



**A Bible Reading Plan  
for the Book of Proverbs**

April 17 - June 11, 2017

Mountain Brook Baptist Church  
[www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org)



# Proverbs

## ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the book of Proverbs. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. The weekends are used as time to reflect on the passages of the previous week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to [www.mbbc.org/blog](http://www.mbbc.org/blog), click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit [www.mbbc.org/project119](http://www.mbbc.org/project119).

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Proverbs is traditionally attributed to Solomon (see Proverbs 1:1); while scholars have different views on this, traditionally the assumption is that Proverbs was probably written during Solomon's era and some of the book was likely produced by him, since he was a king known for his wisdom and for composing proverbs. On a first reading, it might seem as if this book is just a collection of random, unrelated teachings - "how-to" instructions to help people in various life situations. But a deeper reading of the book reminds us that God is speaking to His people about what it means to live as His people. Relationship precedes obedience. Proverbs aren't just random sayings helping the world live better - the book of Proverbs was written to God's covenant people, to help them see what it looked like to live as God's people, living in light of the covenant.

Proverbs isn't about giving us "our best life now" by following a certain formula. Rather, in Proverbs 1:7, the author reminds us that all wisdom comes first and foremost from a fear of the Lord - a correct understanding of who God has revealed Himself to be in Scripture. And the rest of the book unpacks what it means to walk wisely in this fear. If we divorce Proverbs from the rest of Scripture, perhaps we really do have "just a book of rules." But if it's taken in the context of the rest of the Bible, the book of Proverbs shines a light for us on what it means to live as God's chosen people - holy and set apart for His name's sake. As we read Proverbs together as a church, pray that the Lord would illuminate His word to us through the power of the Holy Spirit, helping us to walk the right and level path as God's chosen children.



# Proverbs

## WEEK ONE: PROVERBS 1-3 APRIL 17-23

### Monday, April 17 | Proverbs 1:1-19 | Doug Dortch

#### “Warning Against Enticement”

The book of Proverbs, traditionally attributed to Solomon (1 Kings 4:29-33), is a book of instruction devoted to practical wisdom and helping its readers find their proper place in the social and religious order of the day. While much of its wisdom mirrors the admonition and instructions in nearby New Eastern cultures, the central truth of the book is that wisdom, personified as the companion of God, always is at work promoting loyalty to God’s perfect will.

The opening verses of Proverbs outlines this purpose in a succinct phrase that will be repeated throughout the book: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:7). The parallelism of the verse (another feature of wisdom literature) reinforces the importance of the author’s words and the good life they will assure to everyone who hears and heeds them.

The first warning is one against enticements. The author speaks frankly of the pull that foolish sinners seek to have over those who want to walk the paths of righteousness. Because sinners see the example of the righteous as an indictment of their folly, they do everything they can to make disobedience seem the preferred way of life. No doubt it is the easier way, but as the author admonishes his readers, it is most definitely not the way to experience the best life has to offer. The harsh reality is that it is a self-destructive way, which is why the author urges his readers to learn from the agony sinners have brought upon themselves with their transgressions so that we might not make the same mistakes.

Sometimes it can seem as if people who reject God’s ways are experiencing far more in life than those of us who are earnestly seeking to be obedient. But as this text reminds us, their joy is short-lived and will ultimately lead to death. Wise are those who trust the LORD and align their lives with His purposes. What they receive will never be taken away.

### Tuesday, April 18 | Proverbs 1:20-33 | Doug Dortch

#### “Warning Against Rejecting Wisdom”

This section of Proverbs offers the first example of how wisdom takes on the form of a person. Depicted as a feminine counselor, she raises her voice to make sure she gets a hearing in the din of the sinful counsel so prevalent in the marketplace.



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The line of argument wisdom pursues is compelling. To begin with, she challenges the convictions of those who choose the path of folly. If people fail to experience the life God has created them to know, it won't be because of a lack of opportunity. Wisdom persistently confronts everyone so that if they opt to reject God's ways, it's not because they didn't have the opportunity to know the consequences.

Wisdom's next line of argument is to question the security of those who choose the way of folly. Far from safeguarding their future, those who reject God invite disaster with their disobedience. Instead of appearing confident about life, they will only look comical to those who have chosen to live wisely. Their rejection will only make them more vulnerable and when they do want to reverse course, it will be too late.

The only way of security is to hear and heed the words of wisdom. Her counsel will never lead anyone astray. They will always direct us in paths that set our hearts at peace.

Probably the best definition of wisdom is that it refers to the quality "that keeps us from getting into situations where we need it." Heed it and we will become all God created us to be. Ignore it and we are on our own, which is as the Proverbs tell us, is a most dangerous situation that until we change will only get worse by the second.

## **Wednesday, April 19 | Proverbs 2 | Doug Dortch**

### "The Moral Benefits of Wisdom"

While the previous chapter laid out the consequences of rejecting God's wise ways, this chapter shows us what we gain from aligning our lives to God's will.

As the author teaches us, obedience is not an occasional thing. Much as the Psalmist teaches, it requires "storing up" God's teachings within us (Proverbs 2:1). At times it also requires digging for it, much as a miner might dig for ancient treasure (Proverbs 2:4). But our seeking is not something we must do by ourselves. God is committed to showing us the way and also guarding our lives when we do what He gives us to do (Proverbs 2:6-8).

Such wisdom will deliver us from those who do not have our best interests at heart. The harsh reality of life is that most people operate out of self-interest, and if they find that they have to step over others to attain it, they will. But those who "keep to the paths of the righteous" (Proverbs 2:20) will have nothing to fear, because God will always make a way for those persons and will honor their obedience with peace and rest.



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Does obedience pay? That's a question on the hearts of many, particularly when it appears that those who reject God are doing reasonably well. But the author of Proverbs assures us that all of the effort that is required of us to stay with God will secure His favor and will enable us to have a "heart up" in everything about life that truly matters.

**Thursday, April 20 | Proverbs 3:1-12 | Doug Dortch**

"With All Your Heart"

Proverbs 3:5-6 are my favorite verses of Scripture. They remind me that my life tends to get off the rails when I try to do too much, so that if I can wait upon God and go where He guides, things always work out so much better.

But as the writer tells us, sometimes we forget (Proverbs 3:1). That's why obedience is something that we must be vigilant about. We must "bind them around our neck" and "write them on the tablet of our heart" (Proverbs 3:3). Only then will we experience the favor with God and others we so desperately desire (Proverbs 3:4).

Of course, the temptation is to think that we know what's best for us instead of yielding our wills to God. At times, we may even "bargain" with God, offering Him parts of our lives. But it's only when we turn to Him with our whole hearts do we experience the abundance He wants us to know.

No one needs to try to make a go of life alone, not when God is present to go with us. Following His lead will enable us to rise above every challenge that comes our way and is the only means to the inexhaustible favor He has for us to enjoy.

**Friday, April 21 | Proverbs 3:13-35 | Doug Dortch**

"Finding Wisdom"

You remember the game "Hide and Seek." Finding something of value, whether it be a person or an object, always creates a sense of joy. The same is true with respect to God's wisdom the way of obedience allows us to discover.

Unfortunately, too many think that joy in life comes from finding wealth or in having more possessions or in arriving at a place of prominence. But this section of the Proverbs reminds us that wisdom has been around since the beginning of time and is the only means God has ever devised by which we might order our lives to experience all we long to know.



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The words of this section teach us that everything about wisdom is something we choose to know. God doesn't force it upon us. We don't gain it by being around other righteous people. It is instead a virtue that we develop over years of consistent leaning upon God's ways.

So, look for wisdom as you make your way through life. When you find it, don't let it go. Not only will it sustain you during the difficult times of life, it will also enable you to move into God's future with unshakeable and never-ending joy.

## **Saturday, April 22-Sunday, April 23 | Proverbs 1-3**

Reread Proverbs 1-3 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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## WEEK TWO: PROVERBS 4-6 APRIL 24-30

### Monday, April 24 | Proverbs 4:1-9 | Amy Jackson

I cherish the things that my grandma passed down to me: a love for Mexican food, an interest in cooking, and a fondness for yard sales. Proverbs 4 is also a “passing down” - a father passes down instructions to his sons, which he received from his own father (Proverbs 4:1, 3). These teachings and precepts passed down from generation to generation center on this call to walk in wisdom, the theme of Proverbs. I love the imagery of spiritual fathers passing down these careful instructions to their sons and the idea of a lineage of faith. It’s interesting to think that, if Solomon really did write this proverb, perhaps he was reflecting on his father David’s heritage of faith, which was passed down to him from his father Jesse. This is speculation, of course, but there’s beauty in thinking about an ancestry of faith. And really, while passing down mementoes and favorite recipes are significant moments in families, I think the best heritage we can give and receive as parents and children is one of faith.

The grandfather told his sons to let their hearts hold fast to these words and his commandments (Proverbs 4:4); the picture of gaining wisdom in Proverbs is an active pursuit. I especially like the awkward way that verse 7 reads. Derek Kidner summarizes it in this way: “What it takes is not brains or opportunity, but decision. Do you want [wisdom]? Come and get it” (Kidner, *Proverbs*). We have to make the decision to pursue wisdom and to follow godly instruction. Gaining wisdom isn’t dependent on our occupations, backgrounds, or opportunities; it is dependent upon whether or not we want to pursue it.

Ultimately, though we trust that when we pursue wisdom, we receive it - not because of our own efforts, but because it is a gift from the Lord, given to those who seek him. After all, we’ve already read in Proverbs 1:7 that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. And this gift is invaluable; according to verses 8 and 9, wisdom exalts, honors, and crowns those who seek after it. Solomon himself knew this; in 1 Kings 3, when given an opportunity to ask for a gift from the Lord, Solomon asks for wisdom. As we walk through the rest of Proverbs, we’ll discover why wisdom is the greatest of gifts. The good news is that we can also seek wisdom today! We seek wisdom by seeking the face of God, through studying His word and engaging with Him in prayer. As we grow in relationship with God, He bestows wisdom on us through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. *Lord, help us to pursue You wholeheartedly, trusting that You are the giver of all good gifts and grant wisdom to those who seek You.*

### Tuesday, April 25 | Proverbs 4:10-27 | Amy Jackson

As you read Proverbs 4:10-27, you probably hear Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” in the back of your mind. Like in the poem, Proverbs 4:10-27 depicts two roads, but these aren’t just two roads that diverge in the yellow wood. They are the paths of wisdom and wickedness, the roads of life and death, the ways of good and evil. The father continues to implore his sons to walk on this road of wisdom - to



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continue down this way of light which leads to life (Proverbs 4:18), rather than taking the road of darkness which leads to death (Proverbs 4:14-17, 19).

All of the exhortations are really interesting to me in this chapter; we see that choosing this road, this path of wisdom, isn't just a choice that happens once: the imagery of "keeping hold" of instruction and guarding it (Proverbs 4:13) reminds us that we continue to make the choice to walk in this way and to follow the Lord's commands. We make a decision to follow Christ - and that decision is followed by a lifetime of discipleship. And discipleship is simply, in the words of Eugene Peterson, "a long obedience in the same direction."

We also see that this path is all-encompassing and leaves a mark on every part of our identity. In verses 23-27, different parts of the body are mentioned to reinforce this idea. Walking in wisdom means keeping "your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23). And what is in our hearts guides everything else - our speech (Proverbs 4:24), our eyes (Proverbs 4:25), and the paths of our feet (Proverbs 4:26). If we are harboring evil in our hearts, eventually it comes out in the words we say and the things we do. But if we are treasuring God's word and seeking His wisdom, the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control - are an overflow of His redemptive work in our lives!

*Lord, help us to seek out Your wisdom and to walk in Your ways, trusting that taking this road of life, the road that is often less traveled by, will make all the difference. Thank you for making a way when there was no way through the death of Your Son on the cross.*

## **Wednesday, April 26 | Proverbs 5 | Amy Jackson**

When I was in high school, I took a class on mythology. It was all intriguing, but I was especially fascinated by the story of sirens in Homer's *The Odyssey*. Sirens were these dangerous mythological creatures who sang these hauntingly beautiful songs to sailors, luring them to their untimely deaths. These women were beautiful and their songs were enticing, but listening to them meant certain death through shipwreck.

In many ways, the picture of sin in Proverbs 5 reminds me of the sirens. Specifically, the father continues to exhort his son, warning him of the dangers of adultery; while such sin appears enticing, it's actually quite dangerous (Proverbs 5:3-6). Her words are like honey, but in the end it is "bitter as wormwood" (Proverbs 5:4). Not only does wormwood taste bad, but if it is eaten, it can kill you! In the same way, while the temptation of adultery - sexual sin outside of the marriage covenant - may seem alluring, it is actually deadly.

We can probably all attest to the fact that sexual immorality brings pain, shame, and discord to others. It brings brokenness to families. It breaks the hearts of wives and husbands, of daughters and sons. In



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many ways, the story of my family is a story of discord and brokenness brought about because of adultery. I have walked the long roads of healing - which never really end on this side of heaven in such situations of family brokenness - and can see the deadly nature of this particular sin.

I think the allusion here, though, applies to more than just sexual sin. All sin appears enticing and desirable. We find ourselves like Eve in the garden, as she considered the apple - she saw that "the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes" (Genesis 3:6), so she took it and ate it. But after she ate of that forbidden fruit, she immediately began to experience the consequences of her sin - she felt shame and experienced discord and disunity with her husband. But most of all, she realized that her sin was before the Lord. This is also true for us. In the case of any sin, including sexual immorality, we must remember that our "ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all [our] paths" (Proverbs 5:21). All sin is first and foremost offense against Him, and, in the words of my seminary professor, "no matter how careful someone might be to conceal sin, he cannot conceal anything from God" (Allen Ross, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

*Father, we need your help! In the face of deadly sin, our only hope is to turn to the Savior. Empower us through the work of Your Holy Spirit to see sin for what it is - deadly, dangerous, and deceptive. Turn our hearts to You, so that we might not be led astray by the siren calls of sin.*

## **Thursday, April 27 | Proverbs 6:1-19 | Amy Jackson**

Each Thursday or Friday, I make a list of items I need before I go to the grocery store. Now, the list doesn't keep me from buying additional items as I see them, but it provides some guidance for me as I wander the aisles and wonder what I need to purchase for the week. This list in Proverbs 6:16-19 functions in the same kind of way; it's not an exhaustive list of every sin, but it gives us a good representation of the things that grieve the heart of God.

First, notice the strong language of verse 16. The transgressions that follow are things that "the LORD hates...[they are] an abomination to Him" (Proverbs 6:16). These aren't just things that God dislikes or finds annoying, the way that dirty dishes left in a kitchen sink irritate me; in the words of one theologian, "the meaning seems to be equivalent to saying that it is a hate emanating from the deepest part of his being" (Temper Longman, *Proverbs*).

As you read through these seven vices in these verses, did any jump out at you? I was particularly struck by the evil nature of premeditated sin in verse 18. It reminded me of the way you feel when you are watching a murder trial and hear the murderer's plans to murder the victim recounted. I always feel the sense of outrage and injustice as I hear these plans - that they thought out how they would harm this person and then put the plans to action. Premeditated sin is the same. How often do our hearts devise wicked plans? Are my feet prone to hastily run toward evil?



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Undoubtedly, you likely will finish reading this list and, if you are like me, feel a sense of guilt for the many ways you fall prey to the lure of temptation. But the good news is that we aren't left to our own resources. We trust that we are forgiven of our sin through the power of the cross. More than that, we also trust that God works in us through the Holy Spirit. His Spirit strengthens us and enables us to withstand temptation. Through the process of sanctification, we are conformed into the image of Jesus more and more each day.

*Father, help us to turn from our sin and to turn to You! Keep us from premeditated evil. Help us not to think too highly of ourselves, but to see ourselves as You see us. Help us bring unity rather than discord. Give us hands that serve others and lips that speak truth in love.*

## **Friday, April 28 | Proverbs 6:20-35 | Amy Jackson**

My mother loves to tell stories about me as a toddler - especially stories that involve me running off from her in a crowd. To remedy this situation, she bought an early model of a children's safety harness backpack. The idea is that the child wears the backpack, which has a leash on it, so the parents can keep up with their children and still allow the child to walk and have some sense of independence.

The imagery of these verses in Proverbs 6 reminds me a bit of that harness. We have parents here who are warning their child against sexual immorality - in particular, against engaging in sexual relations with a married woman (Proverbs 6:26). They were instructed to "bind [these teachings] around your heart always; tie them around your neck" (Proverbs 6:21). In other words, these teachings functioned a bit like those safety harness backpacks as restraints against sin. They weren't just a physical restraint though. I love the picture of binding these teachings around your heart. The heart is someone's core - the seat of their will, emotions, and intellect. Often disobedience begins in our hearts and flows out through our actions. This is true in most disobedience, isn't it? People don't usually wake up one morning intending to commit adultery and ruin lives. Sin creeps in slowly and takes root in our hearts, and evil actions follow.

In the face of such temptation, God's commands are a harness for us. According to verse 22, they guide us in all of life's situations - both waking and sleeping. God's wisdom leads us in the way we should go, "for the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline a way of life" (Proverbs 6:23). I like the image of these commands as a light to guide us on a dark path. When you are walking on a trail in the dark and don't know what's ahead, you need a light to guide you. You're unfamiliar with the territory, with the dips and bumps and tree roots along the way. God's commands are the same kind of light for us as we walk life's bumpy roads. We don't know what temptations or trials are ahead for us, and we have no idea of the difficulties that are in store in future days. This is why hiding God's word in our hearts is so important (Psalm 119:11). Step by step, His word illuminates the way that we ought to walk, and guides us as a harness, keeping us on the level path.



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Take a minute to meditate and pray through the final verse of one of my favorite hymns, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." I think Robert Robinson summarized it best when he penned these words:

*"O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;  
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above."*

## **Saturday, April 29-Sunday, April 30 | Proverbs 4-6**

Reread Proverbs 4-6 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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## WEEK THREE: PROVERBS 7-10

MAY 1-7

### Monday, May 1 | Proverbs 7 | Hayden Walker

In this chapter, like Proverbs 5 before it, sin is personified as a wily woman. When you read through this chapter, you must not be distracted by the woman. Instead, you must learn from her actions and activities and take heed to the advice given on how to resist sin. Right out of the gate, the author begins by reminding his son that he has the power to stand against this sin. His tool to do so is **treasuring the word of God** (Proverbs 7:1-5).

The author then recounts how easily someone who isn't treasuring the word of God can fall into sin (Proverbs 7:6-7). Temptation begins in small ways; here the young man begins only by walking near the home of the woman (Proverbs 7:8-9). We often don't jump into deep dark sin; it usually happens as a progression over a bit of time. One "not so bad" thing just leads to another.

Now sin is described. Sin seduces us by makes us feel worthy or valuable (Proverbs 7:10-20). However, any value that sin offers is false. It is only natural that sin looks, sounds, smells, feels, and tastes appealing (Proverbs 7:21). Sin has always had this appealing nature; it is what attracted Eve to the fruit in the Garden of Eden.

The chapter closes with the truth behind sin—it will destroy you (Proverbs 7:22-23). You think you have control over it, but it really controls you. The father reminds his son in verses 24-27 about the realities and dangers of sin, no matter how appealing it may seem. May we all heed this advice to seek God in Scripture and thus have wisdom to avoid sin.

### Tuesday, May 2 | Proverbs 8 | Hayden Walker

Over the last couple of days, we have seen sin personified as a woman. In our chapter today, we will read about another woman: the personification of wisdom. In contrast to the temptress, wisdom shows herself to be truly good.

Among the many things we learn about wisdom in this chapter, we learn that wisdom promotes knowledge and discretion. Knowledge in the Old Testament is always experiential knowledge. Therefore, one cannot claim to know wisdom without living it out. In contrast, wisdom is against evil, prideful arrogance, and perverted speech.

While the wisdom that we read about today is not a real person, there was, however, a real person who possessed the fullness of wisdom (I Corinthians 1:24). Wisdom is most fully exemplified in Christ.

The pursuit of wisdom should be derived from fearing God and end with honoring Him. Wisdom should never become a moralistic pursuit, but must be bookended with God. It is no longer an empty



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personification that calls out to us, but we have seen the full expression in Christ. In Him is all wisdom (Colossians 2:3). Therefore, we ought to seek out Christ and His pattern of life through the study of Scripture, in order that we may live wisely.

The entire New Testament book of James is a study of wisdom in light of Christ. This book should be studied and obeyed; as seen in Proverbs 8 wisdom is no good unless it is obeyed. This does not mean we have a works-based salvation, but James argues that a wise and righteous lifestyle is evidence of faith (James 2:18-19, 26). The grace that has been extended to us in Christ should teach us to live now in a wise and right way that shows we serve God (Titus 2:11-14).

## **Wednesday, May 3 | Proverbs 9:1-12 | Hayden Walker**

Chapter 9 wraps up the first section in the book of Proverbs. This portion of the book is framed by the theme which dominates the entire book, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). In our journey so far, we have learned much about the differences in wisdom and folly.

I invite you to consider a bit of a litmus test concerning where you may fall on the spectrum of wisdom. These convicting lesson is found in verses 7-9. To summarize the thought, the way that we receive correction from others is a pretty good indicator of how wise we actually are. The author breaks it down into four categories: the scoffer, the wicked, the wise and the righteous.

The scoffer does not handle correction well at all. He abuses and hates those who try to correct him (Proverbs 9:7-8). Have you ever responded to someone's critique of you by saying "Who does he/she think he/she is?" If so, you may have responded like a scoffer. The wicked person does not receive critique much better: he injures those who attempt to correct him (Proverbs 9:7). These injuries could be physical, but more than likely, they are injuries of slander or judgment.

In contrast, the wise person loves to be corrected (Proverbs 9:8). He receives instruction well and knows that he needs people to show him his "blind spots" so that he can become even more wise (Proverbs 9:9). Finally, the righteous person will only use reproof as an opportunity to increase in learning (Proverbs 9:9).

The difference between the foolish and wise responses to correction is this: understanding that we are imperfect people, and we need other imperfect people to help us and show us where we have opportunities for growth in wisdom. The purpose of listening and learning from others is that we might be more faithful followers of Christ.

## **Thursday, May 4 | Proverbs 9:13-18 | Hayden Walker**

In contrast to our passage yesterday, we see the woman folly inviting all who pass by to come to her house. What people will find with folly will not be nearly as satisfying as what they were previously offered in the house of wisdom. It is important to note that folly makes herself visible (Proverbs 9:14)



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and calls out to invite us in (Proverbs 9:15). This is significant because we cannot be so naive to believe that we can easily avoid sin. No, foolishness will seek us out. We must not be like the simpleton and fall for the bait.

In 1976, the Eagles released their smash hit "Hotel California." One line is particularly memorable: "You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave." This haunting phrase may have referred to any number of things for the Eagles, but it seems to connect particularly well to the final verse in our passage for today. Those who do turn aside to the house of folly will die in their bondage there. Folly succeeds by tempting us into believing that secret sin is "sweet" (Proverbs 9:17). Instead it is that very secret sin that will keep us in bondage. The temptation to enter is sweet, but the reality is quite bitter. It is the wisdom of the Lord that allows us to resist the temptations and invitations of folly.

## **Friday, May 5 | Proverbs 10 | Hayden Walker**

Our chapter today begins the second main section in the book of Proverbs. In the first nine chapters, the foundation of wisdom is established. There are long portions of personification and explanation in that first section, which help the reader to understand the importance of pursuing wisdom.

The new section, which ranges from chapters 10-22, may actually be the type of proverb that you are more familiar with. The verses are independent thoughts, not contextually reliant upon one another or building in argument. Essentially, these pithy statements show the practical outworking of living either a wise or foolish life within everyday situations. Advice is offered in a memorable way, brief enough to fit in a text message or tweet!

As you read through these 32 proverbs today, there may be one or two that particularly resonate with you. After you finish reading the entire chapter, I encourage you to revisit that particular proverb and allow the Holy Spirit to convict you, encourage you, and apply it to your own life.

After all, your decisions to pursue wisdom will not only impact you. Your choices will also have a ripple effect to those around you. We see this truth displayed in verse 1, as parents are certainly affected by their the decisions of their children. If you make decisions to pursue wisdom in all aspects of your life, your family, friends, coworkers, teammates, and peers will be positively impacted. Likewise, your temptation to folly is not only harmful to you, but will grieve those who love you. Let us read and heed the good advice from these proverbs.

## **Saturday, May 6-Sunday, May 7 | Proverbs 7-10**

Reread Proverbs 7-10 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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**WEEK FOUR: PROVERBS 11-15**  
**MAY 8-14**

**Monday, May 8 | Proverbs 11 | Shaphan Helms**

“True Riches”

What does it mean to be truly rich? Proverbs has quite a bit to say about finances, highlighting the connection between right handling of material assets and the wisdom the book urges us to seek. Notice how Proverbs 11 repeatedly addresses the subject from various angles, including honesty in the marketplace (Proverbs 11:1), wealth in relation to mortality/eternity (Proverbs 11:4), making sound financial decisions (Proverbs 11:15), warning against ill-gotten wealth (Proverbs 11:16-21), generosity and caring for others (Proverbs 11:24-25), compassionate use of economic power (Proverbs 11:26), and the folly of trusting in riches (Proverbs 11:28). In addressing the dangers of pride, wealth, and the search for security, this chapter is both tersely practical and theologically profound. We do not find here a strictly negative view of wealth, but we are warned, in the face of human mortality, about the imprudence of placing one’s hope in earthly riches.

Let’s look more closely at the first eight verses. Verse one deals with honesty in the marketplace. Though verse two shifts the focus from financial dealings to personal character, verses three through eight go on to round out both themes. These verses contrast integrity, humility, and financial equity with deceitfulness, greed, pride, and wicked character in general. The search for status and security is scrutinized, and we discover what it means to look for lasting hope in the wrong places that bring only devastation in the end. Scripture make it clear that dishonest dealings are despicable to the Lord. Such behavior is antithetical to his righteous and just character. In Leviticus 19:35-36 God bases this truth on His identity and activity—who He is and what He does: “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights...I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

Apart from Christ, we will fall by our own wickedness (Proverbs 11:5). Our motivation in life springs from what we desire. Our search for wealth, security, and status will reveal our hearts’ true affections. If our hearts desire, trust, and seek anything other than Christ, we are seeking things that do not profit on the day of wrath (Proverbs 11:4) when we give an account to the Lord.

Thus the temporal and the eternal collide in these verses. Verse seven warns against hope in this life only. When we read this chapter’s warnings in light of the New Testament, we remember Jesus’ words after His conversation with the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-30. It is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Indeed, apart from God’s intervention, it is impossible for anyone. The sinfulness of our hearts leads us to foolishly put our hope elsewhere. Yet, there is good news for those who



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realize their spiritual poverty, and there is great reward for anyone who truly seeks the kingdom of God (Luke 18:30).

In this life, following Christ and pursuing righteousness will often have a temporal cost, but it is the path of wisdom and true security. The Lord delights in truth and justice because He acts in accordance with His righteous character. As His people, we are called away from the sinful self-serving practices that proliferate in the world around us. We are called to true riches in Christ, in whom all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom reside (Colossians 2:2-3). Proverbs teaches us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and in Christ we see most clearly the vast storehouses of God's wisdom—Christ who was eternally rich became poor so that we can be truly rich in Him.

*Note: Shaphan Helms is the husband of MBBC intern Elizabeth Helms. Shaphan is a graduate of Beeson Divinity School. Shaphan and Elizabeth taught our college Sunday Morning Bible Study in 2016-2017. He recently took a position at Hunter Street Baptist Church, where he serves as Director of Ministry to Young Professionals.*

## **Tuesday, May 9 | Proverbs 12 | Mary Splawn**

Recently my husband, Wayne, preached a sermon on Christian speech. He gave a four-way test for our words that helps us to decide what to say and when! This four-way test has been the topic of conversation often at our house since then. Occasionally, it comes up prior to someone holding their tongue, like when Eleanor realizes she is about to tell a lie and she covers her mouth with her hand and says, "I caught it!" But most of the time the four-way test comes up after one of us has failed it!

Here is the test as it relates to speech:

- 1) Is it true?
- 2) Does it build others up?
- 3) Is it appropriate for the occasion?
- 4) Does it give grace to all who hear?

While this sermon was rooted in Ephesians 4:25-32, it could have been preached from Proverbs 12. Let's examine each "test" and see what this proverb says in response.

- 1) Is it true? Proverbs 12:22 says "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful."
- 2) Does it build others up? Proverbs 12:25 says, "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up."
- 3) Is it appropriate for the occasion? Proverbs 12:18 says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."
- 4) Does it give grace to all who hear? Proverbs 12:23 says, "A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly."

Controlling the tongue is a lifelong journey, but the good news is that we have a great tutor along the way. The Lord has given us His Spirit to guide and encourage us (John 14:16-17).



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*Even today, Lord, help us to be sensitive to others and how our words can draw them closer to You. Help us to speak with grace and honey. As David prayed in Psalm 19:14, we also ask, "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen.*

## **Wednesday, May 10 | Proverbs 13 | Mary Splawn**

We have a pecan tree in our back yard. It has green leaves but it never produces many nuts. That's because it stands alone with no other pecan trees in sight. By divine design, pecan trees need to be grown with at least one other pecan tree close by. Interestingly enough, the trees must be of different types so that they can cross pollinate and grow pecans in the process.

Similar to pecan trees, we must live in Christian community to bear spiritual fruit. First we must be in community with Christ's Spirit, walking in the ways of the Lord and learning the fruit of the Spirit which is grown within.

Also, we are called to plant ourselves among other strong believers because as Proverbs continually teaches us, the people with whom we choose to associate impacts the fruit or nuttiness we bear! As the writer of Proverbs says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

You've heard the term, you are what you eat. Proverbs disagrees. Instead Proverbs 13 asserts you are the company that you keep. Now we can't always choose who we're around, but we can be intentional about some relationships we seek. That is why it is so important that we make an effort to find mentors and friends who have spiritual wisdom and a desire to follow Christ. It's also important to look for wisdom from other Christians who aren't exactly like you because often when we take a posture of humility and learning, we grow the most.

As we learn from friends who are walking with the Lord, we are encouraged to exercise our faith in the same way. As we hear people of different ages and stages be gracious in their speech, we are eager to do the same as well. As we see other believers in our church, across the centuries, and around the world live sacrificially, we are challenged to take up our cross as well.

Let's take our cues from the pecan tree and plant ourselves in fellowship with others who will spur us on to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). When we make intentional efforts to seek out the wise among us, we'll start bearing the fruit they already produce.

## **Thursday, May 11 | Proverbs 14 | Tyler Kerley**

Jonathan Edwards insightfully remarked once, "[W]ords are cheap; and godliness is more easily feigned in words than in actions ... The self-denial that is required of Christians ... [doesn't] consist in



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words, but in practice. Hypocrites may much more easily be brought to talk like saints, than to act like saints" (Jonathan Edwards, "Religious Affection").

While it may be uncomfortably pointed, Edwards's comment sheds much light on Proverbs 14 and on the whole Bible. Edwards highlights for us this unity between Christian life and Christian speech—a unity that is stressed throughout Proverbs 14 and throughout all of Scripture, and a unity that is grounded in the God who does what He says He will do. "By the mouth of a fool," Proverbs says, "comes a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them ... A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies" (Proverbs 14:3, 5). What is more, "a truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful" (Proverbs 14:25).

Lying here, as well as elsewhere in the Bible, does not seem as concerned with little "white lies" that we may tell others, while that is certainly a part of it. These verses are surrounded by instructions to live wisely, such as walking uprightly (Proverbs 14:2), turning away from evil (Proverbs 14:16), and showing generosity to the poor (Proverbs 14:21). These commands suggest that the more serious form of lying that is in view here is confessing one thing with your mouth and doing another thing in your life. This form of lying is the concern of James' letter: "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:26-27). Jesus teaches that it is this kind of lying that characterizes false prophets: "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16, 20).

In short, to be a truthful witness to Jesus Christ means to honor your commitment to the Lord and your commitments to others. Faith is not some dead, immovable, or self-centered thing. Faith is "active in love" (Galatians 5:6). So as Christians, we cannot say one thing and do another. We must live up to our promises and the expectations we set for ourselves to others. If you promise someone you will meet him at a particular time, be there promptly. If you made a wedding vow to love your spouse "in sickness or in health," then love him or her not only in the good but also in the bad. If you promise to do an activity with your child, go out and play with him. If you tell your elderly parent you will care for them, or perhaps go visit them, then go out and do it. If you want God to honor His promise to save you, then honor your promises to others. If you want God to forgive you, then forgive others (Matthew 6:12). If you say you believe the Word of God, then do the Word of God: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). In the words of Proverbs, "In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty" (Proverbs 14:23)

*Note: Tyler Kerley works in our Christian Life Center. He is currently in his second year at Beeson Divinity School. When he is not at school or working in the Christian Life Center at Mountain Brook Baptist, Tyler reads the works of many dead guys who said a lot of insightful (and sometimes strange) things about God and what God says in the Bible. Tyler also likes to play tennis.*



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## Friday, May 12 | Proverbs 15 | Mary Splawn

As humans, we feel a pull to be in multiple places at the same time. But, we can't. We are limited by the fact that our body can only be in one place at a time. We try to overcome this boundary using technology, so we FaceTime or we text updates or we "like" someone's social media post. For me, this desire to be in multiple places at once often deters me from being fully present anywhere.

Not so with God. He can be 100% present with you and me at the very same time. Baffling for kids and adults alike, God can hear and understand everyone's prayers at the same time even though we are in different places and speak different languages. He knows exactly what's going on in Birmingham, AL and Birmingham, England right now. Nothing escapes His attention.

The word for this is omnipresence! "Omni" means all or every. He is everywhere present. Proverbs 15:3 confirms this attribute of God: "The eyes of the Lord are everywhere. They watch those who are evil and those who are good."

In many ways, knowing that God is everywhere is a comfort and a call for praise. God sees our every need. He knows our pain. He understands our suffering. One of my favorite verses confirms this: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

God's omnipresence should also serve as a warning for us. It is a reminder that our sin, even if hidden from others, is not hidden from God. We cannot pull the wool over His eyes. He sees all. He knows what is done in the cover of darkness and He knows the unspoken sin that lurks in our hearts. Because God sees, we must be diligent to root out secret sins that we're tempted to continue because we think no one will know. We also should live a life of continual confession, not avoiding conversation with God about our sin because of shame. God knows...and He wants us to return to Him in repentance because he loves us as the the father loves the prodigal son.

Today, let us praise the Lord for His continual presence and take some time to confess our sin to Him.

*Lord, We confess our desire to be everywhere like You, but we can't. Thank You for being fully present with us. We confess our desire to cover up our sin from You, but we can't. Thank You for knowing us fully and yet still loving us and standing ready to respond with mercy and grace. Thank You, Lord, that You never leave us or forsake us on this lifelong journey of discipleship. Help us to throw of the sin that so easily entangles and help us to live fully unto You with the help of Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## Saturday, May 13-Sunday, May 14 | Proverbs 11-15

Reread Proverbs 11-15 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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**WEEK FIVE: PROVERBS 16-20**  
**MAY 15-21**

**Monday, May 15 | Proverbs 16 | Wayne Splawn**

“Plans That Come Together”

I used to watch a television show called *The A-Team* when I was younger. Many episodes would end with one of the main characters exclaiming, “I love it when a plan comes together!” I think we all feel the same way about the plans we make. There is something very gratifying about seeing our plans come to fruition.

How do we make plans that are wise and honoring to the Lord? The writer of Proverbs provides two important insights about making plans in Proverbs 16. First, we are reminded of our need for God to direct our plans. In verse 25, we see that there are ways that seem right to people that actually lead to death. As we seek to make plans for the future, we must remember that we are desperately need God’s direction. Second, we need to remember that the Lord must be at work in and through us if we are going to accomplish anything of eternal value (Proverbs 16:3,9). We may be experts at devising and carrying out a plan, but we are not able to ensure the plan will produce lasting fruit. We need God to establish our plans. As you seek to make plans you seek to make wise plans, ask God to direct your path and establish the work of your hands.

**Tuesday, May 16 | Proverbs 17 | Wayne Splawn**

“The Wisdom of Restraining Our Words”

Arguments have a way of escalating quickly. If we or someone we love is wronged by another person, we often allow our anger to get the best of us and we say and do things that only make matters worse. When we have had time to step back from the situation and cool down, we almost always regret words spoken in anger. One thing that makes such actions particularly damaging is that we can never really take back words we have spoken in anger. The damage has already been done.

In Proverbs 17:27-28, the writer of Proverbs reminds us that a wise person is one who has a cool spirit and is able to restrain his or her words. As we seek to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord, we would do well to heed the instructions of Proverbs 17:27-28. If you find yourself in a situation where you feel your temperature rising and harsh words are on the tip of your tongue, stop and pray. Ask the Lord to give you a cool spirit and to enable you to restrain your words.



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**Wednesday, May 17 | Proverbs 18 | Wayne Splawn**

*"A Friend Who Sticks Closer than a Brother"*

We were created for community. We will not experience the abundant life the Lord would have us to know apart from living in relationship with other believers. In Proverbs 18:1, we learn that isolation is particularly dangerous because it creates an environment in which we are free to pursue our own desires unchecked by the wisdom and concern of others in the community of faith.

How will the wise person seek to develop healthy relationships with other people who are seeking to live a life that is honoring to the Lord? In Proverbs 18:24, we learn that the wise person will focus on quality rather than quantity in his or her relationships. You may have a lot of surface level relationships and still live in isolation. Rather than seeking popularity or trying to have many companions, seek to build deep relationships with other believers who will stick closer to you than family. God uses deep, committed friendships with other godly people to make us aware of our own sinful desires and to encourage us to pursue a path in life that will result in God's glory and our deepest joy.

**Thursday, May 18 | Proverbs 19 | Wayne Splawn**

*"A Fear that Leads to Life"*

Fear is a powerful emotion we usually view in negative terms. We fear things like spiders, natural disasters, and speaking in public and we often respond to our fears by trying to overcome them. One fear that is particularly acute in the age of social media is a fear the psychologists have termed the fear of missing out or FOMO. As we see Facebook updates and Instagram posts of people who seem to be having the time of their lives, we are tempted to believe that we are somehow missing out on the satisfaction and joy everyone else is enjoying.

In Proverbs 19:23, the writer of Proverbs reminds us of one fear that we should never try to overcome. Rather than seeking to somehow move past our the fear of the Lord, we are instructed to walk in the fear of the Lord fully assured that that doing so will lead to life and satisfaction. We are daily bombarded with messages that promise life and satisfaction will be found in places outside of God's revealed will. But, the writer of Proverbs knows better. If you and I are going to experience abundant life and satisfaction, we must walk in the fear and reverence of the Lord and conform our lives to God's commands fully confident that if we do we will not miss out on anything of eternal value.



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**Friday, May 19 | Proverbs 20 | Wayne Splawn**

“Wait for the Lord”

Amazon Prime is one of the most convenient services to which I subscribe. Rather than paying expensive fees associated with a speedy delivery, I pay a flat monthly fee and enjoy the convenience of having books and other items delivered to my door in two days or less. I have grown accustomed to the speed and ease of this service and usually decide to buy things based at least in part on whether or not they are eligible for Prime shipping.

Unfortunately, there are certain things in life that can not be delivered as quickly and conveniently as books from Amazon. One of those things is certainly justice in the face of evil. Like the psalmist, we often cry out, “How long, O Lord?” and do not receive a response that fits our timeline. In such seasons of life, we are tempted to take matters into our own hands to see that justice is served quickly and in a manner that seems appropriate to us.

However, from Proverbs 20:22, we learn that such an approach to life is foolish. Rather than seeking to meet out justice in a manner that seems timely and appropriate to us, we are to be people who wait for the Lord to deliver us. How do we wait patiently for the Lord to deliver us in the face of evil? Perhaps the best way is to fix our eyes on our Lord Jesus Christ who “When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23, ESV). One day, either in this life or in the next, justice will be served and when it comes the Lord will ensure it will be right on time.

**Saturday, May 20-Sunday, May 21 | Proverbs 16-20**

Reread Proverbs 16-20 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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**WEEK SIX: PROVERBS 21-23**  
**MAY 22-28**

**Monday, May 22 | Proverbs 21 | Wayne Splawn**

“Answering the Call”

Most of us find it frustrating when people do not return our phone call or email. Being ignored is insulting in part because it seems to indicate that the unresponsive person does not think we are worthy of his or her time and attention. Even if the person responds to our call with an answer we do not want to hear, we appreciate others extending us the dignity of a response.

In Proverbs 21, we are reminded that the Lord is concerned with how His people respond to the cries of the poor and oppressed in our world. We first see this emphasis on answering the call of the oppressed in Proverbs 21:3, where the writer of Proverbs teaches us that God takes righteousness and justice very seriously. In fact, the pursuit of justice is said to be more acceptable to the Lord than the offering of sacrifices. Acceptable worship must always be accompanied with a pursuit of righteousness and justice for the marginalized in our world. Then, in Proverbs 21:13, the author of Proverbs helps us understand the seriousness of our response to the poor with a verse that should give us pause. If we close our ears to the cry of the poor, we should not expect to be answered when we call out for help in our day of need. This is a message that affluent American Christians need to hear. Each of us has been entrusted with an abundance of material possessions, power, and influence that we can leverage in the pursuit justice and righteousness for the poor and oppressed in our world. When you hear the cries of the oppressed ask the Lord to show you how He would have you answer the call.

**Tuesday, May 23 | Proverbs 22:1-16 | Wayne Splawn**

“Something You Cannot Buy”

Money can be deceptive. We tend to think that we can buy anything we desire if we have sufficient funds in our bank account. However, there are certain things in life that can not be purchased even by the wealthiest person in the world.

In Proverbs 22:1, the writer of Proverbs teaches us about one such thing. He writes, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.” A good name is something that we can only acquire by living according to the Lord’s wisdom over many years and this good name is something that will open doors of opportunity and blessing that money never can. Unfortunately, we are far too familiar with the tragic examples of people who have traded in their good name in pursuit of material possessions. When faced with a decision that will result in great wealth at the expense of your reputation, ask the Lord to give you the character and wisdom necessary to



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choose the path of faithful obedience. Such a decision may cost you money in the short run, but in the end you will receive something money can never buy.

**Wednesday, May 24 | Proverbs 22:17-29 | Wayne Splawn**

“Choose Your Friends Wisely”

The book of Proverbs has much to say to us regarding relationships. As we saw in one of the devotions last week, we were created to live in community with others and the quality of our lives will be significantly impacted by those closest to us.

This is certainly what we find in Proverbs 22:24-25. In these verses, the writer of Proverbs warns against developing a friendship with someone who is prone to anger or wrath. What is the danger in such a relationship? In verse 25, we see that we have a tendency to learn the ways of our closest friends. That is, friends have a way of rubbing off on us.

As you evaluate the friendships you have, have you made wise decisions regarding those closest to you? You have a limited amount of time to invest in relationships with others. Make the wise decision to develop friendships with other godly men and women so that when you learn their ways you will become a more faithful follower of the Lord.

**Thursday, May 25 | Proverbs 23:1-19 | Wayne Splawn**

“Our Future Hope”

Why do the evil sometimes prosper while the righteous suffer? This is a question with which humans have wrestled over the course of history and it is a question we find God’s people asking throughout Scripture. For example, in the laments of the psalmists, the cries of the prophets, the questions of Job, and in numerous other places in Scripture, the Bible contains a record of God’s people asking honest, hard questions about why the evil sometimes prosper. One temptation believers often face when they see sinners prospering is to be envious of the prosperity they seem to enjoy.

In Proverbs 23:17-18, we are reminded that, as people of faith, we must respond to our temptation to envy sinners by remembering the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us. Though we may be walking through a season of great difficulty, our circumstances do not negate the promises of God. God loves us with a steadfast, unceasing love and He will not allow our hope to ultimately be cut off. Despite our difficulties, we can be confident that God’s good purposes will come to pass in our lives. Rather than looking to the prosperity of sinners, you and I must always keep our eyes fixed firmly on the Lord and continue to obediently walk in His ways, trusting that this will be the path to lasting, eternal joy.



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**Friday, May 26 | Proverbs 23:20-35 | Wayne Splawn**

*"The Deceit of Adultery"*

Many marriages in America have been decimated by the disastrous effects of adultery. Rather than finding joy and satisfaction in their spouse, husbands and wives often look to another person to provide these things. The writer of Proverbs sheds light on the dangers of adultery throughout this book of wisdom. The empty promise of finding fulfillment outside of the marriage relationship is based on deception. In verse 28, we read that an adulteress person lies in wait like a robber. He or she may promise to add joy or fulfillment to another person's life, but in reality they will only rob their victims of the joy God longs for them to know.

The point of these verses is clear: if having a relationship with someone outside of your marriage ever crosses your mind, do not give in to such deception. Nothing will be gained and much will be lost. If you have a friend who you think may be flirting with the notion of being unfaithful to their spouse, please with him or her to resist the temptation, rather than buy into the deceit of adultery.

**Saturday, May 27-Sunday, May 28 | Proverbs 21-23**

Reread Proverbs 21-23 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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**WEEK SEVEN: PROVERB 24-27**  
**MAY 29-JUNE 4**

**Monday, May 29 | Proverbs 24:1-22 | Amy Jackson**

When I was a kid, I was a fantastic rule-follower (partially because I was self-righteous and legalistic, and wanted to follow the rules in order to win people's approval). Rule-followers desperately long for everyone else to follow the rules too - and, when they don't, they are tempted to tattle. Now, I'm not advocating being a tattletale, but we live in such an individualistic society - a world where we say things like "to each his own" or "live and let live." While there's some merit to not being a busybody, the picture of the Christian life isn't just "me and Jesus." We recognize that we exist in a world with others and have a responsibility, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, to care for others and to look out for their best interests in the same way that God in Christ cared for us (Philippians 2:4-11).

These words of Proverbs 24:10-12 kept echoing in my mind - this call to seek justice for others. We can't sit back and just worry about ourselves or our families. We see this call to care for others, to speak up for those who are oppressed in these verses, rather than claiming ignorance and that we simply "didn't know what was going on" (Proverbs 24:12). Practically speaking, what does this mean? Are we responsible for every atrocity under the sun? Certainly not, but we are called to engage in the world and to take issues of justice seriously - to pray for discernment and to ask God to help give us wisdom on what it means to "rescue those who are being taken away to death" (Proverbs 24:10) and to help us care about the things that break His heart.

But God's heart isn't just broken by social injustice; it's also broken by our own sin. Just as we need courage to speak out against injustice, we also need to have the courage to help fellow believers recognize sin. After all, Proverbs has reminded us that walking in sin is walking toward death (Proverbs 9:13-18). True love isn't condoning a fellow believer's iniquity; neither is it condemning them and feeling as if you are superior to them because you haven't sinned in this particular way. Rather, it is speaking the truth in love and calling sin for what it is, while pointing those we love back to Jesus. While it is painful, it's also the way that we would want others to love us - by helping us see where we have strayed and that we are on a dangerous path, rather than ignoring our downfall only to claim ignorance later.

**Tuesday, May 30 | Proverbs 24:23-34 | Amy Jackson**

Have you ever passed by a house that seems abandoned? Sometimes I wonder how the decay got there: the shrubs are overgrown, the grass is high, and the paint is peeling off. Now, this kind of decay doesn't happen quickly - it takes time for a house to fall into this kind of disrepair. Proverbs 24:30-34 gives us similar imagery as we see a field and vineyard overgrown and covered with weeds. It seems that their owners had been negligent for some time. Months of laziness and ignorance led to the decay we see in these verses.



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We see warnings about laziness throughout Proverbs, but I don't think that the author of this proverb is just speaking to us about physical laziness. Sure, there is merit in working hard. The Lord has gifted us with strength and resources to be good stewards for His kingdom and to be caretakers of the resources He has granted us. But as I was reading this proverb, I thought about the condition of my own heart and the danger of spiritual laziness. Sin, like the weeds, can creep in so slowly that I often don't notice it until it has overtaken me. Perhaps I am neglecting spending time in God's word and in prayer. Maybe I've allowed an irritation in a relationship to create bitterness in my heart. Whatever the case, often when sin sneaks in, it does so slowly - almost unnoticed - until we look around and we see the figurative weeds and overgrown shrubs in our hearts and wonder, "Where in the world did these come from!?"

Surely the owners of these vineyards and gardens didn't intend for them to be overgrown and neglected. Verse 33 is especially telling: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber." Puritan John Owen famously exhorted believers, "Be killing sin or sin will kill you." I picture sin like the weeds that slowly creep into the garden. If we aren't actively putting sin to death and turning to God each day, through studying His word and spending time in prayer with Him, slowly, the weeds of sin can grow and creep into our hearts.

*Father, help us to stay alert and to recognize sin, and weed it out before it takes root in our heart! Help rid our hearts of spiritual laziness and give us a deep desire to spend time with You in study and prayer. Forgive us for the many ways we fall short of Your glory. Thank You for the gift of Jesus, and that we receive His perfect record in exchange for our brokenness. Sanctify us and make us more like Him.*

## **Wednesday, May 31 | Proverbs 25 | Amy Jackson**

In Proverbs 25:18-20, we see three negative pictures of people who don't walk in wisdom - and people we don't want to be! The first character is a person who bears false witness about others (Proverbs 25:18). He is compared to a weapon - ouch! The idea of the comparison is that lying is dangerous; specifically, this proverb is speaking out against those who break the ninth commandment and lie in court, which could end in unjust punishment for the accused. But I think this commandment applies even further; we are called to be truthful because we follow Jesus (John 14:6-7). Lies and deceit are sinful rebellion against our call to be like Christ.

The second character is a person who is "treacherous" - trusting in him "in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips" (Proverbs 25:19). Who likes a toothache or having a foot injury which puts you at risk for falling? This causes me to ask myself, "Am I trustworthy? Can others trust in me? Do I keep my word, to the best of my ability?"

The third character "sings songs to a heavy heart" (Proverbs 25:20). Now, at first this doesn't seem harmful, right? After all, shouldn't we cheer up others occasionally? But the comparison says that this



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person is like someone who takes away a person's coat when they are cold, or who pours vinegar on sodium carbonate, which neutralizes it and does no good. There's certainly a place to encourage people as they're struggling, but before we quote Romans 8:28 to them, we should live out Romans 12:15 - Paul's call to "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep." In reality, sin has broken so much in our world and there are moments when rejoicing is far from our hearts - when things are hard and death is near and we see that the world really is fallen. In those moments, we don't need to sing empty songs to people - instead, we need to be friends who mourn with others over the brokenness of everything while reminding them that our only hope is in Jesus.

On our own, we fail to meet these standards. I am not always truthful or trustworthy. Sometimes I don't know what to say in moments of grief, so I try to make everything better by offering false cheer. The good news is that Christ fulfilled all of these roles perfectly for us. Jesus says of Himself that He "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6-7). Christ is perfectly trustworthy - those who seek after Him are never forsaken (Psalm 9:10). And at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus wept with and for His friends (John 11:35).

*Father, thank you that Jesus is the embodiment of wisdom. He is perfectly true, trustworthy, and compassionate. Help transform us more into the image of Your Son as we walk in wisdom in these specific ways.*

## **Thursday, June 1 | Proverbs 26 | Amy Jackson**

Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." My parents told me that quite a bit when I was younger and would be upset over something unkind that someone may have said to me. While there's some merit to this idiom, as I've gotten older (and especially since I've been reading this chapter of Proverbs), I've realized that perhaps words are actually more harmful than sticks or stones.

The author of Proverbs describes the dangers of our tongues in verses 17-28. The condemnations are all-encompassing; the authors speaks out against mindlessly meddling and starting quarrels (Proverbs 26:17), prankster behavior that deceives others for your own pleasure (Proverbs 26:18), gossiping about others (Proverbs 26:22), and disguising lies as truth (verses 23-26). Perhaps you don't find yourself pranking others just to be mean, but from time to time, we all struggle with sinful speech. And this is a dangerous struggle; verses 27 and 28 remind us that our speech catches up with us. People who continually lie eventually find that they are caught in the web of their own deceit. But our speech is also harmful to others. In some ways, that rhyme isn't completely true. Verse 28 declares that "a lying tongue hates its victims" - in other words, our speech reveals our sinful motives and our lack of care and concern for others.

Our words really can be dangerous! James compares the tongue to a fire that can destroy - "a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). And our words destroy people - who are created in God's



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image. We, who are image bearers, use the very tongue He has given us to tear down and destroy other image bearers.

We find ourselves all condemned in this passage, yes, but there's also good hope for us! We can't necessarily tame our tongues on our own, but thankfully, the Holy Spirit works in us, as God's children, to help us season our speech with salt (Colossians 4:6), to speak sweet and gracious words that bring life to others (Proverbs 16:24), and to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Today, consider how you might season your speech with salt. Consider when your words ought to be few. Ask yourself if you are speaking the truth in love. One of my favorite prayers is from Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer." Pray this prayer and ask the Lord to guide and direct your speech and to tame your tongue today, for His glory!

## Friday, June 2 | Proverbs 27 | Amy Jackson

I was reminded of the ending of the classic Christmas movie *It's a Wonderful Life* this week. The movie's finale reminds us of the importance of community and relationship, emphasizing that "no man is a failure who has friends." In some ways, I think Proverbs 27 agrees! As I read these verses, I kept seeing the significance of friendships pop up.

What kind of friendships do we see in Proverbs 27? First, we see that true friendship isn't afraid to speak the truth, even when it hurts. Verse 6 declares that the wounds of a friend are faithful. According to the ESV Study Bible, such wounds or words from a friend are "meant to cut to the heart for the good of the person." We need friends who love us enough to tell us the truth. We need friends who care about us enough to call us out on our sin. These are faithful wounds because they are wounds that give life. Rather than flattering us and telling us what we want to hear, true friends tell us what we need to hear. I am thankful to have a few friendships in life that engage in this kind of honesty and transparency.

Second, we see that true friendships are invaluable - they are worth far more than the riches of oil, perfume, and other expensive goods (Proverbs 27:9). In "the day of calamity" (Proverbs 27:10), you may be far from your biological family, but if you have friends who are believers, you are still in the midst of family. In Christ, we have brothers and sisters from every language and tribe and tongue. I have lived far away from family since moving to Birmingham, but I am so grateful to have friends in this city who are like family to me. These are friends who aren't just present to celebrate, but who are also there in moments of difficulty. They have been God's gift to me.

Third, we see that true friendship is transformative - just as iron sharpens iron, friends sharpen friends. We instruct each other, rebuke one another, encourage one another, and point one another to Jesus. I think it's fitting that Proverbs talks so much about friendship and relationship because we recognize



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that our path to sanctification isn't a solo journey. In the words of theologian Tremper Longman, "The wisdom enterprise is a community effort" (*Proverbs*). In some ways, it seems Proverbs affirms the end of *It's a Wonderful Life* and George Bailey's transformation - people who have true, lasting, Christ-centered friendships really are the richest people in the world.

## **Saturday, June 3-Sunday, June 4 | Proverbs 24-27**

Reread Proverbs 24-27 this weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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## WEEK EIGHT: PROVERBS 28-31

JUNE 5-11

### Monday, June 5 | Proverbs 28 | Amy Jackson

Everywhere we look, we're constantly bombarded with messages about money - from emails about our credit scores and retirement plans to commercials about securing home loans before interest rates skyrocket. But these messages on money aren't just secular: Scripture also speaks to us about wealth. God doesn't condemn riches, but we are reminded that it's important to have the right perspective when it comes to money. We see so many of these messages about riches in Proverbs - having financial stability and wealth aren't necessarily bad things, but today's passage reminds us that it is better to be a poor but righteous person who fears the Lord than to be a wealthy but unjust fool.

Take a look at verse 6: "Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways." I think sometimes we forget that our perspective is what matters the most. It isn't that God is primarily concerned with whether or not we are wealthy - but He is concerned with how wealth and riches have a hold on our hearts. Do material things cause you to turn your trust away from Him? Are you tempted to cut corners and act dishonestly to increase your return? And the author of Proverbs isn't saying that everyone in poverty is righteous, either - we know that we are all broken, sinful people - both rich and poor. But Scripture recognizes that it is easy for our hearts to begin to trust in ourselves when we have the illusion of control in our lives, when we feel financial security. It's the reason that Jesus said "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" (Matthew 19:24).

So, what are we to do with our money? I'm convinced by reading Proverbs 28 that what the Lord wants is for us to have proper perspective on our resources. First, we must recognize that material blessings we have come from His hand. Yes, we are called to hard work and faithfulness (Proverbs 28:19), but we also know that God is the one who provides for His children and every blessing comes from His hand (James 1:16-17). Second, we are called to live with open hands when it comes to our resources - giving generously and without greed (Proverbs 28:22, 27). Third, we must walk in wisdom in every area of our lives - including making financial decisions (Proverbs 28:26). Rather than trusting in our own intellect and knowledge, we should come before the Lord in humility and respect, asking Him to give us wisdom on what to do with the resources He has given us.

### Tuesday, June 6 | Proverbs 29 | Amy Jackson

It's embarrassing, but I was a fearful child. I had bad dreams. I was terrified of storms. Heights made me nervous. Spiders creeped me out. It's funny, but you think when you're an adult, you won't be afraid of anything anymore. Some of these things I feared as a child were natural - and scary! But as an adult, I can see how I've traded some of these childish fears (although I still hate storms and heights!) for adult fears. And so many of my adult fears are rooted in my fear of people, outlined here in Proverbs 29:25.



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Here, Proverbs describes the fear of man as a snare or trap. Living under the fear of man doesn't mean just being scared by people; we can all agree that being kidnapped would be terrifying. The fear spoken of here is more than that. It's a fear of what others think of us. It's a fear of upsetting someone. It's fear of speaking up, even when you know something is unjust. Allen Ross says that "such fear becomes a snare when it gets to the point of letting others control your life - their opinions and attitudes put subtle pressure on you, even hindering you from speaking the truth or doing what is right" (Allen Ross, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

Rather than fearing man, we're called to trust in the Lord. This trust gives us safety. If we read this verse in the context of the rest of Proverbs, we see that trusting in the Lord means fearing Him. And this isn't just a "shake in your boots" kind of fear - it's reverent worship before the Lord, trusting that He is in control and submitting our lives to Him. It's caring what He thinks, rather than what others think. Christian counselor Ed Welch wrote a book on this topic; his summary is that "You will either fear God or other people. There are no alternatives" (*What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?*).

The disciples had to live out this right fear; they faced persecution and even death for their commitment to Christ. For this reason, Christ encouraged them with these words: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). While we may not face physical persecution for our faith, these words still ring true to me today. What am I afraid of? *Father, help me to fear You rather than fearing what others think of me. Help me to walk in obedience to You, rather than living in fear of other people's opinions. Help me to care more about what You think, rather than what other people think.*

## **Wednesday, June 7 | Proverbs 30 | Amy Jackson**

Recently I had the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C. I loved being in such an old city with its tremendous sense of history. Walking around the National Mall, I looked up at all of the buildings and felt this sense of awe at the history and significance of what I was seeing - imagining the founding fathers with this vision of America, penned in the very documents kept safely in the National Archives.

Yet as I looked up at the buildings, I also saw blue skies and puffy white clouds - it was the perfect spring weekend in Washington - and I felt this deeper sense of awe as I considered God, who reveals Himself as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer in the words of Scripture. The Father who is supreme and infinite, caretaker over all. The same God who created George Washington and Thomas Jefferson also fashioned me out of the dust. And He is the same God who formed the heavens and the earth out of nothing; He called the cosmos into being with simply the roar of His voice.

When we begin to understand the infinite nature of this God, I think we have the same reaction as Agur in Proverbs 30:1-6. Agur recognizes that, in comparison to God's vast wisdom and knowledge, he knows nothing, for "the truly wise know just how ignorant they are" (Tremper Longman, *Proverbs*). Simply put, we are not God. We have not ascended into the heavens, or wrapped up the waters in a



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garment, or established the ends of the earth (Proverbs 30:4). And, this is good news! When we begin to understand that God is God and that we are not, we are free to live as His children (Proverbs 30:5). Sometimes I forget that I am not God. I am not the one who changes people's hearts. I am not the one who holds the universe in her hands. I am not the one who calls creatures into being. So from time to time, I need to gaze up at the sky and be reminded that I am a finite, limited creature - but a being who is loved and cherished and known by the Creator of all things. Because He is who He says He is, we can take refuge in Him and trust that every word He has given us is perfect and true (Proverbs 30:5). It's good news that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are the foundations for our country, but it's better news and our good hope that our foundation for life rests in the living words of Scripture, penned by the Creator Immortal.

## **Thursday, June 8 | Proverbs 31:1-9 | Amy Jackson**

While theologians aren't sure who King Lemuel was, I think we can learn a lot about walking in wisdom from these admonitions given to the king by his mother. First, she warns the king against sexual immorality (Proverbs 30:3). It's important to note there that she isn't saying he should remain single; marriage is depicted as a good gift in the Bible and is certainly an avenue of sanctification. However, the king's mother warns him against sexual immorality - against seeking sexual fulfillment outside of the marriage covenant. Such behavior goes against the commands of Scripture and is harmful to others.

We don't have to look far to see the effects of such behavior; David's relationship with Bathsheba is a good example (2 Samuel 11-12). What began as sneaking an illicit peak at a beautiful woman ended with an affair and having her husband murdered while in battle. And Solomon's downfall came from his many marriages with foreign women (2 Kings 11). Sexual immorality is sin against your own body, against the temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. In many cases, it clouds judgment, leading people to make more poor decisions to cover up their indiscretions. And sexual immorality is also sin against others - it has the power to cause others great pain. After all, our sin never only affects us.

Second, the king's mother warns him to refrain from drunkenness. This warning isn't because alcohol is evil in itself. In the words of Allen Ross, the admonition is concerned with "either excessive use of alcohol or troubling need for it (reflecting deeper problems)...the danger, of course, would be to cloud the mind and deprive the oppressed of true justice" (Allen Ross, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*). This word hits close to home for us today. Use of alcohol isn't prohibited in Scripture; after all, Christ turned water to wine (John 2:1-12). But if we are using alcohol regularly to help soothe our problems, or if it begins to cloud our judgment, perhaps we have stepped into sin. The king's mother encourages him to stay away from drunkenness so that he might fulfill his kingly commands to dispense justice and speak up for the poor (Proverbs 31:8-9).



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Perhaps you are not be struggling in either of these areas. But the beauty of Scripture is that it is God-breathed. Whether it is sexual immorality, or alcohol addiction, or greed, or pride, or envy, we all have areas of our lives where we allow other things to bring us temporary happiness rather than seeking ultimate joy in the Lord. Father, help us to repent of these idols and lay them before your feet. Help us to trust in You as the giver of all good gifts and to walk in Your ways.

## **Friday, June 9 | Proverbs 31:10-31 | Amy Jackson**

Finally, we come to end of Proverbs. In Proverbs 31:1-10, the way of wisdom outlined in the book is exemplified by the biography of an “excellent wife” (Proverbs 31:10); the poem that follows is an acrostic, where each verse begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In other words, it’s an all-encompassing view of wisdom in action. And this isn’t just a passage for wives or women in general; rather, the author of Proverbs gives us a summary of what it means to walk in wisdom, and since we believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable, this is beneficial knowledge for all believers!

I think we could spend days looking at each of these characteristics, but I want to quickly highlight two themes for us. First, we see that walking in wisdom leads to diligent living. This woman doesn’t struggle with laziness or idleness as outlined elsewhere in Proverbs; rather, she is hard at work (Proverbs 31:13-19). And her work isn’t self-seeking; rather, her service provides for her household and even the poor (Proverbs 31:15, 20, 21). Her work is evidence of her character; others, including her husband, find her trustworthy (Proverbs 31:11). She heeds God’s call to put her faith into action, and stands up ready to contribute and use the gifts that He has given her.

Second, we see that there’s more to this woman than just working hard. Work isn’t her identity; rather, she is defined by her relationship with the Lord. She trusts in Him alone, and that trust changes the way she lives. She can live with open hands, laughing at the future because she knows the One who holds the future (Proverbs 31:25). She can live without fear of aging or losing her looks because she trusts that the Lord doesn’t look on outer appearances but on the heart (Proverbs 31:30). She is a woman who fears the Lord.

The activity, the work, the service, and the labor of these first fifteen verses are a result of the character this woman possesses - they are a result of her knowing and fearing the Lord. Knowing the Lord makes a difference in how we live. It makes a difference in how we treat others. Our relationship with God guides us to be good stewards of the gifts He has given us - to not sit by idly but to use what He has given us, for His glory and the good of others.

Pray today that God would help you to walk in wisdom as you walk toward Him! Pray that He would give you insight and knowledge, and that your relationship with Him would make a difference in how you live. Ask Him to help you find your identity in Him alone.



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**Saturday, June 10-Sunday, June 11 | Proverbs 28-31**

Reread Proverbs 28-31 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.