for someone to offer these on the Internet. Just open the Bible and see the hundreds of ways to apply Scripture in your life. Got a question about the Christian life? Search the Bible. The answers are there, waiting to be discovered.

Cling to the Bible; this jewel and treasure

Brings life eternal and saves fallen man;

Surely its value no mortal can measure;

Seek for its blessing, O soul, while you can. —Smith

The Bible has treasures of wisdom for you—read it and apply it!

Proverbs 23:15-24 Happy Fathers

The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him. —Proverbs 23:24

Some people have attributed to Mark Twain the statement, “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in 7 years.”

The attitude of children toward their parents changes as they grow older. Some young people show little respect for their fathers and mothers. It’s disheartening to see this. But as they mature, many begin to recognize that Mom and Dad knew a lot more than they gave them credit for.

On the other hand, some young people come to realize with deep regret that if they had followed the counsel of their parents they could have avoided much heartache both for themselves and their family. The Bible says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’” (Ephesians 6:1-3). The book of Proverbs counsels, “Listen to your father who begot you … The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him” (23:22,24).

Remember—wise children make happy fathers!

Above all else that you can do

To make your father proud of you,

Be diligent, be kind, be wise—

Such traits are priceless in his eyes. —Fasick

Your parents brought you up; don't let them down.

Proverbs 24:11–12

If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death…

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

Christ has greatly added to the convicting power of truth. Before his time men were taught that it was wrong to do wrong; but He taught that it was wrong not to do right. In the Christian church we confess that we have done the things that we ought not to have done — we do this in common with all men that acknowledge the rule of conscience. But we are taught by our Lord, and by such passages as this, to go farther, and confess that we have not done the things that we ought to have done. This is our great and damning crime.

The priest and Levite that did not go to the help of the wounded traveller; the servant who simply did not use the Lord’s money; the

nations that did not feed, clothe, or visit Him in the persons of the distressed; the virgins who had not oil in their vessels; the trees that did not bear — these Christ held up to shame and everlasting contempt. We cannot ignore the evil around us, and say we are not responsible for it. We cannot shut our eyes and avert our faces from wrong-doing, and tyranny, and oppression. We cannot profess that it is not our business, whosoever else's it may be, without it becoming known to the Searcher of all hearts, who will certainly reckon it against us on the day of account. Not to do is to incur Christ's displeasure.

What a striking illustration is afforded to these words in the Book of Esther! When the young queen was hesitating, Mordecai said very truly: "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy fathers house shall perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not some to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Proverbs 24:13-20

Looking Ahead

During General Colin Powell's tenure as US Secretary of State, he discovered that a speech he made to the United Nations had been based, in part, on wrong information. In his long and distinguished career, this was a low point and a blot on his record. "I'm disappointed," he told an interviewer. "I'm sorry it happened and wish those who knew better had spoken up at the time, but there isn't anything else I can say about it."

Instead of being chained by the past, Mr. Powell says he has chosen to "focus on the front windshield and not the rearview mirror" of life.

All of us have something in our past that we regret doing. It may have been an honest mistake, a moral failure, or a foolish decision. We wish it had not happened, but it remains in our mind and often drags us down.

The writer of Proverbs said that "honey … is sweet to your taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul; if you have found it, there is a prospect [future hope], and your hope will not be cut off" (Prov. 24:13-14).

While the past remains part of our lives, it doesn't have to determine our future. With God's wisdom and the forgiveness He offers (Ps. 130:3-4; Acts 13:38-39), we can focus on the future with hope. —David C. McCasland

The vain regrets of yesterday

Have vanished through God's pardoning grace;

The guilty fear has passed away,

And joy has come to take its place. —Ackley

It's better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and despair.

Proverbs 24:27-34 Garden Lesson

Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord. —Lamentations 3:40

My garden got away from me last summer. A sudden 2-week trip to Russia, a tree I had to cut down, and numerous other responsibilities kept me away from the garden too long. It got pretty wild out there before I could give the beans and tomatoes and carrots some much-needed attention.

When Solomon was walking by a vineyard, he noticed that it was overgrown with thorns and its wall was broken down. "I looked on it," he wrote, "and received instruction" (Prov. 24:32). He learned the necessity of constant attention, ambition, and discipline to keep the garden clean and fruitful.

It's the same with our spiritual lives. There are so many aspects that require our attention and discipline. If because of busyness or laziness we're not careful, we'll see some relationships crumble. The walls of moral standards will develop holes. Little sins will creep in and become big ones. The fruit of righteousness will be choked out by the nettles of iniquity.

Have you been neglecting the Lord lately? His Word? Your church? Fellowship with other believers? Take steps now to get back at it! Learn the lesson of the neglected garden.

In all the little things of life,

Yourself, Lord, may I see;

In little and in great alike

I'll serve you faithfully! —Anon.

A life, like a garden, requires cultivation.

Proverbs 24:30-34

The Little Enemy

In the late 1960s, I witnessed a carefully planned bombing raid. I remember watching as the planes methodically worked the Florida skies in an attempt to wipe out the enemy. In this case, however, the enemy was not human. It was a creature known as the fire ant--little in size but causing a major problem. The planes were spreading a pesticide aimed at ridding the South of this invader.

Just as big efforts were required to stamp out the little fire ant, so we must seriously tackle what may seem to be a little problem--laziness. The author of the book of Proverbs speaks of the sad results of "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest" (Prov. 24:33).

Anyone who is inclined to be lazy knows that a big effort is needed to combat it. If we don't attack it, poverty (both spiritual and physical) will come "like a prowler" (v.34).

So what can be done about laziness? You can begin by evaluating how you spend your time. If you discover that you are wasting it, you need to develop a strategy to combat the problem. Tackle those small tasks now. Keep on working diligently and those little jobs won't turn into big problems. You'll soon realize how much better it is to succeed than to slumber. —Mart De Haan

Don't put off until tomorrow

What you can achieve today;

Working hard until you're finished

Will keep poverty away. --Sper

The less we do today, the more we have to do tomorrow

Proverbs 24:30-34 Lazy Man's Lawn

A little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler. —Proverbs 24:33-34

Someday I’m going to write a book called How To Have A Crummy Lawn. All the pages will be blank because that’s what is required — nothing. Just leave it alone and in no time dandelions will sprout, crabgrass will spread, and weeds with Latin names will thrive where the lawn used to be. The magic formula for a bad lawn is no water, no fertilizer, no weed killer, no care.

The book, of course, will be immensely unpopular because no one wants a crummy lawn, not consciously at least. They end up with one, though, simply through neglect.

When I’m out digging dandelions, I often ask myself if I’m putting as much time and effort into maintaining my spiritual life as I am my lawn. How easily the weeds of anger and discouragement take root in my soul. How quickly anxiety crowds out peace in my heart.

The writer of Proverbs observed the same pattern in “the field of the lazy man” long ago: “It was all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction” (Prov. 24:30-32).

The formula for a bad lawn and a bad life are exactly the same—all it takes is a little neglect.

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;

Abide in Him always and feed on His Word;

Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,

Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek. —Longstaff

Neglect is all it takes to ruin a life.

Proverbs 24:30-34a

The Cost Of Neglect

I read about a Detroit man who couldn't find his house. He had gone to the right address but all he found was an empty lot. Completely baffled, he asked the Detroit Free Press to help him figure out what was going on. A newspaper reporter learned that not only was the house gone, but the deed to the empty lot was in someone else's name.

What had happened? For one thing, a few years had passed since the homeowner had left the city without providing a forwarding address. In addition, he had failed to make arrangements for someone to keep the property in repair. So the house was torn down because a city ordinance called for the removal of neighborhood eyesores.

The homeowner's neglect illustrates the practical truth of Proverbs 24:30-34. Neglect leads to loss. This principle also applies to our daily walk with God. If we neglect our times of prayer and fellowship with the Lord, our relationship with Him will deteriorate and we will no longer experience His favor. We would never want that to happen, but we allow it when we become preoccupied with anything that comes between us and Christ.

We need to establish priorities that honor God. Then we'll avoid the loss that comes from neglect. —Mart De Haan

Unless we're occupied with Jesus

And seek to do His will each day,

We're sure to know the loss and sorrow

That comes when we neglect His way. —Anon.

If you shirk today's tasks, you increase tomorrow's burdens

Proverbs 24:30-34b

Care Of The Heart

My father-in-law took a rocky, barren hilltop in Texas and transformed it into a beautiful homesite with a shaded green lawn. After removing thousands of rocks, he added topsoil, planted trees and grass, and kept it watered. Since his death, it has lacked his consistent care. Today when I visit and work around that house, battling the invading thistles, thorns, and weeds, I ponder the state of my own heart.

Am I like that neglected yard, or perhaps the field and vineyard described in Proverbs 24—overgrown with thorns, covered with nettles, its stone wall broken down? (v.31). The owner is lazy and lacks understanding (v.30), perhaps putting off today’s tasks for a more convenient time.

Along with the practical instruction about diligence in work, I find an application for the care of my soul. The thistles of self-interest grow naturally within me, while the fruit that pleases God requires constant weeding and watering through prayer, confession, and obedience to the Lord. Without these, the soil of my heart will become choked with the thorns of trivial pursuits and greed.

“Keep your heart with all diligence,” Solomon wrote, “for out of it spring the issues of life” (Pr 4:23). That requires constant care. —David C. McCasland

One little sin, what harm can it do?

Give it free reign and soon there are two.

Then sinful deeds and habits ensue—

Guard well your thoughts, lest they control you. —DJD

The garden of our heart needs constant weeding and care.

Proverbs 24:33-34

Spurgeon - Morning and evening

The worst of sluggards only ask for a little slumber; they would be indignant if they were accused of thorough idleness. A little folding of the hands to sleep is all they crave, and they have a crowd of reasons to show that this indulgence is a very proper one. Yet by these littles the day ebbs out, and the time for labour is all gone, and the field is grown over with thorns. It is by little procrastinations that men ruin their souls. They have no intention to delay for years—a few months will bring the more convenient season—to-morrow if you will, they will attend to serious things; but the present hour is so occupied and altogether so unsuitable, that they beg to be excused. Like sands from an hour-glass, time passes, life is wasted by driblets, and seasons of grace lost by little slumbers.

Oh, to be wise, to catch the flying hour, to use the moments on the wing! May the Lord teach us this sacred wisdom, for otherwise a poverty of the worst sort awaits us, eternal poverty which shall want even a drop of water, and beg for it in vain. Like a traveller steadily pursuing his journey, poverty overtakes the slothful, and ruin overthrows the undecided: each hour brings the dreaded pursuer nearer; he pauses not by the way, for he is on his master's business and must not tarry. As an armed man enters with authority and power, so shall want come to the idle, and death to the impenitent, and there will be no escape. O that men were wise be-times, and would seek diligently unto the Lord Jesus, or ere the solemn day shall dawn when it will be too late to plough and to sow, too late to repent and believe. In harvest, it is vain to lament that the seed time was neglected. As yet, faith and holy decision are timely. May we obtain them this night.

PROVERBS 25

Proverbs 25:11
J R Miller

It is well to form the habit of saying kindly things. Sincere words of commendation help all true men and women to live more worthily and to achieve better things. They should be spoken, too, while people live. Kind words come too late when they are held back till death has closed the ears and chilled the heart, when words cannot avail to comfort or help.

Too many people speak the wrong words, too - words that hurt, that fall on sensitive feelings like frost on the flowers. They thoughtlessly allude to matters which are of painful interest. They stir up sad or bitter memories in those who are trying to forget them. They lack the tact which always turns conversation into pleasant channels.

We should all learn the art of pleasant speech. It is not a matter of elocution or grammar - it is a matter of heart culture. Love must be the inspirer, and there must be the grace of thoughtfulness in word and tone.

Proverbs 25:8-18 Gossip-Free Zone

A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow. —Proverbs 25:18

In some offices, you can get fired for gossiping. According to a 2002 survey, the average employee gossips 65 hours a year. One Chicago firm decided to become a "gossip-free zone." They require that employees never talk badly about co-workers behind their backs. If you're caught, you lose your job.

A ministry for people in the entertainment industry takes a refreshing alternative to gossip. They combat it with prayer. Instead of putting down famous people who get in trouble with bad choices, they encourage people to pray for them.

Among God's commands to His people is "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). While this may be talking primarily about lying at judicial proceedings, gossip could also be included in the command because it violates the law of love toward our neighbor. Proverbs uses strong language to describe this use of our words. It's like "a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow" against others (25:18).

Gossip feeds into our natural desires to feel superior to others and to belong or fit in, so combating it in our personal lives can be a challenge. But if we choose to love through prayer, our lives can be a gossip-free zone.

Lord, forgive us for speaking carelessly

about others to make ourselves look better.

Help us to think before we speak. Teach us

to be loving with our words. Amen.

You can never justify gossip.

Proverbs 25:11-15 Timely Words

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. —Proverbs 25:11

You may have heard the adage, "Timing is everything." According to the Bible, good timing applies to our words and speech too. Think of a time when God used you to bring a timely word to refresh someone, or when you wanted to speak, but it was wiser for you to remain silent.

The Bible says that there is an appropriate time to speak (Eccl. 3:7). Solomon compared properly timed and well-spoken words with

golden apples in a silver setting—beautiful, valuable, and carefully crafted (Prov. 25:11-12). Knowing the right time to speak is beneficial for both the speaker and hearer, whether they are words of love, encouragement, or rebuke. Keeping silent also has its place and time. When tempted to deride, belittle, or slander a neighbor, Solomon said that it is wise to hold our tongue, recognizing the appropriate time for silence (11:12-13). When talkativeness or anger tempts us to sin against God or another human being, resistance comes by being slow to speak (10:19; James 1:19).

It's often hard to know what to say and when to say it. The Spirit will help us to be discerning. He will help us use the right words at the right time and in the right manner, for the good of others and for His honor.

Heavenly Father, thank You for using others to

speak words of encouragement and challenge to

me. Help me to be wise in how and when my words

or my silence may be helpful to someone else.

Timely words are works of art.

INSIGHT: Hebrew poetry (such as psalms and proverbs) differs greatly from Western poetry. Where Western poetry often depends upon rhyme and meter to artistically tell its tale, Hebrew poetry is dependent upon linguistic devices to paint the picture of the ideas it is seeking to convey. One such device, synonymous parallelism, is found in verse 15. Here, the idea of the first half of the verse is reinforced through a reworded repetition of that idea in the second half of the verse. Another common poetic device is found in verses 11-14, where analogies (notice the word like) form the word-pictures that carry the meaning.

Proverbs 25:12 Real Help When We Do Wrong

Read: 2 Corinthians 2:1-11

Like … an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear. —Proverbs 25:12

When an unmarried girl who had become pregnant walked across the platform to receive her high school diploma, the audience gave her a standing ovation.

A secular writer who was present at the graduation commented that this wouldn't have happened a few generations ago. The teenager likely would have been confronted about her sexual misconduct. He said that if she admitted she had done wrong, she likely would have been forgiven. Her parents and the boy's parents, and perhaps their pastors, would have considered the possibility of marriage. They would have stood by them. But, said the columnist, those applauding this pregnant graduate were not giving real help. They were just offering shallow approval.

If a person who professes no faith in Christ can see this, we as Christians should be equally as perceptive. The apostle Paul didn't hesitate to commend the Corinthian Christians for disciplining a man for immorality (2 Cor. 2:6). And when the offender repented, Paul was quick to urge them to forgive him fully (vv.7-10).

Thank You, Lord, for people who confront me when I do wrong, and who forgive and accept me when I repent. Thank You for their real help.

A faithful friend will say what's true,

Although it causes pain;

He's really thinking of your good

And all you stand to gain. —DJD

Real help combines correction with compassion.

Proverbs 25:14-16, 27-28

Our Daily Bread

Researchers at Montana State University have challenged the idea that a high-sugar snack generates quick energy. They tested long-distance runners on stationary exercise bicycles and found that athletes who had a sugar-free drink before the workout were able to pedal twenty-five percent longer than those who had a sugar-laden drink. The study concluded that "athletes may be well-advised to abstain from sugar snacks before exercise."

The Bible concurs that too many sweets can affect well-being. King Solomon used the illustration of eating too much honey to point up something more serious—the danger of overindulging in the sweet taste of self-glory. In Proverbs 25, the wise king gave two warnings about the danger of too much self-congratulations and boasting (Pr 25:14, 27). Looking for attention and bragging about our accomplishments might be sweet to the taste in the short run. But in the long run, bragging does to the personality what eating five pounds of chocolate-covered cherries does to the waistline.

Nothing makes us weaker than a constant diet of self-centeredness and pride. All our energy is used up on ourselves. How much better to deny ourselves the sweet taste of self-glory by exercising discipline and faith. That's how we can become strong enough to meet the challenges we face. —M. R. De Haan II

Faith steps in when pride steps out.

Proverbs 25:28, 1Cor 6:12-20

Today in the Word

June 28, 2013

In an essay for the Hoover Institution's Policy Review (**Is Food the New Sex? - Hoover Institution**), Mary Eberstadt asks this question, "What happens when, for the first time in history, adult human beings are free to have all the food and sex they want?" In her article, Eberstadt cites the long history of pairing food and sex as primal human desires and needs as well as the way each of these has become increasingly more accessible to us today.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, illustrates this parallel between food and sex. It appears that the Corinthians didn't believe in restrictions of their intake of food and sex. "I have the right to do anything!" must have been a popular phrase by which they readily defended personal autonomy in matters of morality (1Cor 6:12). They wanted to be free to decide what and how much they ate ("Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"), and it seems they also wanted the same liberty in making their sexual decisions. Note how Paul includes both topics in chapter 6.

To answer Eberstadt's question and to engage Paul, we are again back at our list of the fruit of the Spirit. Today we are talking about self-control. Self-control, at least according to Scripture's standards, isn't simply the ability to follow rules. In fact, there is a glimmer of truth in the Corinthians' affirmation that "I can do anything." As Christians, we aren't saved by law; we are saved by gospel grace. But this isn't the license to do whatever we want. In fact, we're given the wisdom of true discernment, deciding to do and not to do that which is helpful or unhelpful. For the Christian, the true statement is "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

Apply the Word - Self-control is a beautiful and difficult virtue: it is beautiful because it guides us into making choices that are best and serves as a means of protection over our lives. But it is difficult, especially when fewer and fewer people believe that we should deny ourselves any pleasure. Self-control is evidence of the Spirit's control in and through our lives!

Proverbs 25:21–22

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

The pagan ideal of a manly life was to succeed in doing as much good to your friends, and as much injury to your enemies, as possible. A few exceptions to this rule are recorded; but the wonder at them proves that the sentiments of forgiveness and mercy were foreign to popular morality and public opinion. How different is the teaching of the Bible! and in this have we not an evidence of its Divine authority? Our Lord went further even than this noble maxim; He said, "Love your enemies, and pray for them which persecute you."

We are not taught to be entirely indifferent to the moral qualities of actions. The perception of sin and evil is necessary to a holy soul. And it is not required that we should abjure that holy resentment to wrong-doing, to which the apostle alludes when he says, "Be ye angry, and sin not." We must always resent wrong as wrong, though we must carefully eliminate any vindictive feeling towards the wrong-doer.

Do you think that others have wronged you? Pity them; pray for them; seek them out; show them their fault, humbly and meekly; wash their feet; take the mote out of their eye; seek to restore them in a spirit of meekness, remembering that you may be tempted; heap coals of loving-kindness on their heads; bring them if possible into such a broken and tender frame of mind, that they may seek forgiveness at your hand and God's. If you cannot act thus with all the emotion you would feel, do it because it is right, and the emotion will inevitably follow. It was said of Archbishop Leighton, that to do him an injury was to secure his lasting friendship.

Proverbs 25:25

What's The Good News?

What's the good news today? I ask that question sometimes of people I know. If the person is a Christian, he might smilingly reply, "The same as it was yesterday. God loves us." And both he and I rejoice that it will be the same tomorrow.

Those who don't know Christ, though, don't have such good news to share. We can understand why pessimistic novelist T. C. Boyle says, "If God doesn't exist … and you have no purpose on Earth, then it's a mighty mean place, ruled by accident… I'd like to have a lot better news for everybody, but I don't."

Despite personal disappointments and the evils we see in this world, life is not just a series of accidents. Our God is in ultimate control, making even man's wrath contribute to the fulfillment of His wise and loving purposes.

Faith in the One who died on Calvary's cross and rose from the tomb is the antidote to dark despair. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ gives a realistic reason for hope.

When Jesus rose from the grave, He told two women to tell His disciples He was alive. Later He commanded His followers to take that news to all nations (Matthew 28:9-10,19).

That's the good news we can proclaim to others. It's the answer to the riddle of our existence. —Vernon Grounds

Oh, may our lives ring loud and clear

With God's good news for all,

So people who are lost in sin

Will clearly hear His call. —Sper

The good news is not that Jesus lived and died, but that He died and lives.

Proverbs 25:15 The Nudge Lady

Read: 1 Samuel 25:14-35

By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone. —Proverbs 25:15

Although Beverly Sklover stands only 4 feet 10 inches tall, she is described as a “towering presence on the telephone.” She advertises in a local newspaper as “The Nudge Lady,” after the Yiddish word that sounds like “noodge” and stands for a chronic and persistent nag or badgerer.

For $50 the first hour, and $40 each additional hour, she’ll make call after call after call to right a wrong or get someone a refund. How does she do it? The lawyer and former New York City planner says 5 years in business have taught her that yelling gets you nowhere. “I always speak in the softest voice possible,” she says. “Then people have to listen.”

The Nudge Lady reminds me a little of Abigail. Her family and servants were headed for disaster (1 Sam. 25). David and his soldiers had been insulted by her husband. Faced with a crisis, Abigail became a woman of initiative. With grace and courage she appealed to David’s sense of mercy. By gentleness and humility she calmed his anger, and her household was saved.

The Lord doesn’t expect us to overlook all wrongs done to us. Nor does He want us to confront others with anger and insults. His Spirit can help us to be like Abigail: gentle and courageous.

O keep up your courage each day to the end,

Go forth in the strength of the Lord;

Trust wholly in Jesus, your Savior and Friend,

And feed on His own blessed Word. —Miles

Gentleness helps us make a point without making an enemy.

Proverbs 25:16 Eating As Worship

Read: Genesis 2:8-17

Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need. —Proverbs 25:16

When you walk into the bookstore and see a table filled with books on dieting, you know it must be January. After several weeks of overeating all kinds of holiday foods, people in many cultures turn their attention to not eating.

Food plays an important role in Scripture. God uses it not only to bless us but also to teach us. Our misuse of food keeps us from knowing God in ways He wants to be known.

In the Old Testament, God gave instructions to Adam as to what to eat and what not to eat (Gen. 2:16-17). Later He gave the Israelites manna to convince them that He was God and to test them to find out if they believed Him (Ex. 16:12; Deut. 8:16). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul stated the proper attitude for everything we do, including eating: “Whether you eat or drink, … do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

When we think of food as a friend that comforts us or an enemy that makes us fat, we miss the wonder of receiving with gratitude a splendid gift from God. Obsessive eating or not eating indicates that we are focused on the gift rather than on the Giver, which is a form of idolatry.

When eating becomes a true act of worship, we will no longer worship food.

You alone are worthy, Lord,

To be worshiped and adored;

We to You our tribute bring

As our hearts rejoice and sing. —Hess

When food becomes our god, our appetite for the Bread of Life is diminished.

Proverbs 25:28

ONE valuable way of practising self-control is in checking grumbling, and an unnecessary display of vexation at petty inconveniences. A workman has fulfilled his task imperfectly, some order is wrongly executed, some one keeps you waiting unreasonably; people are careless or forgetful, or do what they have in hand badly. Try not to be disturbed; be just, and show the persons to blame where they are wrong, even (if it be needful) make them do the thing over again properly; but refrain from diffuse or vehement expressions of displeasure. A naturally quick, impetuous person will find that to cultivate a calm external habit is a great help towards gaining the inward even spirit he needs. - H L Sidney Lear

Proverbs 25:28a

Cupcake Self-Discipline

An old adage says: “Next time you want a cupcake, eat a carrot.” The saying is good advice for dieters, but those who framed it may have had all of us in mind. By disciplining our desires when no moral principle is at stake, we prepare ourselves for those moments when we face a temptation to sin.

This kind of discipline is what Paul referred to when he used the term self-controlled in his list of qualifications for church leadership (Titus 1:8). We need this reminder today. Many people think they can live immorally now and suddenly stop when they want to. Because they do not consider the addictive power of sin, they find that living up to their good intentions is far more difficult than they had anticipated.

Proverbs 25:28 tells us that if we lack self-control we are as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls. Consistent self-discipline will build up our spiritual defense system against the forces of evil.

When we discipline ourselves to keep our ordinary desires under control, we make a habit of virtuous living and practice the reality of Paul’s words in Romans 6:18, “Having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” —Herbert Vander Lugt

For Further Study

Are you facing struggles in your walk with the Lord?

Read **How Do You Live The Christian Life?**

To gain self-control, give Christ control

PROVERBS 26

Proverbs 26:12

In 1984, the House of Representatives disciplined two United States congressmen for immoral behavior. The first, a conservative known for his stand against abortion-on-demand and pornography, tearfully confessed his wrongdoing and voted with his colleagues for his own censure. Many newspeople, however, continued to criticize him. They focused on his prior hypocrisy, refusing to commend him for repenting and turning from his immorality. The second politician, a liberal who openly favored abortion and pornography, defiantly maintained he had done nothing wrong and admitted he was a homosexual. Many newspeople who condemned the first man were far less critical of the second. Apparently they were more comfortable with an open, cal-loused attitude toward immorality than an open and genuine sorrow for sin.

This incident points out our greatest sin—the refusal to acknowledge our transgressions. The Lord Jesus reached down to the most despised people of His day—publicans and harlots—and forgave them when they repented. But He condemned self-righteous people and resisted all who didn't face up to their sin. Refusing to acknowledge sin is a sure ticket to hell!

Insisting we don't need His forgiveness is life's greatest sin. God can forgive us no matter what we do, but we must repent and turn to Jesus. —H. V. Lugt

Forgiveness flourishes in the soil of confession.

Proverbs 26

Today in the Word

April 25, 2013

Laughter is the best medicine," they say, and it's true. Humor and laughter decrease pain, improve heart function, and boost the immune system. According to one source, even a simple thing like "a good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after."

Many biblical proverbs are humorous—we hope you've laughed out loud more than once this month! Today's chapter, like yesterday's, features memorable similes that are also quite funny. One example is today's verse comparing "a proverb in the mouth of a fool" to "a thornbush in a drunkard's hand" (Pr 26:9; compare Pr 26:10). The image is vivid and ridiculous, and it gets the point across clearly. A drunk stumbling around with a thornbush in his hands would be pointless, out of control, dangerous to himself and others, and rather pathetic. So also is a fool trying to appear wise.

Another example is, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly" (Pr 26:11). Did you feel uncomfortable with the picture but still smile at the second part? That's the general idea. This proverb makes use of what we might call "gross humor" from everyday life to make the point that foolish people don't learn from experience. They repeat their mistakes in the same disgusting way that a dog returns to its vomit. Peter used this image to criticize false teachers (2 Peter 2:21–22).

A final example is the sarcastic observation, "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed" (Pr 26:14; cf. Pr 26:13–16). Just as doors and hinges are closely attached, so also are lazy people to their beds. They might roll over—like a door opens—but they're not getting up or going anywhere! The modern idiom would be "couch potato."

Apply the Word - Humor is a big part of American culture, from comedies on television to jokes during political speeches. But even as we enjoy the humor of Proverbs, we should also be careful. Not every time or context is the right place for a joke. "Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death is one who deceives their neighbor and says, 'I was only joking!'" (Pr 26:18–19).

Proverbs 26:1-12 Web Wisdom

A quarrelsome person starts fights as easily as hot embers light charcoal or fire lights wood. —Proverbs 26:21NLT

Scroll to the bottom of many online news sites and you'll find the "Comments" section where readers can leave their observations. Even the most reputable sites have no shortage of rude rants, uninformed insults, and name-calling.

The book of Proverbs was collected about 3,000 years ago, but its timeless wisdom is as up-to-date as today's breaking news. Two proverbs in chapter 26 seem at first glance to contradict each other, yet they apply perfectly to social media. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him" (v. 4). And then, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes" (v. 5).

We are always free to ask God for wisdom.

The balance in those statements is in the “according to”: Don’t answer in the way a fool would answer. But respond so that foolishness is not considered wisdom.

My problem is that the foolishness I encounter is often my own. I have at times posted a sarcastic comment or turned someone else’s statement back on them. God hates it when I treat my fellow human beings with such disrespect, even when they’re also being foolish.

God gives us an amazing range of freedoms. We are free to choose what we will say, and when and how we say it. And we are always free to ask Him for wisdom.

Things to keep in mind: Is what I am saying true, and is it loving? What is my motivation? Will it help anyone? Will this reflect the character of Jesus?

Let love be your highest goal.

INSIGHT: The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) is Hebrew poetry that uses a variety of poetic devices. In today’s reading, metaphors and analogies are used. The foolish person is compared to weather that is inappropriate for the season (v. 1), an animal that needs to be constrained (v. 3), a leg that is useless (v. 7), and a sling that is powerless (v. 8). These comparisons warn about the self-destructive nature of foolish choices. Bill Crowder

Proverbs 26:13-19

HELPFUL HUMOR

Humor can be cruel and offensive, but it can also be kind and helpful. I have used it in sermons to make a point or in meetings to break the tension. I have also profited from humor when it pointed out my faults.

Recently, while watching a film series on family living, I laughed at the comical examples of foibles and failures to which we as husbands are so prone. Yet even though I was amused, I saw enough of myself in these funny situations to feel convicted. As a result, I think I'll be a better husband from now on -- and after more than 50 years of marriage!

God gave us the gift of humor and the capacity to laugh. I believe Jesus had a twinkle in His eye when He said that a person should take the plank out of his own eye before trying to remove a speck of sawdust from the eye of someone else (Mt. 7:4). I can just see His listeners smile and hear them laugh softly. But I'm sure they also understood His point, and some may have been convicted about their own judgmental attitude.

Similarly, the writer of Proverbs portrayed a lazy man in three exaggerated word pictures (26:13-16). They are humorous, but they drive home a solemn warning.

Try using humor to help -- never to hurt.-- Herbert Vander Lugt

Give us a sense of humor, Lord,

Give us the grace to laugh and smile;

But check our lips from needless jest

That what we speak may be worthwhile.-- Anon.

Humor can make a serious difference.

Proverbs 26:13-19

Today in the Word

March 2, 2010

The characters in Flannery O’Connor’s stories are often described as grotesque, but O’Connor explained that they are intended to highlight the spiritual condition of modern humanity: “The novelist with Christian concerns will find modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; … to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost–blind you draw large and startling figures.”

For the next few days we’ll see how God uses grotesque exaggerations to teach His people the truth and to combat a distorted

sense of what is natural. Our passage today presents three darkly comedic characters: the sluggard, the meddler, and the joker.

The sluggard is characterized by making excuses. In Pr 26:13, the excuse is exaggerated to reveal the preposterous situation of someone too lazy to engage his responsibilities. Is it possible that a lion might be in the street? Yes … but it's also extremely improbable. A sluggard will seize on any remotely plausible excuse to shirk his task.

Likewise, the sluggard can't make any progress in life; he is like a door that can only turn from side to side. It's as if this lazy person is tethered to the bed, unwilling—and therefore unable—to get anything done. In fact, a sluggard can't even accomplish the basic necessities of life (v. 15). Laziness will impair our ability to function at even the most fundamental level.

The meddler has no more sense than someone who provokes a dog. Inserting yourself in the affairs of others is hazardous to your own well–being (Pr 26:17)! The final character in our passage depicts the dangerous consequences of inappropriate joking. This person deceives others and then attempts to gloss over the situation by claiming, "I was only joking!" The devastation caused by such deceit is compared to a madman wildly shooting flaming arrows. Humor is never an excuse for lies, manipulation, or deceit.

Apply the Word - Modern sensibilities encourage joking at the expense of others and justifying deceit with the excuse of humor. In fact, it's a natural human tendency—even little children will make a cruel remark and then say, "I was only joking!" The reality is that such jokes are not funny; they are as dangerous as lobbing firebombs into the lives of others. If you struggle with these comments, reflect on Colossians 4:6: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Proverbs 26:17-28

When The Fire Goes Out

When a fire finishes burning through the material it feeds on, it goes out. Similarly, when gossip reaches the ear of someone who will not repeat it, it dies.

Gossip, like other sins, is like "tasty trifles" (Proverbs 26:22). We like to hear it and share it with others because it "tastes" good. Gossip is rooted in our need to feel good about ourselves. As we bring others down, we gain the illusion that we are moving upward.

That's why spreading gossip is so difficult to resist. It takes prayer and God's grace to bring us to the point where we refuse to pass it on or even hear it—even under the guise of personal concern or a request to pray for a sinning friend in trouble.

We must ask God for the wisdom to know when to speak, what to speak, and when to simply keep our mouths shut. For "in the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19).

It is often wise to be quiet and speak few words. But if we must speak, let's talk of those things that encourage and move others closer to God, not those things that will discourage and hurt them. "The tongue of the wise promotes health" (Proverbs 12:18). —David H. Roper

The tongue can spread suspicion,

And reputations steal;

But when the Lord controls our tongue,

Its words will soothe and heal. —Sper

Destroy gossip by ignoring

Proverbs 26:17-21 Stop At The Start

In the spring of 1894, the Baltimore Orioles came to Boston to play the Red Sox in what was expected to be a routine baseball game. But what happened was anything but routine. The Orioles' John McGraw got into a fight with Boston's third baseman. Within minutes all the players from both teams had joined in the brawl.

Soon the conflict spread to the grandstands and quickly went from bad to worse. Someone set fire to the stands and the entire ballpark burned to the ground. The fire then spread to 107 other Boston buildings.

Proverbs 26:21 reminds us that "as charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife." How difficult it is to take back angry words! A raised gun, a clenched fist, and an angry voice all have one thing in common—they are easier to lift up than to put down. Because God loves us and knows the awful danger of strife, He pleads with us not to play with it. We may think that a little conflict makes life (including sports) more interesting, but the Lord wants us to think of its devastating consequences.

Father, help us never to forget the terrible destructive power of strife. When a desire to lash out at someone wells up within us, help us stop it before it starts a "fire." —Mart De Haan

Fire Prevention

When have I spoken or acted in anger? What are the advantages of holding my tongue, stopping my hand, or giving a "soft answer"? (Proverbs 15:1).

The best time to stop a fight is before it starts

Proverbs 26:20-28 Delivering The Dirt

Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. —Proverbs 26:20

Christian industrialist and inventor R. G. LeTourneau is known for his enormous earth-moving machines. One of his products was known simply by the name, “Model G.” A prospective buyer, hoping to stump a salesman, asked, “What does the ‘G’ stand for?”

“I guess the G stands for gossip,” was the salesman’s quick reply. “Because, like gossip, this machine moves a lot of dirt, and moves it fast!”

The Proverbs have a lot to say about gossip: Those who gossip are untrustworthy (11:13) and should be avoided (20:19). Gossip separates the closest of friends (16:28) and keeps relational strife boiling (18:8). It pours fuel on the coals of conflict, feeding the flames of hurt and misunderstanding (26:21-22).

The Hebrew word for “gossip” or “talebearing” actually means “whispering that is damaging.” We fool ourselves into thinking that those juicy, whispered comments here and there are harmless. But gossip leaves behind a wide swath of destruction and is never a victimless crime. Someone is always hurt. So here’s a word to the wise: “Where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (Prov. 26:20). Let’s leave the dirt-moving to big machines. Put the shovels away and revel in the joy of gossip-free relationships!

Many things that others say

Are not for us to tell;

Help us, Lord, to watch our tongue—

We need to guard it well. —Branon

Destroy gossip by ignoring it.

Proverbs 26:20

For lack of wood the fire goeth out. (r.v.)

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

How simple a parable! Of course it must be so. As soon as a fire has reached the end of the material on which it fed, it expires.

This is true of the fire of slander. As long as there is an ear to receive, and a tongue to pass on, some piece of malicious slander will continue to circulate. But directly it reaches a hearer who will not whisper it forward, in that direction at least its progress is arrested. Why do you not adopt this role, and urge others to do so? Hear if you must the whisper of the slanderer; but let it stop with you, locked in the secret of your own breast. You may be voted rather uninteresting and stupid by a certain society which thrives in whispered calumnies; but you will save many a heart from being torn and lacerated by unkindness and falsehood.

How graphic that word “whisperer” is! People always tell you to be sure not to tell; it is a way they have, though they do not expect you for a moment to keep the story to yourself. It is the kiss under which they betray. Always tell them that you refuse to be an accomplice in evil. If there is a wrong concerning which you must neither take action nor speak, you had better not defile your ears with it.

This is true of the fire of the Holy Ghost. You must feed it by your loving obedience, your study of the Word of God, your faith and prayer. Yield yourself more entirely to his possession. Let your spirit, soul, and body, your every act and desire, be as fuel to the Spirit of God. Pile up the wood of continual sacrifice and self-surrender, till the Divine fire reaches out its hands toward heaven. Even though the wood, like Elijah’s, be drenched with water, God’s fire will conquer!

Proverbs 26:20

PUT OUT THE FIRE!

"Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases."

To extinguish a fire, you must remove one of the essential elements needed for combustion. For example, eliminating what is fueling the blaze is a method often employed in fighting a forest fire. A controlled backfire is started from a cleared line ahead of the advancing flames. When the two fires meet, no timber is left to burn.

The Bible tells us that for lack of wood, "the fire goes out" (Prov. 26:20). This refers to extinguishing something much more devastating than the combustion of physical elements. It's the fire of an irresponsible tongue and the resentment and pain that burn in the hearts of those who have been seared by its heat. What deep and lasting wounds the tongue can inflict on others! Families and friendships have been disrupted and individuals hurt for life because of the effects of backbiting and slander.

How necessary it is for God's people to eliminate from their conversation all thoughtless words! This would prevent many of the fires that ruin relationships.

By yielding our tongue to the Lord Jesus, who alone can control it, we can put out the harmful fires of slander and gossip. -- Martin R. De Haan II

How many fires have swept the land

And left an ugly scar!

But of the blazing flames that burn,

The tongue's the worst by far. -- Anon.

Better to bite your tongue than to have a biting tongue.

Proverbs 26:28 Assault And Flattery

Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Neither at any time did we use flattering words … nor a cloak for covetousness. —1 Thessalonians 2:5

A stand-up comedian has provided a couple of one-liners that, when combined, can provide us with a spiritual parallel. He said, “I looked high and low for you, but I didn’t look low enough.” He also joked, “I have a considerate doctor. If you can’t afford the operation, he touches up the x-rays.”

If we put those two together and make it refer to the same person, what do we have? A description of someone who is so low that he wouldn’t hesitate to alter the truth to make you feel better. He will use exaggerated praise to win the affection and goodwill of people by telling them what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear.

The apostle Paul recognized the sin of insincere praise and was careful to avoid it. He wouldn’t stoop so low as to “doctor up” the facts just to gain the support of his listeners. Paul’s aim was to please God, not man. Yet he didn’t hesitate to express his approval when he could do it honestly. For example, he let the Thessalonians know how much he valued and loved them (1 Th. 2:17-20). Paul was not against praise—just insincere praise.

Are we so committed to pleasing God that we would never give false praise to gain the approval of others? Flattery is no joke, even if it does get you a smile.

We flatter those we scarcely know,

We try to please each one we see;

But we should never traffic in

The sin of insincerity. —Anon.

A flattering mouth works ruin. —Proverbs 26:28

PROVERBS 27

Proverbs 27:1
Will You Be Around?

I read the following account in a medical magazine: When the physical examination of a 78-year-old man had been completed, the doctor recommended that he come back in 6 months for another checkup. At this suggestion the aged patient shook his head and said, "Doctor, I don't think I'll be around then."

"Nonsense!" replied the physician with a reassuring smile. "You'll be around for years yet."

The elderly man gave him an odd look, then explained, "I mean that I'll be in Florida. I go there every January."

The story may cause us to smile, but the question it raises is very sobering. Will you and I be around tomorrow, next month, next year? It surely is sensible to make plans for the future, but we must always do so with an awareness of life's uncertainty.

As James reminded us in the Bible reading for today, life is "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (James 4:14). Because of this we ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

Will you be around in 6 months? Let this question prompt you to live faithfully for the Lord Jesus Christ today.-- Richard W. De Haan

The present only is our own,
Live and toil with a will;
Do not wait until tomorrow,
For life's clock may then be still.- McCartney

Thought for the day: Settle all accounts today; you can't bank on tomorrow

Proverbs 27

Today in the Word

April 26, 2013

Christian musician Glenn Kaiser wrote a memorable blues song about “Self-Control” that includes these lyrics: “It’s the thing I lack most and it puts me in a bind / The wise possess it, it brings them peace of mind / Down in my soul, I need self-control / Without it my mouth says terrible things / Without it my hands work selfishness … Down in our soul, we need self-control.”

It takes self-control to resist provocation by a fool (v. 3; cf. Prov. 26:4–5). If we answer seriously, we give too much weight to their words. But if we respond angrily or scornfully, we’ve sunk to their level. That’s why this proverb pictures the decision as a heavy burden. Its parallelism compares the physical burden of sand or stone to the emotional and spiritual burden of answering a fool.

Parallelism can also make its point via reversed expectations. An example is, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (v. 6; cf. v. 17). To match negative with positive, and vice versa, makes us stop and think. We realize things may not be as they appear. It depends on the identity of the giver. Something that feels like a wound, if from a friend, is ultimately for our good and can be trusted; but kisses, if from an enemy, should be doubted.

Another way parallelism can work is by developing in unexpected or surprising directions. Verse 21, for example, begins with a picture we’ve seen before, that of a blazing furnace for refining precious metals. So we expect it will be about something that is painful but has a positive result—and indeed, it’s about testing. The surprise is the content of the test, something pleasant. This spurs reflection, upon which we realize that praise from others is indeed a test of character and a temptation to pride.

Apply the Word -As we’ve been learning this month, wisdom is flexible, depending on the situation, context, and audience to determine whether something is wise or foolish. Notice the apparently well-intentioned blessing in verse 14. The timing is terrible—it’s too early in the morning! May our pursuit of wisdom include a godly sense of context and relationships.

Proverbs 27:1-6 Boast Roast

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips. —Proverbs 27:2

The owner of a small foreign car had begun to irritate his friends by bragging incessantly about his car’s gas mileage. So they devised a plan to bring his boasts to an end. Every day one of them would secretly pour a few gallons of gas into the car’s tank. Soon the braggart was boasting of getting as much as 90 miles per gallon.

The pranksters enjoyed watching his exasperation as he tried to convince people of the truthfulness of his claims. It was even more

fun to see his reaction when they stopped refilling the tank. The poor fellow couldn't figure out what had happened to his car.

This incident points out that self-congratulation can backfire and leave a person looking foolish. There is something repulsive about talk that advertises one's own good judgment or abilities.

How much better it is to find our security and sense of worth in a quiet, personal relationship with the Lord! If we do that, we will become more interested in the needs and successes of others than we are in our own. We will speak of our concerns and accomplishments only as a means of encouraging others who need an uplifting word. Such an approach will win notice and approval—even though we're not looking for it.

If you would glorify your God

And thus His name adorn,

Be sure you keep your heart from pride;

Self-praise and boasting scorn. —Anon.

People who sing their own praises usually do so without accompaniment.

Proverbs 27:2

Keep Your Mouth Shut

A frog was wondering how he could get away from the cold winter climate. Some wild geese suggested that he migrate with them. The problem, though, was that the frog couldn't fly.

"Just leave it to me," said the frog. "I've got a splendid brain." He thought about it and then asked two geese to help him by picking up a strong reed, each holding one end. The frog planned to hold on to the reed with his mouth.

In due time the geese and the frog started on their journey. Soon they were passing over a small town, and the villagers came out to see the unusual sight. Someone cried out, "Who could have come up with such a clever idea?" This made the frog so puffed up with a sense of importance that he exclaimed, "I did it!" His pride was his undoing, for the moment he opened his mouth he lost his hold and fell to his death.

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18), but the Lord crowns humility with His blessing. Solomon also said, "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth" (27:2). If we would talk more about the Lord and praise Him, we would have less time to talk about ourselves. —M. R. De Haan

My gracious Master and my God,

Assist me to proclaim,

To spread through all the earth abroad

The honors of Thy name. --Wesley

No one has ever choked to death from swallowing his pride

Proverbs 27:4

Our Daily Bread

Inequality seems to cause jealousy. When we see someone with more wealth than we have or with qualities we lack, we become jealous.

While recording interviews for a radio program, I asked people on the street in New York City if they believed all men are created equal. Most of them answered no. They cited our differing abilities, appearances, and environments. One man complained that he had to eat hotdogs for lunch while others ate in fancy restaurants. Only one person showed a deeper understanding of the question. She said, "Under God we are all equally human."

The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God, that they are all accountable for what they do with whatever He has given them, and that someday they will all die. So, "under God" there is equality—but only under God. Apart from Him and His plan to bring about eventual justice, we see much in life that is not fair.

Christians are in the best position to keep the right perspective. They have all come to God as sinners and have found forgiveness

in the cross of Christ. Therefore, the rich person and the poor person stand together on the common ground of Calvary. The rich rejoice that they have discovered the emptiness of material wealth, and the poor rejoice that they have discovered eternal riches. And according to James, this is the wisdom that enables us to avoid the pitfall of jealousy. —M. R. De Haan II

No one can take from us the gifts that God gives us.

Proverbs 27:5

FRIEND OR ENEMY?

I like people and want people to like me. So to tell them that their conduct is dishonest or immoral isn't easy for me. On several occasions, men have told me how they got out of a speeding ticket by making up a touching story, or how they got even with some rascal in a shady business deal. I've responded by asking, "That was clever, but was it honest?"

When I get acquainted with people and they tell me they are living immorally, I may ask, "Do you believe in God and that you must answer to Him? Or do you think we are accidents of nature with no more meaning than an insect, and that it doesn't matter how we live?" When they express some belief in God (and almost everyone does), I'll gently share with them what He has said about about their conduct. Many times this opens the door to present the good news of salvation.

Ahab called Elijah an enemy (1 Ki. 21:20). But he was wrong. The prophet was really his best earthly friend. If only he would have listened to God's servant, he could have been a good king and a child of God.

Lord, help us to be loving as we confront people with their sin. And help us to see that those who point out our sins are not our enemies but our true friends. --H V Lugt

True friends will say what's kind and true,

Though it may cause us pain;

They're thinking of what's good for us

And all we stand to gain. --DJD

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. -- Proverbs 27:6

Proverbs 27:6

The Tests Of Criticism

After a church service in which the minister had preached about spiritual gifts, he was greeted at the door by a woman who said, "Pastor, I believe I have the gift of criticism."

He responded, "Do you remember the person in Jesus' parable who had the one talent? Do you recall what he did with it?"

"Yes," replied the woman, "he went out and buried it" (see Matthew 25:18).

With a smile, the pastor suggested, "Go, and do likewise!"

If criticism is not given lovingly and with an honest desire to help, it can be cruel and destructive. The words of Leviticus 19:17, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him," are preceded by warnings against spreading slander and nursing hatred.

You can determine when you should criticize and when you shouldn't by asking yourself three questions:

Am I motivated by a desire to help the other person?

Am I planning to face him honestly, but gently?

Am I doing this for the Lord, or because I enjoy being critical?

If your goal is to help, if your motives are loving, and if your desire is to please God, then go ahead and criticize. If you can't pass these tests, keep quiet.—Richard De Haan

We're building up or tearing down

In everything we do;

Are we in the construction gang

Or on the wrecking crew? —Anon.

He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help. —Abraham Lincoln

Proverbs 27:6 Turn Yourself In

Read: Galatians 2:11-21

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. —Proverbs 27:6

The spiritual-sounding phrase “I am answerable only to God” may be a subtle excuse for not answering to anyone, including God!

Charles Colson, one of President Nixon’s closest aides during the Watergate coverup, became a Christian. In an article titled “The Problem of Power,” he wrote, “Christians need to hold one another accountable. Although I know intellectually how vulnerable I am to pride and power, I am the last one to know when I succumb to their seduction. That’s why spiritual lone rangers are so dangerous —and why we must depend on trusted brothers and sisters who love us enough to tell us the truth.”

Paul confronted Peter face-to-face for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14). How embarrassing for Peter! But he needed the rebuke. Peter knew from his previous boasting and denial of Christ that he couldn’t trust his own estimate of himself.

All of us must come to that realization sooner or later. One way to make sure you’re not the last one to know when you’re sinning is to “turn yourself in.” Ask a Christian brother or sister to show you where you need improvement. They can help hold you accountable.

Don’t be a spiritual lone ranger. Turn yourself in.

Accountability Check

Do we immediately become defensive when criticized?

Is the criticism we give to others loving and helpful?

In what ways can we become more accountable?

True friends speak the truth in love.

Proverbs 27:6-17 How To Be A Friend

A man who has friends must himself be friendly. —Proverbs 18:24

Our daughter Melissa had many friends during her high school days. One of her best friends was Katie. After Melissa’s death in a car accident, Katie told us how they had become friends.

Katie was the new girl in school in fifth grade, having transferred from California. She felt alone and awkward and out of place—until one day early in her first year. That’s when Melissa noticed her sitting alone on the bus.

Mell got up from her seat, sat down next to Katie, and started asking questions. They sat next to each other every day from then on and became inseparable friends for the next 7 years.

Our world has so many people who need just one act of love to change their lives. These people may not think they fit in, or they may be facing turmoil that makes them feel all alone. Sometimes all we need to do is extend a hand, offer a smile, or speak a word of encouragement. As believers, we know and experience the love of God (1 John 3:16), so we are especially able to reach out to people and share that love.

There are enough people to go around so that everyone can have friends. Let’s take the initiative to make sure no one is left out.

I went outside to find a friend

But could not find one there;

I went outside to be a friend,

And friends were everywhere! —Payne

When you see someone in need, be a friend in deed.

Proverbs 27:6 The Wounds Of A Friend

Read: 2 Samuel 12:1-13

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. —Proverbs 27:6

Not everyone appreciates correction, but David did. He felt indebted to those who corrected him and realized how much he owed them. “Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. Let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it” (Ps. 141:5).

Correction is a kindness, David insists, a word that suggests an act of loyalty. Loyal friends will correct one another, even when it’s painful and disruptive to relationships to do so. It’s one of the ways we show love and help one another to grow stronger. As Proverbs 27:6 states: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”

It takes grace to give godly correction; it takes greater grace to receive it. Unlike David, who accepted Nathan’s correction (2 Sam. 12:13), we’re inclined to refuse it. We resent the interference; we do not want to be found out. But if we accept the reproof, we will find that it does indeed become “excellent oil” on our heads, an anointing that makes our lives a sweet aroma wherever we go.

Growth in grace sometimes comes through the kind but unpleasant correction of a loyal friend. Do not refuse it, for “he who receives correction is prudent” (Prov. 15:5) and “wise” (9:8-9).

When others give us compliments,

They are so easy to believe;

And though it’s wise to take rebukes,

We find them harder to receive. —Sper

Correction from a loyal friend can help us change for the better.

Proverbs 27:6a

The Rebuke From A Friend

Never will I forget the rebuke I received from a friend when I was 17. He walked into the back of the butcher shop where I worked and saw me laughing at an indecent cartoon. He said he had admired my Christian character, and was surprised that I would laugh at something sinful and degrading. Instantly a wave of embarrassment swept over me. I shamefully admitted that I had sinned.

It's not pleasant to be rebuked, nor is it easy to rebuke another person. So I can imagine that the apostle Paul didn't like confronting Peter (Galatians 2:11). But he felt he had to, because Peter's hypocritical behavior was hurtful and confusing to the Gentile converts at Antioch. Peter had freely eaten with them, but after some Jews from Jerusalem came to the Antioch church, he shunned the Gentiles, fearing the Jews' disapproval. I imagine that he felt shame, but he apparently accepted the rebuke gracefully and changed his ways. He knew that Paul was a true friend who loved him. And in later years he referred to him as "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15).

If you must rebuke someone, do it gently. If you are rebuked, avoid an angry response. You may be getting a needed "faithful wound" from a friend.—Herbert Vander Lugt

A friend will gently say what's true,

Although it may cause pain;

He's really thinking of our good

And what we stand to gain. —D. De Haan

A true friend will put a finger on your faults without rubbing them in.

Proverbs 27:6

Today in the Word

June 19, 2013

It has taken years to repair the rift between pastor Charles Stanley and his son, Andy. They fought, as Andy recalls, like “middle-

school girls," but eventually patched together their relationship with the help of a counselor. "They weren't too smart, too spiritual or too proud to allow somebody to come in and help them navigate all that anger," says Andy's wife, Sandra.

Conflict is often treacherous both in the church and in the family, and many relationships are never repaired like Charles and Andy Stanley's relationship eventually was. Anger, as we've already studied, is a hot-potato emotion that we aren't sure how to handle. Either we're prone to explode and give in to a host of unhealthy responses—hatred and fits of rage as examples (cf. Gal. 5:20)—or we bury the tension, choosing instead to seethe with unspoken bitterness and resentment.

The fruit of the Spirit is, however, a counterintuitive response, and it overrides our human instincts. For example, kind people might be assumed to be those who make others feel good and keep relational tensions at bay. But as we see in today's reading and in our key verse, people who exhibit spiritual kindness are not just nice people. To be kind, as the Father is kind, is to want and to pursue the best interest of another person. Often, saying what is difficult but true can be kinder than avoiding relational conflict.

Paul confronted Peter, opposing his choice to withdraw from table fellowship with Gentiles. His confrontation was motivated not by self-interest. That would have failed the "kindness" test. Rather, he was worried for Peter, that he was jeopardizing his Christian freedom. He was also concerned for the church, which was being led astray by Peter's actions.

Apply the Word - Has someone confronted you, and you've later understood it to be an incredible gesture of kindness? On the other hand, has someone confronted you out of spite, anger, or jealousy? Can you tell the difference? When you're tempted to confront another person, are you able to discern your motives?

Proverbs 27:7

The full soul loatheth an honeycomb.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

Honey was not used in sacrifices made by fire unto the Lord. Its luscious taste may have made it an emblem of the pleasures of the world. As bees roam from flower to flower, sipping nectar here and there, so does the heart of the worldling roam over the world for satisfaction; settling nowhere for long, but extracting sweets from a variety of attractive sources.

The best way of combating worldliness is by satisfying the heart with something better. The full soul loatheth even the honeycomb. When the prodigal gets the fatted calf, he has no further hankering after the husks which the swine eat. The girl who gets real jewels throws away her shams; and the child who has become a man has no taste for childish toys that once seemed all-important. This is the meaning of the old proverb: Love God, and do as you like. Whenever the spirit of worldliness gets into a congregation, you may be sure that the teaching has been defective, and that souls have not been made to sit at the rich banquet of the Divine providing.

We are reminded of the words which the psalmist applied to the Word of God: "Sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb." Fill your heart with God and his sacred truth, and the things of the world will lose their charm. Do you know this absorbing love of Jesus? We can at least choose to know it, and present ourselves to the Holy Spirit, that He may shed it abroad in our hearts. Oh to be full! Full of the more abundant life of which the Lord spoke, of the unspeakable joy, of the peace that passeth understanding — in a word, of Jesus, as the chief and best.

Proverbs 27:9

We Need One Another

Back in 1948, four friends huddled together in Modesto, California, to pray and plan. They wanted their evangelistic ministry to be God-honoring and above reproach, so they agreed to hold one another accountable to principles of integrity that would guide their organization and their personal lives. They called their agreement the "Modesto Manifesto." You may recognize their names: Billy Graham, Grady Wilson, George Beverly Shea, and Cliff Barrows.

Only God knows the full spiritual impact of their worldwide evangelistic outreach. These men attribute the effectiveness of their ministry to the importance of remaining faithful to God and to the "manifesto" they made years ago. Their friendship and commitment to encourage one another is what made the difference in their lives and ministry.

Most of the work of God is accomplished through people who are honest with one another, committed to serve one another, and willing to receive wise counsel from one another (Prov. 27:6,17). When we build trust, we will work together smoothly and see God at work in and through us.

Yes, to be men and women of integrity and productive members of our churches, we need one another. —David C. Egner

We share a common bond of love

That comes from God our Father,

And we're dependent on the strength

We draw from one another. --Sper

We need one another to do what God wants us to do

Proverbs 27:17 Sharpening One Another

Read: 1 Kings 19:19-21

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. —Proverbs 27:17

Social networks on the Internet are on the rise. Even when separated by great distance, people are still able to gain insights and a listening ear from peers on-line. Blogs, Twitter, e-mail, and Web links add to the ways we can receive and give spiritual guidance.

But it's also valuable to meet face to face with mature believers for mentoring. "Elisha … followed Elijah" (1 Kings 19:21), and Paul mentored Timothy as "a true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). He even admonished Timothy to set up a chain of mentoring which would multiply spiritual growth (2 Tim. 2:2). Moses exhorted parents to teach their children throughout their day: "when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7). The Master Teacher, Christ Himself, illustrated how to mentor: "He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out" (Mark 3:14).

From these passages we see the value of meeting face to face in a variety of settings so that we can sharpen one another spiritually (Prov. 27:17). Along life's journey, there are times when we can benefit from a wise guide or provide this same service to one who wants to follow.

Lord, who could be my mentor? And is there a

younger person in the faith I could help?

Please lead me so that I might grow stronger

spiritually and help others as well.

We need each other to get where God wants us to go.

Proverbs 27:17 Do You Care?

Read: 1 Samuel 20:1-23

You shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever. —1 Samuel 20:15

It's one thing to tell a friend you care. It's quite another to show it.

When David and Jonathan made a pact of friendship (1 Sam. 18:1-4), neither of them knew to what extent Jonathan would have to go to show his care for David. But it didn't matter. Undaunted by danger, Jonathan courageously acted to save David's life (20:1-23).

When we develop close friendships, we may also be called on to demonstrate by our actions that we care. The acrostic C-A-R-E can help us remember four key elements of friendship.

CHALLENGE your friend to grow spiritually. A good friend knows the importance of turning the conversation toward matters of faith.

AFFIRM your friend's value. A phone call or a note can let your friend know how important he or she is and can keep your friendship strong.

RESPECT the feelings and wishes of your friend. No one wants a friend with whom ideas, dreams, and concerns fall on deaf ears. A good friend is a great sounding board.

ENCOURAGE your friend through compliments and by doing good deeds. Your friend will feel better after having been in your presence.

Do you have a friend you should care for today?

THINKING IT OVER

Read Proverbs 27:17. What does it mean for friends to "sharpen" each other as iron sharpens iron? Do any of your friendships

sharpen you?

See a friend in need? Be a friend in deed.

Proverbs 27:18

Servants Honored

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

HE who tends the fig tree has figs for his pains, and he who waits on a good master has honor as his reward. Truly the Lord Jesus is the very best of masters, and it is an honor to be allowed to do the least act for His sake. To serve some lords is to watch over a crab tree and eat the crabs as one's wages; but to serve my Lord Jesus is to keep a fig tree of the sweetest figs. His service is in itself delight, continuance in it is promotion, success in it is blessedness below, and the reward for it is glory above.

Our greatest honors will be gathered in that season when the figs will be ripe, even in the next world. Angels who are now our servitors will bear us home when our day's work is done. heaven, where Jesus is, will be our honorable mansion; eternal bliss, our honorable portion; and the Lord Himself, our honorable companion. Who can imagine the full meaning of this promise, "He that waiteth on his master shall be honored?"

Lord, help me to wait upon my Master. Let me leave all idea of honor to the hour when thou thyself shalt honor me. May thy Holy Spirit make me a lowly patient worker and waiter!

Proverbs 27:21 The Tragic Flaw

Read: 2 Chronicles 26:3-15 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 10-12; John 11:30-57

His fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong. —2 Chronicles 26:15

In literature, a tragic flaw is a character trait that causes the downfall of a story's hero. That was true of Uzziah, who was crowned king of Judah at age 16. For many years, he sought the Lord; and while he did, God gave him great success (2 Chron. 26:4-5). But things changed when "his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong. But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction" (vv.15-16).

Uzziah entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar (v.16), openly defying God's decree. Perhaps pride convinced him that God's rules applied to everyone except him. When Uzziah raged against the priests who told him this was not right, the Lord struck him with leprosy (vv.18-20).

In literature and in life, how often we see a person of good reputation fall from honor into disgrace and suffering. "King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, … cut off from the house of the Lord" (v.21).

The only way we can prevent the nectar of praise from becoming the poison of pride is by following the Lord with a humble heart.

Humility's a slippery prize

That seldom can be won;

We're only humble in God's eyes

When serving like His Son. —Gustafson

The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives. —Proverbs 27:21 NIV

Proverbs 27:23

Spurgeon - Morning and evening

Every wise merchant will occasionally hold a stock-taking, when he will cast up his accounts, examine what he has on hand, and ascertain decisively whether his trade is prosperous or declining. Every man who is wise in the kingdom of heaven, will cry, "Search me, O God, and try me"; and he will frequently set apart special seasons for self-examination, to discover whether things are right between God and his soul. The God whom we worship is a great heart-searcher; and of old his servants knew him as "the Lord which searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men." Let me stir you up in his name to make diligent search and solemn trial of your state, lest you come short of the promised rest. That which every wise man does, that which God himself does with us all, I exhort you to do with yourself this evening. Let the oldest saint look well to the fundamentals of his piety, for grey heads may cover black hearts: and let not the young professor despise the word of warning, for the greenness of youth may be joined to

the rottenness of hypocrisy. Every now and then a cedar falls into our midst. The enemy still continues to sow tares among the wheat. It is not my aim to introduce doubts and fears into your mind; nay, verily, but I shall hope the rather that the rough wind of self-examination may help to drive them away. It is not security, but carnal security, which we would kill; not confidence, but fleshly confidence, which we would overthrow; not peace, but false peace, which we would destroy. By the precious blood of Christ, which was not shed to make you a hypocrite, but that sincere souls might show forth his praise, I beseech you, search and look, lest at the last it be said of you, “Mene, Mene, Tekel: thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”

Proverbs 27:24

The “What Then?” Test

From the 16th century comes a story of a probing conversation between an ambitious young man and a devout Christian named St. Philip Neri. The youth said to him excitedly, “My parents finally agreed to my studying law! "Philip asked simply, “What then?”

He replied, "Then I shall become a lawyer! "And then?” pursued Philip.“ Then I shall earn lots of money, buy a country house, get a carriage and horses, marry a beautiful woman, and lead a delightful life! "he responded.

Again Philip asked, "And then?" Then … ”The young man began reflecting for the first time on death and eternity. He realized that he had not acknowledged God in his plans and was building his life on temporal values.

The point of this story is not that riches are wrong. But if they become our central goal, we are ignoring eternity and trusting money, not God. Jesus said it’s impossible to love both money and God (Matthew 6:24), and He warned, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, … but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”(vv.19-20).

Young and old alike must make important life-plans. But let’s keep eternity in mind by always subjecting them to the "what then?” test.—Joanie Yoder

Shall the great Judge say, when my task is through,

That my soul had gathered some riches too?

Or shall at the last it be mine to find

That all I had worked for I had left behind? —Anon.

The true measure of our wealth is the treasure we have in heaven.

Proverbs 27:20

While they were shopping, a little boy nagged his mother to buy him a new toy. She responded by paraphrasing Proverbs 27:20: “Death and hell are never full, and the eyes of little boys are never satisfied.” The little boy did not understand what she meant. But he knew enough to understand that the answer was “no.”

PROVERBS 28

Proverbs 28
Today in the Word
April 27, 2013

Arloa Sutter understood the biblical mandate of the gospel to address spiritual and physical needs. She founded Breakthrough Urban Ministries in 1992 by opening up a room in a church to offer hot coffee and a meal to homeless people in the area. Today, Breakthrough operates two homeless shelters, a youth development program, and a food pantry in a needy neighborhood in Chicago. In 2007, Arloa was given the Moody Alumni Association Distinguished Service Award.

The book of Proverbs reveals a strong, practical connection between wisdom and social justice. What does today’s chapter teach us about this? First, it mandates a kind attitude to the poor (Pr 28:8). Oppressing or exploiting the poor is obviously unjust (Pr 28:3), but stinginess is also unjust. True justice counsels those with resources to be not only fair but generous (Pr 28:27).

Second, a just leader understands that power is not a tool for domination (Pr 28:3). It is a gift with a purpose. A wise leader is responsible to keep order for the benefit of all. To use power for personal gain is obviously unjust (Pr 28:16), but even using power to keep power is unjust. In that situation, things are unstable—the whole country is filled with little “rulers,” doing as they please (Pr 28:2). A tyrant is like an aggressive wild animal (Pr 28:15), whereas a wise king is the shepherd of his people.

Third, wisdom and justice are part of a panoply of virtues (Pr 28:12, 28). That is, they are not isolated qualities but are linked with

many other virtues. Just as one cannot be both wise and wicked, so also one cannot be truly just and immoral at the same time. Justice, like wisdom, begins with the fear of the Lord (Pr 28:14, 26). That's why only "those who seek the Lord understand it fully" (Pr 28:5).

Apply the Word - "Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe" (Pr 28:26). Where is your trust today? Is it in your savings and retirement accounts? In your good health or good job? Is it simply trusting your gut instincts? Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to walk in wisdom—trusting in God alone

Proverbs 28:10

No Need to Stint

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

THE book of Proverbs is also a book of promises. Promises ought to be proverbs among the people of God. This is a very remarkable one. We are accustomed to think of our good things as in reversion, but here we are told that we shall have them in possession.

Not all the malice and cunning of our enemies can work our destruction: they shall fall into the pit which they have digged. Our inheritance is so entailed upon us that we shall not be kept out of it, nor so turned out of the way as to miss it.

But what have we now? We have a quiet con-science through the precious blood of Jesus. We have the love of God set upon us beyond all change. We have power with God in prayer in all time of need. We have the providence of God to watch over us, the angels of God to minister to us, and, above all, the Spirit of God to dwell in us. In fact, all things are ours. "Whether things present or things to come: all are yours." Jesus is ours. Yea, the divine trinity in unity is ours. Hallelujah. Let us not pine and whine, and stint and slave, since we have good things in possession. Let us live on our God and rejoice in Him all the day. Help us, O Holy Ghost!

Proverbs 28:13

Uncover and Confess Sin

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

HERE is the way of mercy for a guilty and repenting sinner. He must cease from the habit of covering sin. This is attempted by falsehood, which denies sin; by hypocrisy, which conceals it; by boasting, which justifies it; and by loud profession, which tries to make amends for it.

The sinner's business is to confess and forsake. The two must go together. Confession must be honestly made to the Lord Himself; and it must include within itself acknowledgment of the wrong, a sense of its evil, and an abhorrence of it. We must not throw the fault upon others, nor blame circum-stances, nor plead natural weakness. We must make a clean breast of it and plead guilty to the indictment. There can be no mercy till this is done.

Furthermore, we must forsake the evil: having owned our fault, we must disown all present and future intent to abide in it. We cannot remain in rebellion and yet dwell with the King's Majesty. The habit of evil must be quitted, together with all places, companions, pursuits, and books which might lead us astray. Not for confession, nor for reformation, but in connection with them, we find pardon by faith in the blood of Jesus.

Proverbs 28:13a

He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper. (r.v.)

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

There must be confession before forgiveness. This is clearly taught everywhere in God's Word. "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times a day turn to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." But he must turn and say, I repent. This is the clear condition. You may and must use every method of inducing him to say this; but he must be brought to say it, before it is right to pronounce the gracious formula of absolution. There may be the disposition to forgive, but there cannot be the declaration of forgiveness, until the wrongdoer perceives the wrong and expresses his regret and sorrow.

The prodigal must say to his father, "I have sinned." It is only as we confess our sins, that our merciful High Priest can forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Confession is to take God's side against sin. It is the lifting out of one thing after another from heart and life, and holding them for a moment before God, with the acknowledgment that it is our fault, our grievous fault.

There is only one way in which transgressions can be covered: that of which the psalmist speaks, when he says, Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered, because hidden under the propitiation of the blood. In Hood's poem, Eugene Aram sought to cover his sin under the leaves of the forest, and beneath the waters of the river. But in vain. So sinners try to cover their sins in vain. But God hath set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation — a word which denotes the mercy-seat — the lid that covered the stone slabs on which the finger of God had written the Law.

Proverbs 28:13b

Exaggeration

A woman said to a preacher, "I have a habit that I know is hurting my testimony—the habit of exaggeration. I start to tell something and I go on and on enlarging the story. People suspect that it's not true, and they lose confidence in me. I'm trying to get over it. Could you help me?"

He responded, "Let's talk to the Lord about it."

She prayed, "Lord, You know I have this habit of exaggeration … " At this point the preacher interrupted, "Call it lying and you may get over it!" The woman was deeply convicted and confessed her wrong.

We often excuse our pet sins by giving them more acceptable names. Our bad temper we call "nerves"; our untruthfulness, "exaggeration"; our dishonesty we call "good business." In seeking to overcome these sins, we need to bring them out in the open, call them honestly by name, and sincerely repent (Proverbs 28:13).

A man entered a dentist's office and sat down to have his teeth fixed. "I can feel a huge cavity with my tongue," he said. The dentist examined the man's teeth and said, "It'll only be a small filling." "But why does it feel so large?" asked the patient. "Just the natural tendency of the tongue to exaggerate," replied the dentist with a twinkle in his eye. We may smile, but aren't we all prone to blow things out of proportion? Indeed, "the tongue is a little member and boasts great things" (James 3:5).—Henry G. Bosch

Lord, forgive us for misusing our tongues. - Henry Bosch

To stretch the truth is to tell a lie.

Proverbs 28:13 Rubbish Piles

Read: Nehemiah 4:1-10

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. —Proverbs 28:13

Nehemiah, the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, had received permission to return to the city of Jerusalem with a company of workers. It had been destroyed some 70 years before. Its wall lay in ruins, the temple in ashes, while Judah pined away in captivity.

In answer to prayer, Nehemiah was allowed to return to rebuild Jerusalem. When he arrived he found the city devastated. The men of Judah came to Nehemiah and cried, “There is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall” (Neh. 4:10).

We too are builders. Sin has caused utter ruin of the house of humanity. We have the remedy for this lost world in the Word of the gospel. Yet how ineffective our work often is because of the rubbish in our own lives. The rubbish of indifference, spiritual apathy, laziness, sinful pleasure, materialism, worldliness, questionable habits, doubt and worry, and lack of prayer and Bible study. All this must be cleared away before we can serve the Lord effectively.

On our knees we must confess our sin, accept His forgiveness, and begin building on a clean foundation. Then we will be able to offer Him something that will abide forever.

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;

Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. —Orr

God's grace In the heart brings forth good deeds in the life.

Proverbs 28:13

In the book The Five Languages of Apology, Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas identify five distinct sentiments in the anatomy of

a genuine apology: “I’m sorry,” “I was wrong,” “Let me make it up to you,” “I won’t do it again,” and “Please forgive me.” The book asserts that most people have a primary apology language that determines both how they offer and receive apologies. Some people, for instance, won’t accept an apology unless they hear those three rare words: “I was wrong.

Proverbs 28:13 Cover-up

Read: Jeremiah 3:11-15

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. —Proverbs 28:13

After bearing the burden of a guilty conscience for more than four decades, an elderly man decided he couldn’t go on any longer without confessing his crime.

When he was brought to trial, he told the judge, “After living with this thing hanging over my head for 40 some years, it got heavier and heavier until I just couldn’t stand it any longer.” What a clear illustration that guilt is inescapable!

The judge decided to show mercy. “Criminal charges are not warranted in this case,” he said, as the old man, now hard of hearing, strained to catch his words.

Confession is the key to the problem of guilt. The Lord pleaded with His people through the prophet Jeremiah, trying to get them to see where they had been unfaithful. Over and over again He warned that He would judge them for denying that they had done wrong, and for refusing to come back to Him for mercy (2:35). He urged them to stop running from what they had done and to admit their sin (3:13).

What about you today? Is there something in your life that you are covering up? It won’t work. You can’t fool God. Confess it to the Lord and experience His mercy, love, and grace.

Jesus died to pay sin's debt,

Forgiveness to bestow;

But all who try to cover sin

His grace will never know. —DJD

Confession is the key that opens the door to forgiveness.

Proverbs 28:13 Hide Or Seek?

Read: Isaiah 30:8-18

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. —Proverbs 28:13

An Indianapolis patrolman ran into trouble while he was investigating a routine traffic mishap. He had interviewed witnesses, arrested one of the drivers, and written up the accident report. Then he noticed that the offending motorist was chewing on something that wasn’t gum. He was eating the report! Despite the officer’s efforts to retrieve the report, it was destroyed. But the delay was only temporary. The patrolman tracked down the witnesses again and recompiled the evidence.

The resistance and coverup that this Indiana officer encountered is similar to what Isaiah saw in the people of Israel centuries ago. The prophet was grieved as he watched his countrymen try to ignore and conceal the evidence of their sin. They, in effect, stuck their fingers in their ears while the Lord spoke (Isa. 30:9), and they encouraged their prophets to tell them only what they wanted to hear (v.10). They would rather hide than seek the mercy of God. Consequently, the Lord sent judgment on them (vv.12-17).

We can learn from Israel’s mistakes that an attempt at coverup won’t do any good. It’s only temporary. We must confess our sins to God and forsake them. Then we will know the joy of God’s forgiveness.

The sins that would entangle us

Must never be ignored;

For if we try to cover them

They'll pierce us like a sword. —Sper

The sin we try to cover up will eventually bring us down.

Proverbs 28:14

Fear Has Its Place

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

THE fear of the Lord is the beginning and the foundation of all true religion. Without a solemn awe and reverence of God, there is no foothold for the more brilliant virtues. He whose soul does not worship will never live in holiness.

He is happy who feels a jealous fear of doing wrong. Holy fear looks not only before it leaps, but even before it moves. It is afraid of error, afraid of neglecting duty, afraid of committing sin. It fears ill company, loose talk, and questionable policy. This does not make a man wretched, but it brings him happiness. The watchful sentinel is happier than the soldier who sleeps at his post. He who foreseeth evil and escapes it is happier than he who walks carelessly on and is destroyed.

Fear of God is a quiet grace which leads a man along a choice road, of which it is written, “No lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon.” Fear of the very appearance of evil is a purifying principle which enables a man, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to keep his garments unspotted from the world. In both senses he that “feareth always” is made happy. Solomon had tried both worldliness and holy fear: in the one he found vanity, in the other happiness. Let us not repeat his trial, but abide by his verdict.

Proverbs 28:20

God's Word commends faithfulness. The parables in Matthew 24 and 25 about being ready for Christ's sudden appearing point out that those who faithfully do their tasks receive the Lord's approval. Day by day, in good fortune or in bad, whether feeling good or a little down in the dumps, we are to continue steadfastly doing the job God has given us.

After the tragic bombing of a marine base in Beirut in October 1983, the steadfastness of one young soldier moved and heartened the American people back home. He had been critically wounded in the explosion of the revamped hotel where he and his fellow marines had been staying. Many of his buddies had been killed. He was covered with bandages and a jungle of tubes was attached to his body. Unable to speak, he indicated he wanted to write something when visited by General Paul X. Kelly, Commandant of the Marine Corps. Painfully he wrote the words semper /j a shortened form of the U.S. Marine Corps motto, Semper Fidelis, which means "Always faithful."

Those of us in the Lord's army can learn from this young man's example. We too may have come under heavy attack. Our "wounds" may be many. Some of our beloved fellow soldiers may fall in battle. Even so, we are to be faithful to the end. An attitude of determined loyalty should fill our hearts and drive us onward no matter what the circumstances. Yes, Semper Fidelis, "always faithful," is also the Christian's motto. —D. C. Egner

The proof of our faith is our faithfulness.

Proverbs 28:20 A Faithful Servant

If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:11

Madaleno is a bricklayer. From Monday to Thursday he builds walls and repairs roofs. He is quiet, reliable, and hardworking. Then from Friday to Sunday he goes up to the mountains to teach the Word of God. Madaleno speaks Nahuatl (a Mexican dialect), so he can easily communicate the good news of Jesus to the people in that region. At age 70, he still works with his hands building houses, but he also works to build the family of God.

His life has been threatened several times. He has slept under the stars and faced death from car accidents and falls. He has been kicked out of towns. But he thinks that God has called him to do what he does, and he serves happily. Believing that people need to know the Lord, he relies on God for the strength he needs.

Relying on God's #strength allows us to serve him better.

Madaleno’s faithfulness reminds me of the faithfulness of Caleb and Joshua, two of the men Moses sent to explore the Promised Land and report back to the Israelites (Num. 13; Josh. 14:6-13). Their companions were afraid of the people who lived there, but Caleb and Joshua trusted in God and believed He would help them conquer the land.

The work entrusted to us may be different than Madaleno’s or Caleb’s and Joshua’s. But our confidence can be the same. In reaching out to others, we rely not on ourselves but on the strength of our God.

Where has God placed you to serve? Are you being faithful?

We grow strong when we serve the Lord.

INSIGHT: Discipleship has been called “a long obedience in the same direction.” The point is not how much we have done, but whether or not we have been faithful to our Lord. Caleb was faithful for 45 years in the wilderness. When Christ returns, our faithfulness will be rewarded when we hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).

Proverbs 28:20a

REWARDS OF FAITHFULNESS

"A faithful man will abound with blessings."

Missionary Jack Shiflett was speaking to one of his supporting churches. Having spent 11 years in Spain, Shiflett talked about the frustrations of presenting Jesus to people who don't think they need the gospel.

In the past couple of years, though, Jack and his wife Cheryl have seen their ministry begin to bear fruit. At least 17 people have accepted Jesus as Savior. Yet that was after many years with few results. To emphasize his appreciation

for the faithfulness of this church, Shiflett said, "After 8 years, we came to you and reported that we had led one person to Jesus Christ. And you sent us back."

The people at the church had recognized that the hallmark of servanthood is faithfulness, not results. Results, they knew, rested in God's hands through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Shifletts were faithful to the task and are now seeing the harvest. Their example is encouraging, for we often go without results for even longer periods of time. And the example of the church in sticking with them is just as vital.

Perhaps you've been faithful at a task for a long time -- seemingly without results. Stick with it, and leave the results with God. He'll send the rewards.-- J. David Branon

Press on in your service for Jesus,

Spurred on by your love for the Lord;

He promised that if you are faithful,

One day you'll receive your reward.-- Fasick

God is more concerned with reliability than results.

Proverbs 28:26

The Storm Will Pass

The local TV meteorologist occasionally points to a map and says something like this: "I'm afraid that things are going to get worse before they get better."

Such a forecast could very well have applied to Israel when God sent Moses to free His people from slavery in Egypt. The barometer of events was falling rapidly, and the dark, ominous sky of oppression would soon break forth into a churning, flashing storm of cruelty unleashed by Pharaoh.

Moses had appealed to Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go into the desert to worship God, but the king accused them of loafing on the job (Exodus 5:1,17). So he multiplied their workload, and the situation went from bad to horrible (v.18). Moses cried out in bitterness to the Lord for an explanation (vv.22-23). He found it hard to believe that a glorious exodus could be just around the corner.

The plans of the Lord were not being frustrated, however. Before conditions would get better for His children, God tested them by allowing their suffering to increase.

Even when we are obedient to the Lord, the skies of adversity may not always clear immediately. Circumstances may get worse before they improve. But praise God, His grace will sustain us, and the storm will pass.—Mart De Haan

Have faith in God, the sun will shine,

Though dark your path may be today;

His love has planned your way and mine,

Have faith in God, have faith alway. —Anon.

It's always darkest before the dawn

PROVERBS 29

Proverbs 29:1
It's A Long Story

In August 1989, a major fire broke out under an elevated section of New Jersey's Interstate 78. The intense heat buckled parts of the highway and forced the closing of the East Coast artery. The governor said it was the worst transportation crisis in years.

An investigation brought to light a longstanding problem. It revealed that the fire broke out in a dump site in which construction debris had been collecting for many years. The owners of the site had been convicted of a multimillion dollar conspiracy to allow the illegal dumping of construction debris. But appeals in federal and state courts frustrated New Jersey's efforts to clean up the area. Not until the day after the fire did a state appeals court finally order the operator of the dump to stop accepting trash and begin clearing the site.

That fire tells a basic story of life. Most of our problems don't just happen. They are the result of a long series of bad decisions. Second Chronicles 36 illustrates this and reminds us that God will not allow His children to continue in sin. Even though He is longsuffering, His patience has a limit. If we don't correct the problem ourselves, we can be sure that He will discipline us.

Let's clean up the trash in our lives today. —Mart De Haan

Lord, help me see my hidden sin,

Those secret wrongs that lurk within;

I would confess them all to Thee-

Transparent I would always be. —D. De Haan

The most deadly sins do not leap upon us, they creep up on us.

Proverbs 29:2

When a missionary visited India, he observed the images and statues representing pagan gods that seemed to fill every corner. Overwhelmed by the idolatry, he asked an Indian Christian how he dealt with its ubiquity. The Indian man responded by describing how idolatry was so much worse in America, which is why he remained in India! Idolatry exists in all places and in all cultures.

Proverbs 29:3 Smart Dad

Read: Proverbs 4:14-27

Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice. —Proverbs 29:3

A hard-working single dad named William Jackson Smart was the inspiration for the creation of Father’s Day. His wife died in 1898 while giving birth to their sixth child, and the Civil War veteran was left to raise the children alone in rural Washington.

In May 1909, Smart’s daughter, by then a married woman named Sonora Dodd, heard a sermon enumerating the virtues of motherhood. It was Mother’s Day, a new American holiday that had begun the previous year. Sonora decided to honor her dad’s dedication to his children by seeking to have a Father’s Day designated on the calendar. The day caught on, but it wasn’t permanently established as an annual holiday in the US until 1972.

What a vital role fathers can play in the home as they train their children to follow God’s ways! Proverbs 4 gives these nuggets of wisdom that dads can pass on to their children: “Do not enter the path of the wicked” (v.14). “Keep your heart with all diligence” (v.23). “Put away from you a deceitful mouth” (v.24). And finally, “Remove your foot from evil” (v.27).

We honor our godly fathers by obeying their instruction. And we should pray for all dads to recognize their God-given role of training in the home. —JDB

We're thankful for good fathers, Lord,

They're special gifts from You;

Help us to show we honor them

By what we say and do. —Sper

Good fathers not only tell us how to live—they show us.

Proverbs 29:1-6

Our Daily Bread

We were out on the lake and the fish were biting. Suddenly we heard a rumble in the distance. Looking up, we saw a mass of dark clouds in the west. The sound of thunder warned of a coming storm. It was a long way off, I thought, so I didn't heed the suggestion of my fishing partner that we start back to the cottage. I hoped the bad weather would move to the north or south of us. But then it happened! A fresh breeze sprang up, and the clouds mounted quickly overhead. We tried starting the motor—but no response. I cranked while my partner rowed frantically. The waves became whitecaps; the rain came in sheets; and the gale tossed our aluminum boat like an autumn leaf. That experience taught me a valuable lesson. Never wait when a storm is brewing!

It also preached a powerful sermon. Judgment is coming! It may seem far off to those who are in good health, but our motor can "conk out" at any time. To heed the foreboding signals of death is true wisdom. Look in the mirror before you go to work and observe some of its warnings. Notice those gray hairs and wrinkles. Remember your stiffening joints, shortness of breath, that dizzy spell—it's all "thunder in the distance." Why not hasten to find shelter in Christ before it is too late? Don't depend on your motor or the oars of self-effort. You will have no excuse, for you have been warned! —M. R. De Haan, M.D.

We are not truly ready to live until we are prepared to die.

Proverbs 29:11-17

A Sermon From Nature

I'll never forget seeing a mother wren angrily dive at my father when I was a boy. He had placed a number of wren houses around the yard and was always happy when his tenants returned each year to raise their families. One of his birdhouses was made with a hinged cover so that Dad could lift the top and look into the nest.

One day, wanting to see a new family that had just hatched, my father approached the birdhouse—but not without a severe scolding from Mother Wren. How she told him off! Disregarding her warning, my father was just about to lift the lid when this furious little mother flew full speed right down on top of his head. She gave him such a vicious peck that it drew blood!

Do we as Christian parents have that much concern for our children? Are we diligent in protecting them from the evil that could bring them spiritual injury? Are we teaching them about the threats of the world, the flesh, and the devil? (1 John 2:14-16). Do we know their friends? Do we monitor the TV programs they are watching?

Our children need our attention, guidance, and care (Proverbs 29:15). May God help us to guard them from spiritual harm. —Richard De Haan

God gives us children for a time

To train them in His way,

To love them and to teach them how

To follow and obey. —Sper

The character of your children tomorrow depends on what you put into their hearts today.

Proverbs 29:7 Consider the Poor

The righteous considers the cause of the poor. —nkjv Proverbs 29:7

The year was 1780, and Robert Raikes had a burden for the poor, illiterate children in his London neighborhood. He noticed that nothing was being done to help these children, so he set out to make a difference.

He hired some women to set up schools for them on Sunday. Using the Bible as their textbook, the teachers taught the poorest children of London to read and introduced them to the wisdom of the Bible. Soon about 100 children were attending these classes

and enjoying lunch in a safe, clean environment. These “Sunday schools,” as they were soon called, eventually touched the lives of thousands of boys and girls. By 1831, Sunday schools in Great Britain reached more than a million children—all because one man understood this truth: “The righteous considers the cause of the poor” (Prov. 29:7 nkjv).

It’s no secret that Jesus cares greatly for those who struggle. In Matthew 25, He suggests that followers of Christ show a readiness for the Lord’s return by helping the hungry to get food, helping the thirsty to get a drink, helping the homeless to find a home, helping the naked to get clothes, and helping the sick or imprisoned to receive comfort (vv. 35-36).

As we bear witness that Christ is in our hearts, we honor our compassionate Savior by considering those on God’s heart.

Awaken my heart, Lord, to those You care about, including the poor and helpless, the hungry and homeless, the troubled and hopeless in our world.

Open your heart to God to learn compassion, and open your hand to give help.

INSIGHT: Today’s Bible reading is a portion of what is sometimes referred to as the Olivet Discourse, our Lord’s last recorded public sermon before going to the cross. Matthew 24:3 says that Jesus led His disciples to the Mount of Olives, where He delivered this message on the future judgment and the establishment of the kingdom. Jesus spoke to them of tribulation, of the coming of the King, and of the need to have a prepared heart. It’s a sober message, yet one that ends with Jesus calling His followers to a heart of service that reaches out to hurting people with compassion and generosity. Bill Crowder

Proverbs 29:7 A House For A Car

Read: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

The righteous considers the cause of the poor. —Proverbs 29:7

A woman from one of the world’s poorer countries was visiting Toronto. While there, she stayed in the home of a woman who worked for a worldwide relief organization.

Looking out the back window of the home, the visitor asked, “Who lives there?” Thinking she meant who lived in the backyard, the hostess replied, “No one.”

“No,” the guest persisted, “I mean over there.” She pointed to the woman’s garage. “Who lives in there?” “No one,” the hostess said. “That’s a house for the car.”

The woman was dumbfounded. Over and over, she repeated, “A house for a car! A house for a car!” She was shocked that people could afford not only a car but a house to keep it in.

As I think about it, her shock is understandable. It’s embarrassing to realize that some of us have so much while others have so little.

The apostle Paul didn’t see wealth as a sin, but he understood the dangers it brought. In his instructions to Timothy, he challenged “those who are rich in this present age” to be “ready to give, willing to share” (1 Tim. 6:17-18).

God expects us to use His blessings to bless others. Are we using what He’s given us to show His love?

Because God gives us all we need, we should give to those in need.

Proverbs 29:11 Angry Prayers -

Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end. Proverbs 29:11

The neighbors probably didn’t know what to think as they looked out their windows at me one wintry day. I was standing in the driveway with a garden shovel clutched in my hands, whacking wildly and angrily at a clump of ice that had formed beneath a corner gutter. With each smack, I was uttering prayers that were variations on one theme: “I can’t do this.” “You can’t expect me to do this.” “I don’t have the strength to do this.” As a caregiver, with a long list of responsibilities to handle, I now had this ice to deal with, and I had had enough!

My anger was wrapped around a bundle of lies: “I deserve better than this.” “God isn’t enough after all.” “Nobody cares anyway.” But when we choose to cling to our anger, we become mired in the trap of bitterness, never moving forward. And the only cure for anger is truth.

The truth is that God does not give us what we deserve; He gives us mercy instead. “You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you” (Ps. 86:5). The truth is that God is more than enough, despite what we see. The truth is that His strength is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9). Yet before we can find such reassurance, we may need to step back, lay down the shovel of our

own efforts, and take Jesus' hand that's extended to us in mercy and grace.

God is big enough to listen to our anger and loving enough to show us, in His time, the path forward.

Loving God, forgive me for my outbursts of anger. Today I choose to lay down my sinful anger and accept Your mercy and grace. Thank You for forgiveness and for truth that leads to wisdom.

Shelly Beach is the author of several books, including Precious Lord, Take My Hand: Meditations for Caregivers.

Grace: Getting what we don't deserve.

Mercy: Not getting what we do deserve.

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision.

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

What a difference it makes to our teaching and preaching where there is no vision! The people perish for want of seers of those who can say with the apostle, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you also, that ye may have fellowship with us." It is not difficult to know whether a poet or painter has a vision. If he have, there is glow and passion in his work. And it is not more difficult to detect in the accent of the speaker on divine things, whether he is speaking at secondhand, or as the result of direct vision.

This vision of God was vouchsafed to Moses and Elijah and the apostle Paul. Concerning the latter God said, "He shall be a minister and a witness of things which he has seen." This is our only qualification for teaching others; not intellect, nor imagination, nor rhetoric, but to have seen the King and beheld the pattern on the mount. For such a vision, on our part, there must be humility, patience, and faith, a definite withdrawal from the life of sense, and a definite fixedness of gaze on the things that are unseen and eternal. But on God's part there must be revelation. "It pleased God," said the apostle, "to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach Him."

The apostle said, "I could not see for the glory of that light." A party of tourists was divided one dull morning in Switzerland; the majority thought that it was useless to attempt the mountains. A few started, soon got beyond the low-hanging clouds, spent a day in the heights under marvellous skies, and returned at night, radiant, and overflowing with what they had seen. Ah, speaking is easy when one has seen!

Proverbs 29:22 Volcanic Activity

Read: Ephesians 4:29-32

An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression. —Proverbs 29:22

It erupts. It melts everything in its path. Its blast is as powerful as a nuclear explosion!

Well, maybe not—but a temper can feel as intense as a volcano when it is aimed directly at another person in a family. The moment may be quickly over, but it can leave emotional devastation and bitter feelings behind.

It's sad that the people we love the most are often the target of our hurtful words. But even when we feel we've been provoked, we have a choice. Will we respond in anger or in kindness?

The Bible tells us to rid ourselves of bitterness and anger, and to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

If you are struggling with chronic anger that is hurting your relationships, surrender this vulnerable part of your emotions to Christ's strength (Phil. 4:13). Ask God to forgive you for an uncontrolled temper and to show you how to moderate your emotions and to teach you how to honor others above yourself (Rom. 12:10). Seek out help from others to learn how to deal with your strong emotions in appropriate ways.

As we earnestly seek to love others and to please God, we can win the victory over a volcanic temper.

Spirit of God, please change my heart,

And give me a new desire;

I want to be a man of peace,

Not controlled by anger's fire. —K. De Haan

Losing your temper is no way to get rid of it.

Proverbs 29:25 You're Afraid Of Whom?

Read: Numbers 13:30-14:10

The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe. —Proverbs 29:25

Mrs. Ima Terror chased her husband through the crowds at the zoo, waving her umbrella and unleashing insults like invisible missiles. Her perspiring and winded husband, seeing that the lock on the lion's cage had not quite closed, yanked it open, jumped into the cage, slammed the door, pushed the astonished lion hard against the bars, and peered over its shoulder. His frustrated wife shook her umbrella, stuttered in anger, and finally managed to explode, "Ralph, come out of there, you coward!"

Ralph, in this fictitious story, is like the people of Israel that we read about in the book of Numbers. They were confused about whom they should really fear. They saw themselves as grasshoppers when compared to the giants in the land where God wanted them to go (13:32-33).

If we are so afraid of people that we stop following the Lord, we're not trusting Him. It shows that we have doubted His plan, His power, and His promises. We have failed to recognize that He, above all others, is the One to be feared—which means that He is to be reverenced, trusted, loved, and obeyed.

Father, forgive us for fearing what we should not be afraid of, and for not fearing and trusting You.

Our love for God should always move

Our hearts to do what's good and right;

Love also fears His judgments true

And stands in awe of His great might. —D. De Haan

Fear God, and you'll have nothing else to fear.

Proverbs 29:25 Fear Escape

Read: Proverbs 1:1-7

You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield. —Psalm 115:11

In our increasingly dangerous world, think of what we have to fear: Ominous terrorist threats, frightening crime rates, increasing natural disasters, sobering energy crises, … God.

Yes, God. Ironic, isn't it, that in a world full of fearful things, the single source of our refuge and safety is also the One we are instructed to fear?

Consider Solomon's words: "In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge" (Prov. 14:26). Then look at the next verse: "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life."

We try to avoid life's fearful things because they interrupt our peace. Yet we are told to move toward fear—the fear of God. For those who "fear the Lord, … He is their help and their shield" (Ps. 115:11).

Our faith in God can deliver us from the fears of the world (Ps. 23:4)—but only because our faith relies on a fear that is different from worldly fear. Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe."

To fear God is to sense His awesomeness. When we acknowledge that greatness and trust in Him, we no longer want to sin against Him. He becomes our refuge from the fears of this world. In Him we find peace.

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then

Have nothing else to fear;

Make you His service your delight;

Your wants shall be His care. —Tate & Brady

Those who fear God need not fear the world.

Proverbs 29:23

Self-Made?

The story is told of a millionaire who attended a banquet and sat next to some people who were discussing the subject of prayer. He declared, "Prayer may be all right for you, but I don't need it. I worked hard for everything I have. I didn't ask God for anything!" A university president responded, "Sir, there is one thing you don't have that you might pray for." "And what might that be?" asked the man. The educator replied, "You could pray for humility."

When the Israelites were about to occupy the land of Canaan, Moses looked ahead and knew they would be blessed with an abundance of flocks, silver, and gold--all the result of God's goodness. Knowing that this could easily lead to a feeling of self-sufficiency, he warned that no one should ever boast by saying, "My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth" (Dt. 8:17).

We are all prone to a certain amount of pride. If everything goes well, we feel self-sufficient. When a blessing comes our way, we may think we received it because we deserved it. That's foolish pride, and it's out of place in the life of the child of God.

Let's honor the Giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17) by praising Him for His generosity. —Richard De Haan

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!

All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near;

Join me in glad adoration! --Neander

The trouble with some self-made men is that they worship their creator.

Proverbs 29:23

The Hidden Rattler

When I was a boy, our family lived on a farm. One spring, we killed 13 rattlesnakes in a brief period of time.

A rattler can be easily destroyed if you know where it is and how far it can reach when it strikes. So my brothers and I never worried about the snakes we could see. We were genuinely concerned, however, about stepping on one whose presence we had not detected.

King Hezekiah was subtly "bitten" by a hidden temptation, not seduced by a gross and obvious evil. He allowed a measure of pride and self-reliance to blight his career. He should have put his full trust in the Lord for protection from his enemies, but instead he sought safety through an alliance with idolatrous men (2 Chronicles 32:25,31).

It’s too bad that this otherwise good king marred his reign by this sin. We need to be on guard lest we allow pride to build up in our hearts until we, like Hezekiah, succumb to the wiles of the enemy. We may be prepared to stand against obvious invitations to sin that would besmirch our name, but we may not be ready for life’s subtle temptations.

Beware of "hidden rattlers"—they’re the most dangerous of all! —Herbert Vander Lugt

The devil has many enticements,

There’s danger wherever you go;

But if you are tempted in weakness,

Ask God for more grace, and say, "No!" —Palmer

If you want to master temptation, let Christ master

Proverbs 29:25

Our Daily Bread

Fear of what others may think about us can play an important role in the way we act. The American Indians recognized this and used scorn and ridicule to promote social order. For instance, when a child of the Fox tribe was taught the do's and don'ts of Indian

life, his elders didn't hold over his head an abstract rule of morality. Nor did they threaten him with punishment now or in the hereafter. Instead, they said to him, "The people of the village may say things about you."

Isaiah 51 also recognizes the power of peer pressure--but not as a motivation for right conduct. Whereas the Indians used fear of ridicule to induce good behavior, the Lord warned His people Israel that the "reproach of men" could be their downfall. Their concern with what others said about them could cause them to seek unholy human alliances and to make compromises. Instead, God called them to trust the Lord and seek only His approval.

This is also good advice for us, because "the fear of man" snares many Christians. If we order our conduct only by the approval or disapproval of others, we will be frustrated and left with a painful sense of insecurity.

When we find our fulfillment in doing what pleases God, the crippling terror of what others think will give way to the confidence of a healthy fear—a reverence for God that frees us to live for His approval. —M. R. De Haan II

The fear of God can deliver us from the fear of men.

Proverbs 29:25 Healthy Fear

Read: Isaiah 51:7-16

The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe. —Proverbs 29:25

Fear of the disapproval of others can often affect the way we act. Some Native Americans recognized this and used scorn and ridicule to promote social order. For instance, when a child of the Fox tribe was taught the do's and don'ts of his culture, his elders didn't hold over his head an abstract rule of morality. Nor did they threaten him with punishment now or in the hereafter. Instead, they said to him, "The people of the village may say things about you."

In that culture the power of social restraint was used as a motivation for right conduct. But in speaking to the tribes of ancient Israel, the Lord warned His people that the "reproach of men," worrying about what people think, could be their downfall (Isa. 51:7-16). Their concern with what others said about them could cause them to make compromises. Instead, they were called on to trust the Lord and seek only His approval.

This is also good advice for us, for "the fear of man" is a snare to many Christians. How much better to find our fulfillment in doing what pleases God! Then the crippling fear of what others think can give way to the confidence of a healthy fear—a reverence for God that frees us to live for His approval.

Living for Jesus a life that is true,

Striving to please Him in all that I do;

Yielding allegiance, gladhearted and free,

This is the pathway of blessing for me. —Chisholm

The fear of the Lord can deliver us from the fear of others.

Proverbs 29:25

Today in the Word

April 28, 2013

In the 1960s, a Stanford University psychology professor conducted a famous experiment known as the "marshmallow test" with a group of four-year-old children. Each child was given a marshmallow and told he could either eat the one marshmallow immediately or wait several minutes and be given a second marshmallow. Only about one third of the children exercised selfcontrol and waited for the second treat. Interestingly, showing self-control on this test correlated in some ways with the children's success later in life.

Self-control is a crucial ingredient of godly wisdom. This chapter provides an excellent opportunity to recap or review many of the ingredients of wisdom as seen in Proverbs. We've seen that wisdom is closely associated with righteousness, trust in God, sexual faithfulness or purity, justice, order, good leadership, acting for others' benefit, joy, blessing, care for the poor, being slow to anger, integrity, honesty, fairness, being diligent in parenting, obedience, peacemaking, humility, attentive listening, an openness to rebuke or correction, and the fear of the Lord. We've also seen that foolishness is associated with wickedness, tyranny, disorder, trust in self, adultery or sexual immorality, injustice, oppression, stubbornness, tyranny, exploiting the poor, being hot-tempered, deceit, dishonesty, disobedience, pride, ears closed to rebuke or correction, greed, destruction, insincerity, selfcenteredness,

rebelliousness, anger, violence, a lack of self-control, and no fear of the Lord.

Wisdom makes more sense! An evil person falls into his own trap, but the righteous “shout for joy and are glad” (Pr 29: 6). That trap is defined as “fear of man”—it’s fear of the Lord that is the true key to wisdom, safety, and blessing (Pr 29:25).

Apply the Word - It’s never too early to start teaching self-control and other character virtues to children, including fruitful spiritual habits such as daily prayer and Bible reading. One helpful book is Shepherding a Child’s Heart, by Tedd Tripp (Shepherd Press, 1995). He and his wife, Margy, have also written Instructing a Child’s Heart (Shepherd Press, 2008).

Proverbs 29:25a

You're Afraid Of Whom?

Mrs. Ima Terror chased her husband through the crowds at the zoo, waving her umbrella and unleashing insults like invisible missiles. Her perspiring and winded husband, seeing that the lock on the lion's cage had not quite closed, yanked it open, jumped into the cage, slammed the door, pushed the astonished lion hard against the bars, and peered over its shoulder. His frustrated wife shook her umbrella, stuttered in anger, and finally managed to explode, "Ralph, come out of there, you coward!"

Ralph, in this fictitious story, is like the people of Israel that we read about in the book of Numbers. They were confused about whom they should really fear. They saw themselves as grasshoppers when compared to the giants in the land where God wanted them to go (13:32-33).

If we are so afraid of people that we stop following the Lord, we're not trusting Him. It shows that we have doubted His plan, His power, and His promises. We have failed to recognize that He, above all others, is the One to be feared—which means that He is to be reverenced, trusted, loved, and obeyed.

Father, forgive us for fearing what we should not be afraid of, and for not fearing and trusting You. —Mart De Haan

Our love for God should always move

Our hearts to do what's good and right;

Love also fears His judgments true

And stands in awe of His great might. —D. De Haan

Fear God, and you'll have nothing else to fear.

Proverbs 29:25b

Vance Havner said… God pity the preacher who has grown cross-eyed watching certain faces in his congregation to observe whether the message is acceptable or not. "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29:25), and the chilly countenances of resentful listeners who must not be disturbed have taken the heart out of more preachers than have all the infidels and higher critics. Well did Spurgeon say, "We admire a man who was firm in the faith four hundred years ago, but such a man is a nuisance today. "

Proverbs 29:25c

Household Security

After the United States was attacked by terrorists on September 11, 2001, President Bush called on Congress to create a Department of Homeland Security. The job of this agency is to do everything possible to keep citizens safe.

Our individual households also need a plan for "homeland security" if we are to keep others from endangering our children. But in a world of easy access to harmful outside forces, how do we do that? Here are some suggestions for household security:

Take charge of the media. Instead of allowing makers of TV programs, movies, and CDs to dictate what you watch and hear, use biblical guidelines to evaluate the language and morality of what your children see and what they listen to.

Check out their friends. The standards of your children's friends may not match yours. Make your home a haven where their friends are welcome. It'll help you get to know them.

Build shields. By teaching your children biblical principles and encouraging their faith, you'll help them to be discerning and to build inner shields that will protect them from the dangers they face.

How good is your household security? —Dave Branon

Our children need a home where love

Provides security,

Where what is taught is not confused

By what they hear and see. —Sper

The best safeguard for the younger generation is a good example by the older generation.

PROVERBS 30

Proverbs 30:1-6
Test The Teachers

Revelation. To some people, it's more than just the name of the last book of the Bible. To some self-promoting preachers, revelation is something God personally gives to them. In most cases, however, what they say God has given them contradicts His teachings in the Bible.

Have you ever been exposed to those who claim to have had a special "revelation" or "word" from God? If so, be careful. Unless what a person proclaims as truth can be verified by the clear teaching of the Bible, it is personal opinion at best and heresy at worst —not divine revelation.

The Scriptures warn us not to add to nor take away from what God has revealed to us in His written Word. Deuteronomy 4:2 tells us, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it." Similar warnings are found in Deuteronomy 12:32, Proverbs 30:5-6, and Revelation 22:18. It is indeed a precarious position for a person to put himself in—claiming to add to God's inspired Book.

If someone attempts to teach a doctrine not found in the Bible, beware—no matter how polished and well-known the person is. Test the teachers you hear by God's Word. If they talk of receiving a revelation, make sure they aren't violating God's clear warnings. —Dave Branon

God's Word must verify the truth

Of what is wrong and what is right,

And test what seems so real to me

Of feelings, sense, and sight. —D. De Haan

Test all teaching by the truth of God's Word

Proverbs 30:1-9 A Wise Way To Pray

Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches. —Proverbs 30:8

Plato, the Greek philosopher, borrowed from an ancient poet a prayer that he said best expresses the way we shortsighted mortals should pray. Although the prayer was to a pagan deity, it has a lesson for us. It goes like this: “Give us those things which are best, whether we pray for them or not; but command evil things to remain at a distance from us, even though we implore them.”

The insight of that philosopher is also seen in the Bible, only with a clearer and more specific focus. Centuries before Plato, Agur fully understood that wise praying must be based on truth and a desire to bring glory to the Almighty. He asked God to grant him two things before he died: “Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches” (Prov. 30:8).

Agur longed for integrity and contentment. That desire included his willingness to have God veto anything that might cause him to become self-sufficient and forget the Lord, or to make him a thief and thus profane God’s name (v.9).

Plato focused on what is best for us. Agur went a step further. He wanted what was best for him, but only if it would reflect God’s glory. That’s the wise way to pray.

We can't presume to know what's best

When we begin to pray;

So we must ask, "What honors God?"

And seek His will and way. —Sper

Biblical prayer seeks God's glory, not our gain.

Proverbs 30:1-4 I'm Stumped

The riddle stumped me: What is greater than God—and more evil than the devil? The poor have it. The rich need it. And if you eat it you will die.

I missed the solution by allowing my mind to be distracted from the obvious answer: "Nothing."

That riddle reminds me of another test of wits that would have been far more difficult to solve when it was originally posed. An ancient wise man named Agur asked: "Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?" (Prov. 30:4).

Today, we know the answer to those questions. But sometimes when we're in the middle of the questions, worries, and needs of our lives we may lose sight of the obvious. The details of life can so easily distract us from the One who answers the most important riddle: Who is One with God; more powerful than the devil; the poor can have Him; the rich need Him; and if you eat and drink from His table, you'll never die? Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Father, in the details and distractions of our spiritual journey, it is so easy to look right past You and Your Son. May we see You today in a new and fresh way.

Focusing on God helps us to take our eyes off our circumstances.

INSIGHT: The book of Proverbs contains many pithy sayings that promote a wise approach to life. Living by them does not guarantee that life will always go smoothly, but taking their advice will help avoid unnecessary problems. Proverbs 30 is slightly different in that it is prefaced by a reflection on the wisdom of the Lord. By introducing the Lord in the beginning of his reflection, Agur acknowledges that he has not "mastered human wisdom" (v. 3 NLT) and suggests that all wisdom is from the Lord.

Proverbs 30

Today in the Word

April 29, 2013

Rhetorical questions are questions with obvious answers, asked to make a point. For example, the answer to, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?" (Isa. 40:12) is "God." The point is His power and rule over creation. The answer to, "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2) is "Job." The point is Job's lack of understanding of God. The answer to, "Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him?" (Isa. 40:14) is "no one." The point is the greatness of God's wisdom compared to ours.

In Pr 30:4 of today's reading, the answer to all the rhetorical questions is similarly "no one" or "no person." The author of Proverbs 30 was an otherwise unknown wise man named Agur. If "an oracle" should be translated "of Massa" (Pr 30:1, see NIV text note), then Agur was likely an Ishmaelite. Although his authorship of the numerical or list proverbs in Pr 30:15 through Pr 30:33 is uncertain, he definitely wrote the first fourteen verses.

Pr 30:1 sets the tone for this first section: "I am weary, God, but I can prevail." This fits with Pr 30:1 through Pr 30:6 as an expression of fatigued humility. Agur is weary because understanding God is an impossibly huge task. Compared to the Holy One, even a wise man feels like a dullard. He exaggerates his emotions for effect, but the point is God's greatness and how far He is above our thoughts and ways. His every word is perfect!

In light of this, Agur first prays that God would keep him honest. Second, he asks that God would provide for him in moderation, because poverty and wealth both present greater temptations (Pr 30:7–9).

Apply the Word - Agur's second prayer goes against the grain of our materialist society. Yet there's a great deal of wisdom in what he says—too little, and there's a temptation to steal, but too much, and there's a temptation to self-sufficiency. We can certainly trust God to provide for us (Matt. 6:25–31).

Proverbs 30:1-9

Prosperity And Adversity

Prosperity and adversity are equal-opportunity destroyers. The extremes of life can be hazardous because a person with too much may encounter as much difficulty as one with too little.

Agur, the writer of Proverbs 30, must have sensed this danger when he prayed: “Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:8-9).

A similar request occurs in a beautiful choral anthem composed by Benjamin Harlan:

Write Your blessed name,

O Lord, upon my heart,

There to remain so indelibly engraved

That no prosperity, nor adversity

Shall remove me from Your love.

In Proverbs 30 the focus is on circumstances, while the song centers on the state of our heart. Perhaps we should pray that God would guard us in both areas of our lives.

The late Dr. Carlyle Marney, a prominent pastor, often said that most of us need to have our “wanter” fixed. Instead of always asking for more, we should seek the balance expressed in Proverbs 30.

When we invite the Lord to place His mark of ownership on our lives, we acknowledge His wise and loving provision for all our needs. —David C. McCasland

Contentment is realizing that God has already given me all I need.

Proverbs 30:1-9 Riches Of The Soul

Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me. —Proverbs 30:8

With the hope of winning a record jackpot of $640 million, Americans spent an estimated $1.5 billion on tickets in a multistate lottery in early 2012. The odds of winning were a staggering 1 in 176 million, but people stood in lines at grocery stores, gas stations, and cafes to buy a chance to become rich. Something inside us makes us think more money will solve our problems and improve our lives.

A man identified in the Bible as Agur had a different perspective on riches when he asked God to grant him two requests before he died.

First, he said, “Remove falsehood and lies far from me” (Prov. 30:8). Integrity is a key to living without anxiety. When we have nothing to hide, we have nothing to fear. Deceit enslaves; honesty liberates. Second, he said, “Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me” (v.8). Contentment springs from trusting God as our supplier and gratefully accepting what He provides. Agur said of the Creator that He “established all the ends of the earth… He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him” (vv.4-5).

Integrity and contentment are riches of the soul that are available to all. Our Lord is pleased to give these treasures to everyone who asks.

Contentment does not come from wealth—

It’s not something you can buy;

Contentment comes to give you peace

When you depend on God’s supply. —Branon

Discontentment makes us poor while contentment makes us rich!

Proverbs 30:2 Absolutely Nobody

Read: Exodus 4:10-17

Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man. —Proverbs 30:2

He wanted to be a nobody. In 1992, a Seattle man running for the office of Washington State's lieutenant governor legally changed his name to "Absolutely Nobody." As he entered the race, he said he wanted to greet the voters, saying, "Hi, I'm Absolutely Nobody. Vote for me." He later admitted that the purpose of his campaign was to abolish the office of lieutenant governor.

This man used a name as a gimmick, but the Bible has a lot to say to those of us who present ourselves to others as a nobody. The right kind of humility is healthy. The songwriters of Israel knew how important it is to see our foolishness apart from God (Ps. 73:22; Prov. 30:2). Jesus Himself showed us that without God we won't accomplish anything of lasting value (John 5:30; 15:5).

But we read a warning in the story of Moses. There's a downside to insisting that we are "nobody" if it is to avoid doing what God commands (Ex. 4:1-17). Our motives make us into somebody who resists the loving purposes of God.

We may treat ourselves and others as having no worth. But remember, God doesn't make nobodies. Like Moses, if we surrender to God, we can do anything God wants us to do—in His strength.

Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine;

Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.

Take all my will, my passion, self and pride;

I now surrender, Lord—in me abide. —Orr

Without Christ we can do nothing. With Him we can do everything He wants us to do.

Proverbs 30:1-6 Test The Teachers

Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. —Deuteronomy 12:32

Revelation. To some people, it's more than just the name of the last book of the Bible. To some self-promoting preachers, revelation is something God personally gives to them. In most cases, however, what they say God has given them contradicts His teachings in the Bible.

Have you ever been exposed to those who claim to have had a special "revelation" or "word" from God? If so, be careful. Unless what a person proclaims as truth can be verified by the clear teaching of the Bible, it is personal opinion at best and heresy at worst —not divine revelation.

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God's Word must verify the truth

Of what is wrong and what is right,

And test what seems so real to me

Of feelings, sense, and sight. —D. De Haan

Test all teaching by the truth of God's Word.

Proverbs 30:5-9

Servant Or Master?

An Illinois resident asked his employer for a two-thirds pay cut in order to put his income below the poverty level. He reasoned that by making himself poor he would not have to pay income tax, and therefore he would not have to support military policies he didn't agree with. This would make him more consistent in practicing his beliefs. A close friend commented, "He has a strong commitment to justice and peace, and I think this is his way of carrying that out."

I'm not suggesting that we should follow his example, but he is a person who doesn't want money to divert him from his ideals. He

reminds me of Agur, the wise author of Proverbs 30, who expressed concern that too much or too little wealth can get in the way of commitment to God.

So we are left to consider it—money. The Illinois resident gave up part of it. Agur didn't want too much or too little of it (Proverbs 30:7-9). Jesus used it (John 13:29). Paul could take it or leave it (Philippians 4:11-12). The rich young ruler clung to it (Luke 18:23). Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied to God about it (Acts 5).

What about our relationship to money? Do we use it wisely or does it control us? Is it our servant or our master? We cannot serve both God and money (Luke 16:13). —Mart De Haan

If money is your highest goal,

The thing you long to gain,

Its power will enslave your soul

And cause your life much pain. —DJD

Money is a good servant, but a poor master

Proverbs 30:6

Misquote

Imagine the frustration of a mother as she tries to gather her family for supper. Her 8-year-old son comes through the door smuggling a dead bird behind his back. "Call Ann for dinner," says his mother. "Then wash your hands and come to the table."

A minute later the 4-year-old daughter comes running into the kitchen, sobbing uncontrollably. Her brother had just waved the stiff bird under her nose and told her that if she wasn't at the table in 17 seconds, Mom wouldn't let her go out and play for a whole week.

This story about a misquoted mother doesn't begin to capture the confusion that follows when we misquote the heavenly Father. Often we become preoccupied with our own ideas of how things should be, like Job's friends, who didn't speak rightly about the Lord (Job 42:7). The result is that we say more, or less, than God actually said in His Word (Deuteronomy 4:2). We need to make sure we know exactly where His words stop and our opinions begin. If we don't, we may misrepresent Him, and Proverbs 30:6 warns that we are then in danger of being found liars before God.

Let's take care that we don't express our opinions as if they were God's words. —Mart De Haan

Lord, grant us wisdom to discern

The truth that You've made known,

And may we never teach one word

Beyond what You have shown. —D. De Haan

We must adjust our lives to the Bible—never the Bible to our lives

Proverbs 30:7-9

Today in the Word

August 17, 2012

On February 22, 1846, Victor Hugo saw a poor French man arrested for stealing bread to survive. He also noticed a wealthy duchess and her family watching the event from the comfort of their well-appointed coach. Hugo incorporated the scene into a pivotal event in his novel Les Misérables, when his protagonist Jean Valjean steals bread to feed his sister’s children.

Few of us probably feel the anxiety and desperation of daily hunger. We might struggle with its opposite, daily overindulgence. Our reading today addresses the spiritual dimension of both of these situations.

These verses are taken from a series of proverbs by Agur (Pr 30:1). He positions the request for daily bread within the context of material status. His petition for daily bread requests a sufficient supply, a provision that recalls God’s gift of manna for each day.

We can understand Agur’s request for the Lord to keep him from poverty—but note he also requests to be kept from riches! This is completely contrary to our cultural expectations. Didn’t he know that he should strive to maximize his earning potential and move up

the socioeconomic ladder?

These verses don't imply that Christians should be neither rich nor poor. Clearly people from all income brackets have faithfully walked with God. The point in this passage is about what we desire. Do we desire the desperation that can accompany poverty? Of course not. But neither should we desire the self-congratulations that can come with wealth. Both of these provide temptations to sin that lead us away from a close relationship with God. We should desire the kind of relationship with God that acknowledges His provision for us each and every day. Our daily bread should draw us closer to Him, in reverence and thankfulness.

Apply the Word - These verses do not provide an excuse for us to judge either the rich or the poor around us. They do not assert that poverty and wealth force people to sin. They should remind us all of the temptation we face to forget that it is God who provides for us. He supplies our daily bread. He meets our needs. Spend time in prayer thanking Him today for daily bread.

Proverbs 30:7-9

Today in the Word

January 22, 2011

Using Peter and Matthew as examples, musician and writer Michael Card sings of "the freedom we find from the things we leave behind." The lesson of the song is that "worshiping goods" is love of the world, whereas a true Christ–follower's heart is not tied to such things. The song continues: "Every heart needs to be set free from possessions that hold it so tight, 'cause freedom's not found in the things that we own, it's the power to do what is right. Jesus, our only possession, giving becomes our delight. We can't imagine the freedom we find from the things we leave behind."

For those of us who trust in the Lord, our daily bread is enough. The godly virtue of simplicity is relatively simple. As followers of Christ, we abandon the world's frantic pursuit of more and bigger and better, understanding that money and material goods do not and cannot satisfy our deepest needs and desires. The so−called rat race promotes anxiety and covetousness, not thankfulness and a sense of God's blessing.

That's why the otherwise–unknown figure of Agur declared in today's reading that he had only two prayers. The first prayer was for truth or honesty, and the second prayer was for simplicity or contentment (v. 8). He defined "simplicity" as a balance between poverty and riches; it is enough to live on, that is, "daily bread." For the Israelites, this was a powerful historical image of God's provision. They remembered well how God had provided manna for them day by day in their desert wanderings during the Exodus.

To Agur, "daily bread" was the perfect midpoint between two extremes (v. 9). If poor, the temptation would be to steal. Rich or poor, stealing is a sin—God's ethics are not relative (Prov. 6:30–31). If rich, on the other hand, the temptation would be to rely on money and forget God. Moses had long ago warned the nation that prosperity could bring faithlessness if the people failed to remember that wealth and the ability to produce it are God's gift (Deut. 8:11–20).

Apply the Word - A trip to your local grocery store (all those choices!) reveals how complicated "daily bread" might become if we let it. We hope that today's devotional has given you a deeper appreciation for the line in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Money and things cannot satisfy, but Jesus Christ is our "Bread of Life … Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever" (John 6:26–58).

Proverbs 30:7-9 Five Cs Or Two Gs

The Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. —Psalm 84:11

Young people in Singapore at one time aspired to have the five Cs. Cash in the bank. Career for the future. Car to drive. Condominium to live in. Credit card to travel with.

A recent newspaper report indicated that there is now an updated version of the five Cs: Connectivity to be tuned in. Choices, and the more the merrier! Cheek—doing things our own way. Causes, because it is hip to help. Consumers who spend first and pay later.

Instead of the five Cs, Agur, the writer of Proverbs 30, asked for two Gs from God: His grace and goodness. He sought the grace of God to "remove falsehood and lies far from me" (v.8). He didn't want to fall into the trap of believing that corrupt principles, practices, and affections are acceptable.

Agur also asked for the goodness of God to provide what he needed—no more and no less (vv.8-9). He was concerned that poverty could cause him to become covetous and to disgrace God's name. But he also realized how easily riches could pamper him and cause him to deny the Lord.

Which do you desire more? The temporary satisfaction of the five Cs or the rewards of God's grace and goodness? Is your desire to

honor God’s name above all?

Let us celebrate together,

Lift our voice in one accord,

Singing of the grace and mercy

And the goodness of the Lord. —Sper

God’s grace is infinite love expressing itself through infinite goodness.

Proverbs 30:8-9 The Good And Bad Of Wealth

Read: 1 Chronicles 29:1-12

Give me neither poverty nor riches … ; lest I be full and deny You … Or lest I be poor and steal. —Proverbs 30:8-9

The other day I received a letter saying that I am still in the running to win the Reader’s Digest Sweepstakes. I imagine that all the millions of people who received this notice would like to be the winner. But winning all that money might not be good for some of us. Sudden wealth could hurt us spiritually.

Agur, the writer of Proverbs 30, didn’t ask God for wealth. He was afraid that if he were rich he might feel self-sufficient and try to live without God (vv.8-9).

Yet some very godly people in the Bible were rich. Many Israelites had great wealth, and because of that they were able to provide lavishly for the building of the temple. This led David to declare, “Both riches and honor come from You” (1 Chronicles 29:12).

We can be thankful for what some wealthy Christians do with their money. I know a family who gives hundreds of thousands of dollars to Christian causes annually. What good their riches accomplish!

The fact remains, however, that not all of us can be trusted with great wealth. So don’t set your heart on it. Instead, thank God for what you have, and be content. Then faithfully honor Him with what He has given you. —HVL

If we've been blessed with riches,

We should be rich in deeds;

God wants us to be generous

In meeting others' needs. —Sper

Wealth is a double blessing when it's used for the blessing of others.

Proverbs 30:8a

Feed me with the food that is needful for me. (rv)

Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

God knows what you need for the maintenance of physical life and strength. The body is more than meat, and to have given you this is a pledge that He will give you that. The body is the vehicle and organ of the soul; and since God has given such a wonderful instrument into your custody, He is bound as need arises to furnish needful supplies. He could not expect that you should do what He has arranged should be done in your life, without providing for the repair and maintenance of the wonderful machine through which alone your life-plan can be realized. Trust in his faithfulness. He cannot deny Himself.

But there is other food which is needful. The daily bread of love, of hope, of holy thought, and fellowship. There is other hunger than that of the body. But this also will be provided, according as each day requires. If the human fails, the Divine will take its place, and God Himself will become the complement of your need. The Chinese Christians often put on the gravestones of their cemeteries the words, “They shall hunger no more,” in allusion to the idea of the Confucians that children must constantly be sending on supplies to maintain their ancestors. And may we not say, with unwavering certainty, of those who have learnt to be satisfied with God, “They shall hunger no more”?

Notice the alternative rendering of the rv, “The bread of my portion.” In God’s granaries there is our share of corn already calculated for and provided. Let us ask for and claim it. We have no wish to have more than our share, or to despoil others. As Jesus said, Give us each day the day’s supply. O happy child of the great Father, his hired servants have enough and to spare; there is plenty

for thee!

Proverbs 30:8-9

BAD AND GOOD OF WEALTH

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Agur, the writer of Proverbs 30, didn't ask God for wealth. He was afraid that if he were rich he might feel self-sufficient and try to live without God.

Yet some very godly people in the Bible were rich. Moreover, it was because many of the Israelites had great wealth that they could provide lavishly for the building of the temple. This realization led David to declare, "Both riches and honor come from You" (1 Chr 29:12).

We can be thankful for what some wealthy Christians do with their money. A family with whom I am acquainted gives hundreds of thousands of dollars to Christian causes annually. What good their riches accomplish!

The fact remains, however, that not all of us can be trusted with great wealth. So don't set your heart on it. Instead, thank God for what you have, and be content. Then use what He has given you as a sacred trust. Author: Herbert Vander Lugt

If we've been blessed with riches,

We must be rich in deeds;

God wants us to be generous

In meeting others' needs. --Sper

Wealth is a double blessing when it's used for the blessing of others.

Proverbs 30:8-9a

BAD AND GOOD OF POVERTY

The young man I visited in jail had been arrested for armed robbery. He was bitter as he spoke of the inner-city school from which he had dropped out because he felt unsafe. He asked, "Why couldn't I have gone to a better school? Why didn't someone help me to learn a trade?" He said he committed the robbery because he was sick and tired of having so little while others had so much.

I felt sorry for him. Poverty has a down side. It can place people in a position where they are tempted to commit crimes.

Like the writer of Proverbs 30, I would never ask God to send me poverty. Yet Jesus said, "Blessed are you poor" (Luke 6:20).

I grew up in the 1930s during the Great Depression. My family seldom ate meat, and we wore secondhand clothing. Yet we were happy. We were supremely thankful for small favors. We enjoyed simple pleasures. We appreciated one another. We valued our spiritual riches.

'm not saying that we should desire poverty, but we can be thankful for it. We can learn lessons through it that we could earn in no other way. Let's be like the apostle Paul who said hat he had learned to be content, no matter what his situation (Phil. 4:11). Author: Herbert Vander Lugt

Lord, help me not to set my heart

On things that pass away;

Make me content with what I have

And help me stay that way. --Sper

Those who are content are never poor; those who are discontent are never rich.

Proverbs 30:1-9 Windfall

Give us this day our daily bread. —Matthew 6:11

Upon winning $314 million in a 2002 lottery, a happy business owner expressed noble desires. He wanted to start a charitable foundation, put laid-off workers back on the job, and do nice things for his family. Already wealthy, he told reporters the big win wouldn't change him.

A few years later, a follow-up article described a different outcome. Since winning the biggest of all lotteries, the man had run into legal problems, lost his personal reputation, and gambled away all of his money.

A thoughtful man by the name of Agur wrote words that anticipate such heartbreak. Brought low by the awareness of his own natural inclinations (Prov. 30:2-3), Agur saw the dangers of having too much or too little. So he prayed, "Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God" (vv.8-9).

Agur saw the special challenges that come both with wealth and poverty, but also with our own tendencies. Each gives us reason for caution. Together they show our need for the One who taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Lord, as we seek Your face today to ask for what we

need, help us to keep in mind that You are as wise in

what You don't give us as what You do give us. So

often, You rescue us from our own sinful tendencies. Thank You.

Discontentment makes rich people poor, while contentment makes poor people rich.

INSIGHT: The book of Proverbs is known for its practical wisdom. It provides insight into relationships, work ethic, wealth, education, and many other topics. Yet despite the many words of instruction intended to make us wise and help us to live rightly, there are reminders to be humble regardless of our level of wisdom or knowledge. Agur's humility (30:2-3) came from recognizing who God is and who he is in relationship to God (vv.4-5). Proper recognition of God leads to an appropriate response to Him (vv.7-9).

Proverbs 30:8

Psalm 38:21

Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Here we have two great lessons—what to deprecate and what to supplicate. The happiest state of a Christian is the holiest state. As there is the most heat nearest to the sun, so there is the most happiness nearest to Christ. No Christian enjoys comfort when his eyes are fixed on vanity—he finds no satisfaction unless his soul is quickened in the ways of God. The world may win happiness elsewhere, but he cannot. I do not blame ungodly men for rushing to their pleasures. Why should I? Let them have their fill. That is all they have to enjoy. A converted wife who despaired of her husband was always very kind to him, for she said, "I fear that this is the only world in which he will be happy, and therefore I have made up my mind to make him as happy as I can in it." Christians must seek their delights in a higher sphere than the insipid frivolities or sinful enjoyments of the world. Vain pursuits are dangerous to renewed souls. We have heard of a philosopher who, while he looked up to the stars, fell into a pit; but how deeply do they fall who look down. Their fall is fatal. No Christian is safe when his soul is slothful, and his God is far from him. Every Christian is always safe as to the great matter of his standing in Christ, but he is not safe as regards his experience in holiness, and communion with Jesus in this life. Satan does not often attack a Christian who is living near to God. It is when the Christian departs from his God, becomes spiritually starved, and endeavours to feed on vanities, that the devil discovers his vantage hour. He may sometimes stand foot to foot with the child of God who is active in his Master's service, but the battle is generally short: he who slips as he goes down into the Valley of Humiliation, every time he takes a false step invites Apollyon to assail him. O for grace to walk humbly with our God!

Proverbs 30:11-17

Someone Special

A postcard arrived in the mail. Then another. And a third. They were unsigned, but I could tell they came from the same person--an elderly mother who had given her all for her son but was getting only cruel abuse in return.

She wrote, "Will you please print some articles on how Christian people should treat their elderly parents and widows? I have been physically and verbally abused by a son who professes to be a Christian."

To think about such a tragedy on Mother's Day can give new meaning to this special time. This is a day to celebrate the goodness of motherhood. It's our chance to say thank you to the one who has nursed our pains and cheered our gains. This is a time to honor

Mother for being a guiding light, a calming sight, and a warrior for right.

But don't stop with just one day a year. If you are living at home, give daily praise and offers of help. If you have left the family home, make frequent phone calls and visits. Express your love and appreciation often. It's your turn now to meet Mother's needs.

Think about your relationship with your mother. Do you treat her as someone special? —Dave Branon

God has conferred on motherhood

A true nobility,

And she who gladly fills that role

Can shape man's destiny. --DJD

No man is poor who has had a godly mother. --Lincoln

Proverbs 30:25

THE WISDOM OF ANTS

We tend to take our lead from the great characters and personalities of the world. But the ancient wise man Agur pointed us in another direction. In Proverbs 30, he told of the virtues of the low things around us: the ants, badgers, locusts, and spiders (vv. 24-28).

"The ants are a people not strong," Agur told us, "yet they prepare their food in the summer" (v. 25). Ants know instinctively that winter is coming, so they take advantage of the warmer weather. They attend picnics. While you're wolfing down a hot dog and a soft drink, they're marching off with the potato chips. They will store them, and when the snows come, they will have enough food.

For us, the first step in "preparing for winter" is to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. "Now is the day of salvation," we are warned (2 Cor. 6:2). If we've already done that, as believers in Christ we have much work to do. If we display the wisdom of ants, we'll prepare for "winter." We can equip ourselves for difficult times by storing up God's Word in our heart. Then, when we face the blizzards of life, we'll know right where to find nourishment for our spirit.

Next time you see an ant, remember: Winter is coming! Are you ready? -- Haddon W. Robinson

The humble ant's keen industry

Will teach us all a lesson,

If in all nature we will see

God's classroom is in session.-- Gustafson

The time to prepare for tomorrow is today.

Proverbs 30:24-28 The Bug Zoo

The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer. —Proverbs 30:25

A bug zoo in Philadelphia with more than 100,000 live insects entertains 75,000 visitors a year. The Insectarium’s founder and proprietor says, “I’ve got a million more bugs still in storage.” He points to boxes, cookie tins, and other containers piled floor-to-ceiling, filled with dead bugs from around the globe. Movies, holograms, microscopes, and games keep people of all ages occupied. There’s even a scale to weigh yourself in ladybugs, fireflies, and other creatures.

In Proverbs 30, a wise man named Agur also showcases insects and other small creatures. He calls them small but very wise.

Look at the ant. He’s weak, but his Creator has taught him to use whatever strength he has to prepare for the future. Consider the locust. He has no king, but when his numbers multiply, God has taught him how to line up and move as one. Look at the spider. He too is a lowly creature, but by using the ability God gives him, he rises to high places.

Do you sometimes feel small and insignificant like an insect? When you do, remember that God showcases His wisdom and greatness through even the smallest things. That’s because His “strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Inadequate but mighty—

How strange, yet wholly true;

Weak men endued with power

The Lord’s blest work shall do. —Bosch

God’s wisdom is given to those who humbly ask Him for it.

Proverbs 30:26

Spurgeon - Morning and evening

Conscious of their own natural defencelessness, the conies resort to burrows in the rocks, and are secure from their enemies. My heart, be willing to gather a lesson from these feeble folk. Thou art as weak and as exposed to peril as the timid cony, be as wise to seek a shelter. My best security is within the munitions of an immutable Jehovah, where his unalterable promises stand like giant walls of rock. It will be well with thee, my heart, if thou canst always hide thyself in the bulwarks of his glorious attributes, all of which are guarantees of safety for those who put their trust in him. Blessed be the name of the Lord, I have so done, and have found myself like David in Adullam, safe from the cruelty of my enemy; I have not now to find out the blessedness of the man who puts his trust in the Lord, for long ago, when Satan and my sins pursued me, I fled to the cleft of the rock Christ Jesus, and in his riven side I found a delightful resting-place. My heart, run to him anew to-night, whatever thy present grief may be; Jesus feels for thee; Jesus consoles thee; Jesus will help thee. No monarch in his impregnable fortress is more secure than the cony in his rocky burrow. The master of ten thousand chariots is not one whit better protected than the little dweller in the mountain’s cleft. In Jesus the weak are strong, and the defenceless safe; they could not be more strong if they were giants, or more safe if they were in heaven. Faith gives to men on earth the protection of the God of heaven. More they cannot need, and need not wish. The conies cannot build a castle, but they avail themselves of what is there already: I cannot make myself a refuge, but Jesus has provided it, his Father has given it, his Spirit has revealed it, and lo, again to-night I enter it, and am safe from every foe.

Proverbs 30:26a

Weak And Wise

Bible scholars have difficulty identifying the "badger" mentioned in Proverbs 30. Many believe it is the same animal as the Syrian hyrax. If this is so, then God is calling our attention to an unusual little creature.

The hyrax is about the size of a large guinea pig but is not closely linked to any other known animal. It looks like a rodent and has been characterized as a "rock rabbit." It is extremely vulnerable to attack from its predators. Among its enemies are snakes, eagles, buzzards, leopards, dogs, and other small beasts of prey such as the mongoose.

So how does this little fellow manage to survive? The answer is simple. It makes its home in holes or clefts of the rock, frequently along the side of a steep cliff.

We are a lot like the hyrax. We are susceptible to many dangers. Disease, depression, temptation, war, accident, and isolation threaten us constantly. If only we could find a way to survive like that little creature! Well, we can. We too have a Rock in which to hide—the Lord God Himself (Psalm 62:2). Trusting Him doesn't exempt us from life's troubles, but it does give protection to our soul.

It's not bad to be weak—if we are wise enough to take refuge in God. —Mart De Haan II —Mart De Haan

O safe to the Rock that is higher than I

My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly;

So sinful, so weary—Thine, Thine would I be:

Thou blest "Rock of Ages," I'm hiding in Thee. —Cushing

Are you between a rock and a hard place? Take refuge in the Rock of Ages

Proverbs 30:26b

BADGER BRAINS

"The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags."

We could learn a lot from the rock badger. This small animal (also called a coney or hyrax) knows where to go when danger comes.

The large ragged crags jutting up from the mountains form a perfect hiding place for the badger. If an eagle swoops down and tries to capture him the little

animal is protected by the rock. The eagle would have to tear the mountain apart to get to its prey.

When a lion is on the prowl for lunch, the badger goes undetected by lying close to the rock because he is the color of the mountain.

As long as the badger hides in the rocks, he is safe. If he wanders away into the grassland, he is dead meat. The most courageous badger in the world is no

match for even a small lion. The badger is wise enough to know that his strength lies not in working out at the gym but in taking shelter in the crags.

If you have the brains of a badger, you'll figure out where your strength lies. "Be strong in the Lord," the Scripture urges us, "and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). "The Lord is my rock and my fortress," cried David after being hunted by his enemies (2 Sam. 22:2).

Badgers know where their strength lies. Do you?-- Haddon W. Robinson

He cannot fail, your faithful God,

He'll guard you with His mighty power;

Then fear no ill though troubles rise,

His help is sure from hour to hour.-- Henry G. Bosch

You have nothing to fear if you stay close to the Rock of Ages.

Proverbs 30:27

Grasshopper Sense

One grasshopper seems insignificant as it leaps across a field. But when it joins forces with other grasshoppers, the resulting swarm can soon devour all the vegetation in its path.

Grasshoppers demonstrate the power of working together for a common cause. What they cannot do individually, they are able to accomplish together. In the Old Testament book of Proverbs, the wise man Agur observed,

"The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks" (Proverbs 30:27).

We can learn a lesson from these little creatures. Followers of Christ can make far greater advances for Him when they act and pray together than they could ever make alone. When Christians are united in serving the Lord, they can become a mighty force for God in fulfilling His purposes for the church.

Although the New Testament urges us to possess a personal faith in Jesus Christ, it says nothing at all about a private faith. We need other believers, and other believers need us (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Let's enjoy and contribute to the strength and fellowship of the unified body of Christ. An effective church will demonstrate the good sense of the grasshopper by our cooperation and unity in the Holy Spirit. —Haddon W. Robinson

We Christians have a kinship with

All others who believe,

And from that bond of faith and love

A mutual strength receive. —Hess

We can accomplish more together than we can alone

Proverbs 30:28

ROYAL LIZARDS

"A lizard can be caught with the hand,yet it is found in kings' palaces."

Most lizards are small and somewhat repulsive. Yet it's amazing where they can go. I've seen a lizard on the 26th floor of a hotel in Acapulco, Mexico.

How did it get there? Did it climb the stairs? Take the elevator? Scale the walls? Who knows? Lizards can get past guards and maids, and can end up in the best hotels. The author of Proverbs 30:28 marveled that a lizard ("spider" NKJV) could be found even in the throne room of kings.

Something else that should cause us to marvel is the thought of who will live in the royal palaces of heaven.

Think of the Christians you may be tempted to despise: The man with bad breath and body odor who gets too close to you when he talks. The woman who sings too loudly and a bit off key. The teenager whose hairstyle and clothing you don't approve of. If you could see them now as one day they shall be, you would marvel at their beauty. And remember, because of sin, we too are unlikely future residents of heaven. But by God's grace, we will inhabit heaven as sons and daughters of God.

In the mystery of grace, God takes unlikely people and puts them into His palace for eternity. And we don't have to climb the walls to get there. Wow!-- Haddon W. Robinson

What unlikely people will be in heaven? (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Why doesn't anyone deserve to be there? (Romans 3:23).

What qualifies us? (Romans 10:9-10; Galatians 3:26).

God claims by grace those who have no claim to grace.

PROVERBS 31

Proverbs 30
Today in the Word
April 30, 2013

The city of Chicago hired the country's first known female police officer. Detective sergeant Marie Owens was born to Irish immigrants, grew up in Ottawa, and moved to Chicago with her husband. After he died of typhoid fever, she worked for the Chicago Police Department enforcing child labor laws. "I like to do police work," she said. "It gives me a chance to help women and children who need help."

The famous "wife of noble character" in Proverbs 31:10–31 is a also a strong woman (Pr 31:25). This praise poem of an ideal character type is also an acrostic, in which each verse begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It is structured in ever-widening spheres, beginning with marriage (Pr 31:11–12), expanding to the home (Pr 31:13–19) and then to the larger community (Pr 31:20–26), before returning to the home (Pr 31:27–29). Pr 31:30 and Pr 31:31 are concluding words of praise for the wife's true beauty.

What characterizes this noble woman? In marriage, she brings good to her husband and has earned his complete trust. Domestically, she works hard and is an incredible household manager. Her activities show she's highly energetic, competent, confident, strong, and organized. She plans ahead and is an excellent provider. In the community, she cares for the poor, supports her husband, and demonstrates keen business and financial skills. Her husband and children recognize her abilities and praise her key role in their family. It's not her physical beauty that matters (no matter what secular magazine covers say), but rather her spiritual wisdom (Pr 31:26).

Does such an amazing, perfect woman actually exist? Not really—this is an ideal. (Men, a similar ideal for you is found in Psalm 112!)

Apply the Word - Lemuel, another otherwise unknown sage, gave his mother much of the credit for his wisdom (Pr 31:1–9). She advised him to avoid sexual immorality and drunkenness and to be an advocate for social justice. What godly wisdom have you inherited from your parents? What godly wisdom do you wish to leave your children as a heritage?

Proverbs 31:26-31

A Mother's Strength

My wife Carolyn and I were walking in a park one morning when we spotted a mother squirrel scurrying along a power line with her baby in her mouth. She delivered the little squirrel to a new nest she had built in a tree. Then she ran back across the wire to fetch another baby from the old nest and transport it to its new home. Back and forth she scampered until she had deposited all six of her babies in their new home. "Being a mother is hard work!" Carolyn mused.

Indeed it is. The labor to bring a child into the world is only the beginning. How essential it is that she take care of herself spiritually

so she can take care of her children! Of all concerns, the care for her soul is the greatest—to grow in wisdom and in the knowledge of God.

Susanna Wesley was a busy mother with 19 children, yet she set aside time each day to meet with God. Some days she spent that time in a chair with her apron over her head, praying. Woe be to the child who disturbed her!

The woman described in Proverbs 31 placed a high value on wisdom, kindness, and a respect for the Lord (vv.26,30). This Mother's Day, let's honor the women in our lives who share their wisdom, show us kindness, and who seek above all to honor the Lord. —David H. Roper

Though other scenes may be forgot,

While life shall last, this one cannot;

When mother prayed! O peace divine!

My mother's God today is mine. —Anon.

God bless my mother… all I am I owe to her. —Abraham Lincoln

Proverbs 31:10-20 A Helping Hand

She reaches out her hands to the needy. —Proverbs 31:20

In the 1930s, jockey Johnny Longden was rammed in mid-race. While thundering steeds came up from behind, Johnny was thrown sideways off his horse. Seeing his predicament, another jockey reached out and attempted to push Longden back up on his mount. Unfortunately, he pushed too hard and Longden flew over the horse onto the other side. Still another jockey nearby grabbed him and was able to help him safely back on his horse. Amazingly, Johnny Longden won the race! A newspaper dubbed it "the ultimate impossibility." Helping hands had not only saved him from severe injury and possible death, but allowed him to win the race.

As believers, we are to offer a helping hand to others as well. In Proverbs 31, we read of the virtuous woman who "extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy" (v.20). For centuries, the compassion of this woman of faith has been an inspiration to both men and women. She helps to remind us that extending ourselves to others is a biblical virtue to be exhibited by all believers.

There are many who are struggling or have fallen on hard times and need our assistance. Who in your life needs a helping hand?

Your faith in God is proven when

You serve as one who cares;

Faith finds a way to love and help—

Puts action to your prayers. —Hess

God often sends His help by way of human hands.

Proverbs 31:11

The heart of her husband doth safely trust to her.

This alphabetical poem to godly womanhood is one of the gems of Old Testament Scriptures. It should be read from the r.v., that its significant and beautiful touches may be appreciated. Clearly the Hebrew woman was held in high honour, and had as much freedom of action as she enjoys in Christian countries. Herein the contrast was very marked, as against the women of other Oriental nations. But in the whole delineation there is hardly any trait more beautiful than this — absolute trustworthiness. You can see the pair together: the husband comes in from sitting among the elders, his heart weighted with affairs of state, and he seeks her confidence and advice. He has no fear of her betraying his secrets. He can safely trust her.

This surely is the most sacred joy a woman can have. To be consulted, to be trusted, to share the common toils and responsibilities. Who would not work willingly with her hands, and rise while yet night, and engage in ceaseless toils, if only she had the inspiration that trust brings!

"If then your future life should need A strength my love can only gain Through suffering — or my heart be freed Only by sorrow from some stain, Then you shall give, and I will take This Crown of fire for Love's dear sake."

Can Christ, in like manner, safely trust us? (John 2:24, r.v.).

Can He trust us with his secrets, his interests, his money?

Abraham was one whom God could safely trust, and He did trust him as his friend: “Shall I hide from Abraham,… for I have known him?” It is required of us also that we be absolutely trustworthy.

Proverbs 31:11a

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This surely is the most sacred joy a woman can have. To be consulted, to be trusted, to share the common toils and responsibilities. Who would not work willingly with her hands, and rise while yet night, and engage in ceaseless toils, if only she had the inspiration that trust brings!

“If then your future life should need
A strength my love can only gain
Through suffering — or my heart be freed
Only by sorrow from some stain,
Then you shall give, and I will take
This Crown of fire for Love’s dear sake.”

Can Christ, in like manner, safely trust us? (John 2:24, r.v.). Can He trust us with his secrets, his interests, his money? Abraham was one whom God could safely trust, and He did trust him as his friend: “Shall I hide from Abraham,… for I have known him?” It is required of us also that we be absolutely trustworthy.

Proverbs 31:30

Who Then Is Beautiful?

In her book Who Calls Me Beautiful? Regina Franklin observes that in 1951 Miss Sweden was 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighed 151 pounds. But Miss Sweden of 1983 was 2 inches taller and 45 pounds lighter. What qualifies as beauty for one generation does not seem to apply to the next.

In Genesis 24:16, we are told that Rebekah was "very beautiful to behold." But physical beauty was not the crucial point for Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, who was sent to find a wife for Isaac.

Eliezer's prayer gives us an important clue about the kind of beauty he sought for his master's son: "Let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'—let her be the one" (v.14).

Common courtesy could have prompted Rebekah to provide drinking water for a stranger, but to water camels was a different matter entirely. Ten thirsty camels could drink up to 210 gallons. Rebekah clearly had a servant's heart.

The Bible tells us that Rebekah was beautiful, but it says much more about the beauty of her character. "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).—Albert Lee

Think not alone of outward form;

Its beauty will depart;

But cultivate the Spirit's fruits

That grow within the heart. —D. De Haan

Nothing can dim the beauty that shines from within

Proverbs 31:10-31

In Word And Deed

A man decided to make Mother's Day special for his wife. He bought her presents. He took her out to eat. He made life easy for her around the house.

But when she later told him what made her weekend really special, she thanked him for something he did during church on Mother's Day. When the men in the church were told they could have the microphone to say something about a special woman in their life, he listened for a while as others spoke. Then, when the last call was given, he rose and spoke ever so briefly about his wife--telling how thankful he was for her godly example. She was moved as he honored her before others. Those 18 seconds were the highlight of her weekend. She even requested a tape of the service so she could savor his thoughtful words.

It is admirable when a man does kind things for his wife, but if he compliments her publicly he demonstrates wisdom. When a man says of his wife in the presence of others, "You are special to me, and I appreciate you," their relationship is enhanced.

The husband in Proverbs 31 praised his wife by saying, "You excel them all" (v.29). Nothing a man can do is more honoring than speaking words like those. —Dave Branon

A man who finds a godly wife

Is blest beyond compare;

She is his greatest prize in life--

A treasure rich and rare. --DJD

Marriage thrives in a climate of honor and respect

Proverbs 31:10-31a

What Dad Can Do For Mom

The bumper sticker states, "My wife says I never pay attention to what she says—or something like that." It's funny, I admit, but the more I think about it, the more I don't want to be that kind of a husband.

Far too many husbands have developed an attitude toward their wives of half-heartedly hearing what they say and not giving them the respect of 100-percent attention.

A husband who does this, or in any way shows disrespect, should consider how his words and deeds also affect his children. After all, he's not just speaking as a husband—he's speaking as a father who needs to teach his children to respect their mother.

In Proverbs 31, the writer mentions that the children of the virtuous woman will "rise up and call her blessed" (v.28). That kind of honor does not come easily. It comes to a mother who shows good character, but it also comes from children who have been taught by a trusting, loving father how important it is to show respect for Mom.

Husbands and fathers, renew your commitment to love and honor your wife by kind words, thoughtful actions, and respectful communication. Long after the flowers have died and the perfume is gone, that kind of present will continue to be appreciated. And your children will notice too. —Dave Branon

Husband, show your wife you love her;

Give her honor and respect;

Listen closely when she's speaking;

Acts of kindness don't neglect. —Sper

A Christlike example is the greatest gift parents can give their children.

Proverbs 31:26-31 Magnets And Mothers

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you. —Deuteronomy 5:16

A teacher gave her class of second-graders a lesson about the magnet and what it does. The next day, in a written test, she included this question: “My name has six letters. The first one is m. I pick up things. What am I?” When the test papers were turned in, the teacher was astonished to find that almost 50 percent of the students answered the question with the word mother.

Yes, mothers do pick up things. But they are much more than “magnets,” gathering up clothes and picking up toys around the house. As willing as many mothers are to do such chores, they have a higher calling than that.

A good mother loves her family and provides an atmosphere where each member can find acceptance, security, and understanding. She is there when the children need a listening ear, a comforting word, a warm hug, or a loving touch on a fevered brow. And for the Christian mother, her greatest joy is in teaching her children to trust and to love Jesus as their Savior.

That kind of mother deserves to be honored—not just on one special day a year but every day. And that recognition should involve more than words; it ought to be shown in respect, thoughtfulness, and loving deeds.

Of all the earthly things God gives,

There’s one above all others:

It is the precious, priceless gift

Of loving Christian mothers. —Anon.

Godly mothers not only bring you up, they bring you to God.

Proverbs 31:10,25-31

Influence Of Godly Moms

Many people have been richly blessed by what they learned at their mother’s knee. Consider John and Charles Wesley. Their names would probably never have lighted the pages of history if it hadn’t been for their godly mother who taught them that the law of love and Christian witness was to be their daily guide.

Susannah Wesley spent one hour each day praying for her 17 children. In addition, she took each child aside for a full hour every week to discuss spiritual matters with him or her. No wonder John and Charles were used of God to bring blessing around the world.

Here are a few rules she followed in training her children: Subdue self-will in a child and work together with God. Teach him to pray as soon as he can speak. Give him nothing he cries for and only what is good for him if he asks for it politely. To prevent lying, punish no fault that is freely confessed, but never allow a rebellious, sinful act to go unchecked. Commend and reward good behavior. Strictly observe all promises you have made to your child.

Let us honor our godly mothers today, not only with words of praise for them but with lives that reflect the impact of their holy influence! —Henry G. Bosch

Of all the earthly things God gives,

There’s one above all others:

It is the precious, priceless gift

Of loving Christian mothers. —Anon.

The virtues of mothers are visited on their children. —Dickens

Proverbs 31:30a

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Our society idolizes the so-called "beautiful people" - popular entertainers and models whose youthful faces dominate the pages of the magazines at the supermarket checkout. But such attractiveness has nothing to do with the kind of beauty that delights the heart of God.

We tend to think of beauty in terms of something lovely that evokes a feeling of pleasure within us. But God wants us to place more value on what's in a person's heart than we do on superficial things (1 Pe 3:3-4).

As William Dyrness explains, something is lovely by God's standards "if it displays the integrity that characterizes creation and that in turn reflects God's own righteousness." In other words, a truly beautiful person is one who serves God's purposes.

Regardless of our outward appearance, then, all of us can be beautiful. By God's transforming grace, we can have the beauty of holiness and integrity that mirrors the character of His Son. As we devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the fulfillment of the Lord's purposes in our lives, we will develop the kind of God-honoring beauty that does not fade (Prov. 31:30). That's the only way to

become one of the truly beautiful people.-- Vernon C. Grounds

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,

All His wonderful passion and purity;

O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,

Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

Beautiful people are those who mirror Christ.