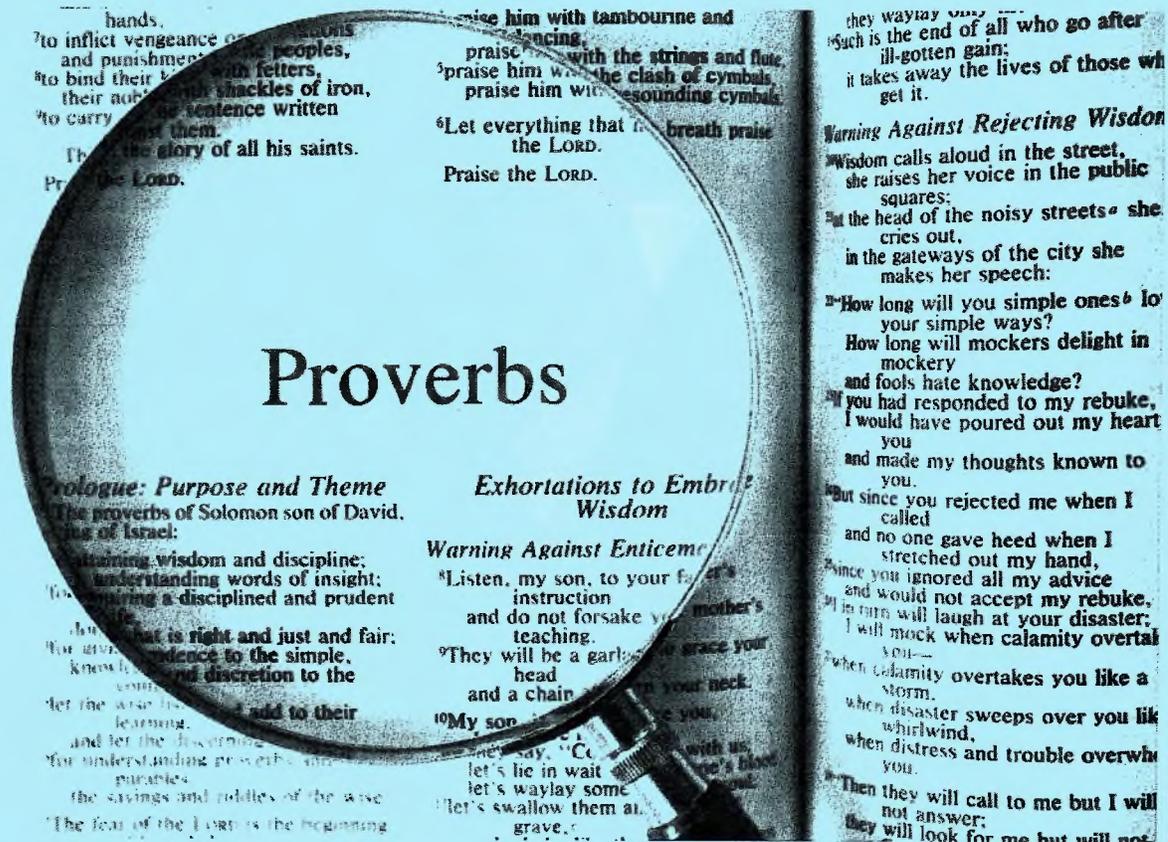


The Integrated Life



Guidance for Life from the Book of Proverbs

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2020

Course Outline

The Integrated Life

Guidance for Life from the Book of Proverbs

<u>Date</u>	<u>Lesson</u>	<u>Lesson Topic</u>
2020		
March 3, 2020	Lesson 1-A	What is Wisdom and How Does One Obtain It?
March 10, 2020	Lesson 1-B	Wisdom's House
March 10, 2020	Lesson 2-A	Guidance for Knowing and Fearing God
March 10, 2020	Lesson 2-B	How a God-Ordered Life is to Function
2021		
March 16, 2021	1 & 2 Summary	Review from Last Year
March 16, 2021	Lesson 3	Guidance for Dealing with Self
March 23, 2021	Lesson 4	Guidance for Dealing with Family
March 30, 2021	Lesson 5	Guidance for Dealing with Times of Temptation
April 4, 2021	Lesson 6	Guidance for Dealing with Money, Stewardship, and Work
April 20, 2021	Lesson 7	Guidance for Dealing with Justice
April 27, 2021	Lesson 8	Guidance for Dealing with Correction

Lesson 1A—WHAT IS WISDOM AND HOW DOES ONE OBTAIN IT?

Jonathan Perz stated that “wisdom is often the difference between barren living and fruitful living. The Proverbs often present choices we must make between the two.” (from www.simplyapreacher.com).

No doubt we have all at one time or another received advice or counsel or instruction about the way life can and should be lived. And no doubt we all have come to realize that even the best counsel has no real benefit until it is **integrated** into actual day to day decision making and life choices. God does not leave this whole matter of everyday practical living to guesswork or to our gut feelings. Sin is so powerful and often so subtle and our hearts can be so easily deceived, even when one has the very best of intentions.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and test the mind to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” (Je.17:9-10)

The conscientious believer dare not go coasting through life’s flood of choices, decisions and alternatives without giving careful attention to just what may result from whichever way we turn or what path we take. It is tricky business out there to live life spiritually in such a chaotic world.

Proverbs 1:1-7 states the author’s intended purpose in the writing and the collection of all these Biblical Proverbs. The Proverbs are: (from NIV)

**F
O
R**

- Attaining wisdom and discipline (v.2a)
- Understanding words of insight (v.2b)
- Acquiring a disciplined and prudent life (v.3)
- Giving prudence to the simple (v.4a)
- Providing knowledge and discretion to the young (v.4b)
- Understanding proverbs and parables (v.6)

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and discipline.”
(v.7). Petersen’s Message says, “Start with God—the first step in learning is bowing down to God—only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning.”

THE WORDS RELATED TO WISDOM

1. Proverb—(*masal*) a poetic, brief, often vivid, thought-provoking saying that conveys a significant truth in just a few words. They are not actually specific commands or promises. Although they are capable of giving moral or spiritual direction and when a person integrates these lessons into life and life’s choices, there are sure benefits to receive.
2. Wisdom—(*hokma*) to be moral, even when there is no explicit moral law. (1:2a)
3. Discipline or instruction—(*musar*) training with accountability (1:2a)
4. Discernment or insight—(*bina*) seeing the distinctions, even if subtle, understanding shades of difference... i.e. what is good, better, and best. (1:2)
5. Prudence behavior—(*haskel*); prudence (*ormah*) discretion (*mezimmah*) all have to do with planning out a path or course and living out life strategically. To know what to do and when to do it. (1:3-4)
6. Learning (*leqah*) extensive study (1:5)
7. Fool—(*ewil*) one who lacks true wisdom and despises discipline. (1:7)
 - a. Mocker—(*lesim*) not a lack of mental ability, but a haughty attitude that refuses to listen to anyone (1:22)
 - b. Simple—(*pethiy*) gullibility, these will believe anything. (1:22)
 - c. Obstinate—(*keciyl*) refuses to be told anything, hates being told anything. (1:22)

HOW DOES ONE ACQUIRE WISDOM?

This “wisdom” is not a quality that one is either born with or without. It is not an innate quality of the mind which is just beyond some people. It is not just having a “knack” for something or an inclination towards something. This wisdom of the Bible is a discipline and path of life-understanding which can be learned, enhanced, and developed with study and training and application. God wants us to be equipped with spiritual wisdom and provides the means for any believer to seek and find it. Just the careful reading and study of this Book of Proverbs can go a long way toward giving a person deeper insight into life and life morals, ethics, and values which are approved by God and pleasing to Him.

But there is another factor in this pursuit of wisdom. [READ James 1:5-8].

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the

one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.” (NASB-’95).

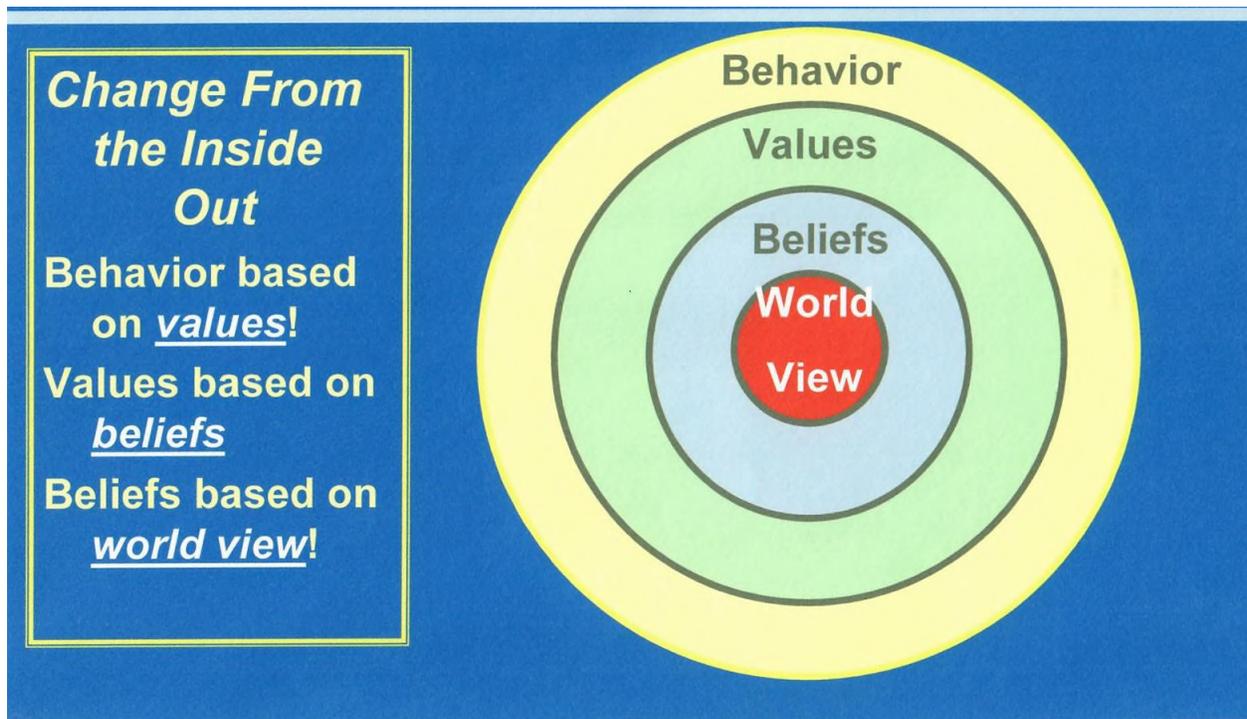
It is not that uncommon for a new or younger Christian to be lacking in spiritual wisdom. Acknowledging that shortfall can be an important first step to moving toward greater insight for living. Yet James teaches that it is more than just acknowledging one doesn’t have enough of it; one needs to ask God for it. And God promises to respond to a prayer of faith to gain moral and spiritual wisdom **IF** that prayer is genuinely offered without doubting God’s desire to assist in our pursuit of gaining insight and direction and discipline. One of the wisest things a Christian can do is to approach God in trusting prayer asking Him to grant him/her greater measures of spiritual wisdom. And the flipside of that is true as well... it is a most foolish thing not to ask.

Lesson 1B—WISDOM’S HOUSE

Texts for Lesson—Proverbs 8:1-9:1 and James 3:13-18

Wisdom’s House, referred to in Proverbs 9:1 is obviously not a physical building; rather it is describing a life lived out in this world. How one lives and the ultimate outcome of life hinges on the choices made throughout an individual’s lifetime. Even though we are all sinners, we retain the trait of free will decision-making. Adam’s sin did not take that away, nor does our own. Having free will is just part of what it means to be created in the image of God. And these “pillars” (Pro.9:1), whether from the elements in Proverbs or from the New Testament letter written by the Lord’s brother James, each refer to the key elements of a value-system. Every person has one and lives by one, albeit it varies from person to person.

WHAT IS A VALUE-SYSTEM?



A world-view is the most CORE assumptions a person holds about life. For example:

- There is a God, who is Creator of all.
- This God has every prerogative to rule over His creation
- This God requires accountability from all His creatures.

Beliefs are those elements that one holds to be true realities. For example:

- The Bible is the Word of God and provides the needed basis for knowing God and His will.
- Jesus is the God-man, unique in every way as Savior and Lord.

- The church of Jesus worldwide is His family of faith bound by a covenant relationship.
- The “afterlife” for humans will be in heaven or hell. No other destiny exists.
- Man’s destiny after this lifetime is determined by God’s judgment of us according to His true standards of righteousness.

Values are the elements of life which man decides to be the most important. These “values” determine where and how one will spend his time, attention, energy and resources. For example:

- Pursuing a life of holiness to please God
- Maintaining integrity based on God-defined ethics and morals
- Integrating these “most important elements” into daily living.

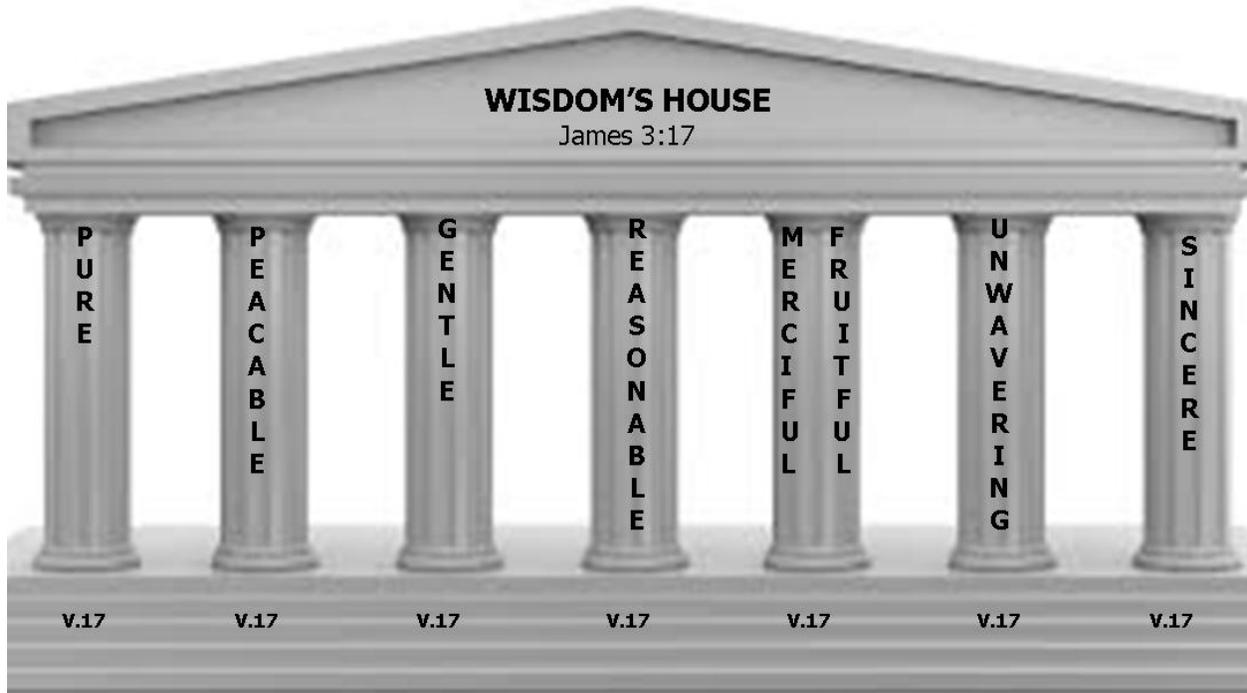
Behavior is the outgrowth of all these factors which play out into everyday life choices and decisions.

So, WISDOM’S HOUSE with its seven pillars detail the VALUES that a person embraces when he/she has a proper Biblical worldview and holds to Bible-true beliefs.

THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM’S HOUSE FROM PROVERBS 8



THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM FROM JAMES 3



Proverbs 8 lists SEVEN fruits or benefits to adopting these elements as one's value system:

1. Wise counsel- v.14
2. Sound judgment- v.14
3. Power-v.14
4. Prosperity-v.18
5. Joy-v.30
6. Blessedness- v.34
7. Life-v.35

Thus, Proverbs is about building a life to honor God based on the qualities that He places value on. And there are so many aspects to life, both private and public which need to be ordered around the will of God. Just think of how many of those aspects are directly affected when one integrates these values into everyday living. Hence, THE INTEGRATED LIFE.

Lesson 2-A—KNOWING AND FEARING GOD

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 15:33-16:9

This lesson answers two vital questions necessary for developing an integrated life:

1. What does Proverbs teach us about the person of God?
2. What is the fear of the Lord and why must this be a priority for life?

Tom Hallman Jr. recounts the story of 13 high school students, 9 of which died in the spring of 1986 attempting to climb Oregon's Mt. Hood. Their error was grave—Although it was spring, May 12, 1986, and it was sort of a “rite of passage” for high-schoolers in the Portland area, they ascended the mountain ill-prepared for the sudden change of weather which trapped them for four days before help could arrive.¹ But experienced climbers have died on that mountain as well. David Bland commented, “While the downfall of experienced hikers is their naïveté, the downfall of experienced climbers is their pride. Both are vulnerable.”²

Such is the danger in riding along a wave of “easy-believism” without really getting serious about knowing God or fearing Him. The first represents the naïveté while the second represents the pride. The Book of Proverbs calls out for us to both KNOW God and FEAR God.

THE QUEST TO KNOW GOD

1. There are some 100 times in Proverbs that God is referred to by name. And of these 100+/- times, 88 specifically use the term YAHWEH. This is God, the I AM (see Ex.3:14), the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. This special covenant name for God is found and translated in Genesis (beginning in 2:4) and is translated there The LORD GOD.
2. The Specifics One Can Know of God in Proverbs
 - a. God is the GIVER of wisdom. (2:5-6)
 - b. God is TRUSTWORTHY (3:5-6) To “acknowledge” Him is to KNOW Him, not just know some things about Him.
 - c. God is the CREATOR of the heavens and the earth. (3:19-20) (Echoes Gen.1:1)
 - d. God is the PROVIDER for the righteous. (10:3-4)
 - e. God views wickedness as an ABOMINATION. (15:8) but hears the prayers of the righteous (15:29)
 - f. God works PROVIDENTIALLY in the world to accomplish His purpose. (16:4)
 - g. God is the JUDGE of the prideful (16:5) (See also 28:9)
 - h. God stands UNCHANGING in His counsel (19:21)
 - i. God is the REWARDER of heartfelt obedience over empty compliance. (21:3)
 - j. God COMMUNICATES His Will to man through His Word. (30:5-6)

¹ Tom Hallman, Jr. “Mount Hood’s Deadly Deceit: A Remembrance.” *The Sunday Oregonian*, May 12, 1996.

² David Bland. **Proverbs and the Formation of Character**. Eugene, OR.: Cascade, 2015. p.162.

3. Is this matter of seeking to know God something of a last resort OR the very first aim in spiritual pursuits? It is all too easy to become satisfied with just knowing some things “about God”, and really not knowing Him. Paul spoke of this distinction in Philippians 3:7-11. He knew plenty about God, but realized the greatest pursuit of life was to KNOW HIM!
4. Knowing God as The Sovereign LORD
 - a. Proverbs 15:33-16:9 addresses the connection and tension between what men attempt to accomplish and what God purposes. God created man as a free-will, rational, volitional creature in His image. Yet in doing so, He did not simply cast the earth’s future to something of complete chance. The outcome of the world is NOT a toss-up. He still maintains His will and purpose for it and everything in it and is in control.
 - b. Mankind drifts toward two extremes when He goes about to pursue or explain outcomes.
 - i. By luck or chance. Here man doesn’t have to accept personal responsibility, but just kicks back and “goes with the flow”. We say, “Well as luck would have it.” Man in this vein sees himself just the victim of his circumstances and the product of the evolutionary processes, still doing its “natural selection” of such.
 - ii. By prideful possibility thinking or the determination to master one’s own destiny. You make your own luck. This is the “can-do” mentality. I have “got this!” “You’re either on the way or in my way.”
 - c. Here the person seeking to KNOW God, gets an introduction to the balance of man taking responsible action (or even irresponsible actions) over against the sovereign and determined purposes of God, our RULER.
 - d. An understanding of this balance gives foundation to the believer praying in the will of God. (see 1st Jn.5:14-15)

THE OBLIGATION TO FEAR GOD

1. What is the fear of the Lord? An examination of the original terms clears up the matter for us.
 - a. Not terror (emah)
 - b. Not fright (chah)
 - c. Not sorrow (deagah)
 - d. Not being afraid (magor)
 - e. Not dread (pachdah)
 - f. The FEAR of the Lord is REVERENCE—(yirah or yare)
 - i. Living in the recognition of His majesty. (God’s greatness)
 - ii. Living in submission under His authority. (God the loving Ruler)
 1. It has to do with knowing God sees the action and the heart behind it, wherever we are, whatever we do. And this consciousness of the presence of God means we hold Him in the highest respect and the dread of His wrath. (See Prov. 28:14, *mephahed* from pachdah)

- g. Some think it to be just the dread of being punished for wrong-doing or to be in awe of someone of great stature or reputation.
 - h. It has to do with our VALUE-SYSTEM—what we CHOOSE to esteem most. It is what becomes our basis for defining reality or deciding what to believe as true. It speaks to our basic explanation of life, either as determined by our senses, by our own desires, or by the pressures imposed by others.
2. The Proverbs teaching aspects and values of the FEAR of the Lord.
- a. 1:7—The beginning of knowledge
 - b. 1:29—A path to be chosen
 - c. 2:5—Attainable and discoverable
 - d. 8:13—To hate what God hates: evil, pride, arrogance, the evil way and perversion.
 - e. 9:10—The beginning of wisdom
 - f. 10:27—Prolongs life
 - g. 14:26—Provides strong confidence
 - h. 14:27—Fountain of life
 - i. 15:16—Provides satisfaction and contentment with a little
 - j. 15:33—Instruction for wisdom to know humility comes before honor
 - k. 16:6—Keeps one from evil and leads to atonement for sin
 - l. 19:23—Leads to life and inner peace
 - m. 22:4—Rewards the humble with riches, honor and life
 - n. 23:17—Provides a basis for consistent day to day living.

Lesson 2-B—HOW A GOD-ORDERED LIFE IS TO FUNCTION

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 3:19-20

There is a set of “givens” (sometimes called natural laws) which God put in place when He created the universe. And one of life’s challenges to living an integrated and productive life is to recognize and live day to day by these “givens”. It is easy for us to recognize the “law of gravity” in the earth environment we live in. But most of the universe functions without such a law. But this law is true in our world. Defying it is most foolish and dangerous. So it is with these “givens” which God has put in place for our most satisfying and most rewarded life. Certainly a person can live outside these “givens”, but very predictable outcomes await that pursuit.

Tim Keller says that “there is a givenness to things—physically, socially, morally, and spiritually—that is built into the fabric of creation.” Given that, Keller goes on...

“...we can’t treat our body any way we want without consequences. We can’t treat people anyway we want and expect to have good friends and a strong family. We can’t live selfish lives and expect our social fabric to remain intact. And there is also a spiritual order. If we try to center our lives on anything by God, it leads to fragile identity and psychological disorder. It is the essence of wisdom to perceive this divine order in life and to align one’s life with it.”¹

There is the principle of natural retribution. For example, right living will be rewarded (3:1-2) while evil doers will be punished. (16:5). “Consequence are inherent with our actions.”² These “natural” consequences are not so “natural” after all. They are part of God’s ordered world.

A tough question to grapple with is this: Do good actions always lead to good outcomes AND do bad actions always lead to bad outcomes? And the answer to that is in this life—this might be often true, but not always. It is related to the reality of timing. In the world to come, it will always be true because of God’s justice. But God’s justice does not always prevail in this fallen world order we live in.

Consider **Proverbs 10:3-4**. That is often true, but not absolutely or not always true here in this life. This is how Derek Kidner answers this dilemma regarding order and natural consequences:

“... This is true at four levels: logical, providential, spiritual, and eternal. First sin sets up strains in the structure of life which can only end in breakdown. Living selfishly can feel great but catches up to us physically, relationally, psychologically. Second, however much rope God gives us, He remains in control. Third whatever their worldly state, the righteous are the truly rich. Fourth, in the world to come, justice will be complete.”³

So life priorities and values ought to be anchored to God’s order of things.

¹ Tim Keller. **God’s Wisdom for Navigating Life**. New York: Viking; 2017. p.56.

² Derek Kidner. **Proverbs**. Downers Grove: IVP; 1964, 2008. p.37.

³ Ibid. p.80.

Proverbs 22:1 states this example: ***“A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, favor is better than silver and gold.”***

The New Testament addresses the experience of life here and now compared to the then and there. See **Romans 8:19-22**.

Just taste this sampling of Proverbs which speak to various categories of life around the order which God puts into His system governing this world He has created:

1. 11:4, 28—Regarding riches and righteousness
2. 11:17—Regarding being merciful or cruel
3. 14:34—Righteousness or sin dominant in a nation
4. 21:3—What response is most pleasing to the Lord, really doing righteousness and justice OR meaningless motions of worship
5. 24:16—Being resilient when knocked down
6. 25:11—Guarded and timely speech (see also 15:1 & 29:20)
7. 26:23—Genuineness and authentic to the core.
8. A CLASSIC—6:16-19—Loving God and loving what God loves means hating what God hates.

Many of the Proverbs set these value terms in a comparative mode: Better is this rather than that... as in 16:19—***“It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.”***

Hard work and diligent attention is required to reorder and retrain a value system around God’s desired order for mankind. Yet this is how the well-ordered life can function in the will of God.

SUMMARY SHEET—LESSON 1 & 2

Since it has been exactly 1 year since we had to suspend our study on Proverbs, let's take just a bit of time to review our first two lessons before proceeding to Lesson 3:

The Integration Principle

It is so vital that all we learn from God's Word about life actually gets **INTEGRATED** into our own lives and choices on a day to day basis. There must be a "translation" from the pages of Scripture to life circumstances and actions. James speaks of this reality in the illustration of the man in the mirror. (See James 1:19-25)

The Purpose of Bible Proverbs

Proverbs 1:1-7 states the author's intended purpose in the both the writing and collection of these Bible proverbs. (See Lesson 1-p.1)

How To Acquire Wisdom

How does one acquire wisdom? ASK GOD! (See James 1:5-8) (Lesson 1-p.2)

Proverbs 8—Overview of "Wisdom's House"... The seven pillars of wisdom: Prudence, understanding, right and true thoughts and actions, just and justice, knowledge of spiritual insights, instruction in heavenly principles, discretion. Some draw an expanded parallel to James' list of virtues which describe heavenly wisdom.

Highest Priorities

Knowing and Fearing God needs to be on man's highest order of life obligations and priorities. (see Lesson 2A-pp. 7-9)

The Certainty of Outcomes to Decisions and Actions

A God-ordered life recognizes that there are always outcomes and consequences to our life-choices. This is sometimes referred to as "The Law of the Harvest"... "***what a man sows, that is what he will reap.***" (See Keller quote on Lesson 2-B-p.10)

Lesson 3—GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH SELF

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 4:23-26

Living out life with an overshadowing presence of heavenly wisdom is certainly key for experiencing an integrated life. This book of the Bible is a real gem in providing guidance and for shaping a God-centered value system.

David Bland offers an insightful view of this wisdom portrayed in Proverbs and the Bible.

The idea of wisdom defies any single definition. But speaking in broad terms, wisdom embraces the task of learning how to live successfully. It involves the ability to cope with life's realities, not in the sense of dominating them, but in the sense of navigating the difficulties and assuming responsibility. Wisdom offers direction in connecting individuals to others and ultimately to God. Wisdom knows its limits. God ordered life in a certain way, building moral laws into its scheme. Wisdom seeks to live within those restraints.¹

One concept found in the Bible which describes the journey of life is “the walk” or “the path.” It is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Please consider these references:

1. Genesis 5:22—“***Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.***”
2. Genesis 17:1—“***... I am God Almighty. Walk before Me, and be blameless...***”
3. Leviticus 26:3—“***If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments...***”
4. Deuteronomy 8:6—“***Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him...***”
5. Galatians 5:16—“***And for those who will walk by this rule...***”
6. Ephesians 2:10—“***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.***”
7. Ephesians 4:1—“***Therefore I ... implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling...***”
8. Ephesians 5:8—“***... walk as children of light.***”
9. 1st John 1:6—“***If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.***”

The Book of Proverbs uses “walk” and “path” to describe the journey of life by each and every person.

The Bible is honest with us. The Book of Proverbs is quite telling on the matter: not every man chooses to walk down the path of righteousness and God-centeredness. In fact, Glen Pemberton observes that there is a downward spiral that a foolish person experiences when there is no fear of God in his life. Those steps are noted as:

1. “Committing isolated foolish acts or missteps that involve lapses into a loss of control on particular occasions.”

¹ David Bland. **Proverbs and the Formation of Character**. Eugene, OR.: Cascade, 2015. p.3.

2. “Folly becomes sport, and the person starts to repeat the same destructive behavior and begins to enjoy it.”
3. “The individual loses any desire to pursue wisdom.”
4. “The fool loses all respect and honor in the community. The fool is disgraced and there remains no hope for return.”²

Proverbs 4:14-16 states, ***“Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.”***

The life we choose is a reflection of our heart. ***“As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the real person.”*** (Proverbs 27:19 NLT).

A person’s CHOSEN pattern for life or course of life can become so second-nature that he/she just has to be doing it. It’s like that’s all they can see, all they can think about, all they can do. And the Christian observer is left wondering why they can’t see the mess they’re making of life!

Tim Keller wrote, *“Walking on a path always takes you someplace. Life is likened to a path because every action takes you somewhere. That is, the act changes you, making it easier for you to do it again. Eventually it becomes so natural to be cruel and selfish that you cannot rest unless you are doing it.”*³

When taking into account that the Proverbs provide guidance for me to deal with myself, here are two important considerations:

1. Often our feelings prompt our actions. We say (i.e. modern man) that we do this because we feel like doing it OR “I don’t want to do that because I don’t feel like doing it.” However, there’s a deeper truth actually:
2. Actions can shape our feelings. Sometimes, one may not feel like doing something, but if he/she digs down deep in faith and Christian commitment to take the right action, eventually the right feeling can follow.
 - a. Consider carefully Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:43-48. Who really feels like loving an enemy, especially at first?
 - b. Taking the right actions can eventually lead to feeling the right feelings. (This principle works in the family and marriage by the way.)
 - c. *“Sow a thought, reap an action; Sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”*

THERE ARE TWO PATHS!

² Glen Pemberton. *“It’s A Fool’s Life: The Deformation of Character in Proverbs.”* Restoration Quarterly 50 (2008) 213-224.

³ Tim Keller. **God’s Wisdom For Navigating Life.** New York: Viking; 2017. p.83.

“But the path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like the darkness; They do not know over what they stumble.”
(NASB-’95).

In considering the path that I’m walking on, are my steps headed toward the light? OR is something on that path pulling me down? Can I see it or is it hiding in the darkness?

Consider the parallel in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:13-14.

GUARDING MY HEART

Here’s a task for everyone of us, if we have chosen to walk the path of wisdom. I must guard my heart. Everything I do flows from it. In the Bible, the heart (kardia) refers to:

- The mind
- The will
- The conscience
- The emotions

A KEY PASSAGE:

“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you. Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established.” (Proverbs 4:23-26 NASB-’95).

Four times in this passage, the writer refer to what one takes in through his eyes:

- “Watch over your heart...” (v.23)
- “Eyes look directly ahead...” (v. 25)
- “Gaze be fixed...” (v.25)
- “Watch the path...” (v. 26)

What enters a man’s mind through his eye-gate and ear-gate shapes and influences the heart and results in the actions and path one chooses. One the very first things I must do in order to walk in wisdom is to control what enters my heart. (Remember the little kid’s chorus... “O be careful little eyes what you see.... O be careful little ears what you hear... O be careful little feet where you go...”

BEING HONEST WITH MYSELF—WHY DO I DO THE THINGS I DO?

Motives matter to God. And He knows them as well as He knows our outward actions and behaviors.

1. 15:14—***“The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge...”*** Before I begin, am I discerning about my options?

2. 16:2—***“All the ways of man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives.”***
(Consider 1st Corinthians 4:4)
3. 20:5, 9—***“A plan is the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out... Who can say, ‘I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from sin’?”***
4. 28:13—***“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper; But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”***
 - a. We live in this age which avoids accountability. A person may do all in their power to avoid coming clean with God. But only the one who does finds mercy.
 - b. See Psalm 51:3
 - c. See Psalm 32:3-5
 - d. See 1st John 1:9
5. 21:2—***“Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts.”***
 - a. I can always convince myself that I am right. And I can give many reasons to others to defend my actions. Yet if I am going to deal with myself with honesty and wisdom, I must surrender myself to the Lord’s examination.

THE NEED FOR SELF-CONTROL

Here is where an inner battle has to be fought and won. Usually, it is not that hard to discover God’s will for a certain life situation, or the best path forward when facing multiple options. Self-control is a test of personal strength and the degree that self is surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. Self-control for the Christian might better be named “Christ-control” or “Spirit-Control”. This whole issue assumes that there is a part of me which might wish to head down a path for self-satisfaction and pleasure or the worldly pathway. But I also must acknowledge that there is a higher road which calls me to think of God’s will, Jesus’ example and what is ultimately best for the most positive outcome. The Integrated Life will be successfully live ONLY when there is a degree of mastery over self—especially the worldly self.

Consider God’s counsel for my-SELF-control here from the Proverbs:

Self-control is a spiritual virtue. It is emphasized in the Proverbs and the New Testament as well. Self-control and its first cousin “restraint”, are inner spiritual disciplines which are invaluable in keeping inappropriate and insatiable desires in check. We sometimes speak of a person who is “out-of-control” or seems unable to live within or maintain boundaries in life. 25:28 summarizes this person like this: ***“Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.”***

1. 13:3—***“The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips come to ruin.”***
2. 14:16—***“A wise man is cautious and turn away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless.”***
3. 14:29—***“He who is slow to anger has great understanding but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.”*** (Lit. “short of spirit”)
 - a. 15:18—***“A hot-tempered man stirs up strife but the slow to anger calms a dispute.”***

4. 16:32—***“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.”***
5. 17:27-28—***“He who restrains his words has knowledge and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he keeps silent is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.”***
6. 18:13—***“He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”***
7. 19:11, 19—***“A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.” – “A man of great anger will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.”***
8. Consider also the parallel verses which speak of restraint: (10:19; 12:16,23; 17:27; 29:20)

The New Testament underscores these life safe-guards as spiritual fruit and desirable virtues. See Galatians 5:22-23 and 2nd Peter 1:5-7. Peter even states that acquiring these or developing these qualities connects us to the divine nature which God exhibits always.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE DEEPER PERSONAL ASPECTS OF MY INNER SELF?

For those who think the proverbs to offer little quips on the superficial side of life, think again. This gets personal. It gets below the surface. Living for Jesus and maintaining an Integrated Life is not mere matter of outward behaviors. It has to do with the development of core values and inner principles which the godly person refuses to compromise.

There is the public side of life—the part that is just out there for everyone to see. And then there is the private aspect of life, where only God, oneself, and maybe a couple others can know. ***“The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy.”*** (14:10). Just consider this list of topics that God speaks to which may be a bit too personal or private to openly discuss:

1. Envy- 23:17-18; 24:1-2
2. Fears- 29:25
3. Loving sleep- (when it gets in the way of being industrious)- 20:13
4. Seeking pleasures- 21:17
5. Indulging in alcohol- 21:17b
6. Desire for power/control- 11:16b, 24:5 (Using knowledge to get an advantage)
7. Boasting about tomorrow-27:1
8. Lust and inordinate sexual desire- 7:13-27 (the lure of the adulteress)
9. Personal discouragement-17:22 (a broken spirit just drains the sap out of a person)

We can live a life of pretense, trying to keep up a good front for those around us. However, we each know where our inner weaknesses are. We should have a sense of areas of our personal life that have not yet been fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus. In the inner self is where character is shaped and formed. It is the dimension of life that many choose not to address. It is easier to keep up a charade of pretense that appears to be spiritual. But integrity, honesty demands that we get to the very core of self and raise a white flag of surrender... surrender to Jesus as Lord.

Lesson 4—GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH FAMILY

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 2:16-17

Wisdom, knowledge, discretion and understanding is given... ***“to deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words, that leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.”***

Family is the most basic unit of society, beginning with marriage at the core of it. God designed the first home. And at the very center of family and marriage is the concept of covenant.

Family is the common denominator for all people, from every culture and continent. Family traditions may vary widely, but family is something we all have and are! A family may be close or distant, may be strong or weak, may be functional or dysfunctional, may be spiritual or quite worldly, may be resilient or fragile, may openly communicate or never communicate. And yet we have family and we are family. Everybody is connected to a family somewhere, somehow. And the Book of Proverbs has a lot to say about family. In fact, so much of the book has specific application for families.

It occurred to me that if families had no problems, so much of this book would be totally unnecessary. But as life since the fall has it, families toil and exist under lots of threats and issues such as:

- Lack of harmony in marriage, a constant underlying tension
- Marital faithfulness or fidelity is violated
- Poor resource management which stresses the relationship and robs a family of needed financial security
- Lack of prioritization of life tasks which leaves the family often at risk and unstable.
- Unruly or rebellious children
- A lack of parental instruction and/or discipline as children grow through adolescence towards adulthood.
- A general disrespect by grown children for their parents
- A widespread lack of respect for the various roles in the family... (husbands disrespecting their wife, wives disrespecting their husband, sons and daughters showing little or no respect for their parents and a general disrespect for harmonious relationship guidelines.

But Proverbs addresses so many of these family issues and more. A neglect of the principles of this book for families spells unhappiness and separation and loneliness and frustration and mistrust and ultimate brokenness.

So we all have family and we all are family and what is true for the vast majority of us is that there are some trouble spots or problematic areas in our families. Few families I know are immune from crisis.

A real question before us all is this: Are we satisfied with troubled and disjointed and stress-inducing family relationships? OR are we willing to learn and apply principles that would go a long way to making family life better?

KNOW THIS: At the root of family issues is selfishness (doing what I want to do), unspiritual decisions and choices, and the satisfying of sinful desires (regardless of what God's Word teaches). And we must remember this: The devil works hard to destroy wholesome families. To the point he succeeds in undermining the functional, godly family, he is able to weaken the church, seize control of generations to come and render the Christian faith impotent to have a lasting impact. POINT IS: PROVERBS HAS MUCH TO SAY ABOUT FAMILY!

THE NUMBER ONE NEEDED VIRTUE FOR STRONG MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES—THE FEAR OF THE LORD! Consider the references:

- 1:7—the beginning of knowledge
- 1:29—they did not choose the fear of the Lord
- 2:5—then you will discern the fear of the Lord
- 3:7—fear the Lord and depart from evil
- 8:13—the fear of the Lord is to hate evil
- 9:10—the beginning of wisdom
- 10:27—prolongs one's days
- 14:26—there is strong confidence
- 14:27—there is a fountain of life
- 15:16—better a little with the fear of the Lord
- 15:33—the fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom
- 16:6—by the fear of the Lord, one keeps away from evil
- 19:23—lead to life
- 22:4—reward of humility and fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life
- 23:17—live in the fear of the Lord always

A careful examination of these passages reveals that in many of the cases, if not most, the fear of the Lord is set in the context of family and family boundaries and family discipline. It appears then that if the fear of the Lord is missing in the home, the family is put at greater risk of disintegration and is ill-equipped to repair and heal the issues which weaken and threaten it.

WORDS FOR HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Since the marriage relationship is identified Biblically as a “covenant”, we will benefit from knowing these truths. Given that marriage is the foundation unit of family and it is established by covenant, we must refresh our understanding of a Bible covenant as it relates to marriage. “Covenant” is mentioned in the Proverbs and is used through the Bible as the binding commitment which holds husband and wife together with a sacred bond before the Lord. When covenant is broken, the marriage typically fails and the resulting fracture can impact everyone directly connected and can do so for generations. Covenant involves promises and commitments and bonds and seals. A Bible covenant includes God. And a marriage covenant is not only for the present, but includes promises and a purpose for the future. It is not just a “today event”, but a “lifetime” event. It is NOT as modern society has it—“for as long as we both shall love...”

“Adultery” (Heb.na’aph and Gr. moicheia) is the breaking of a vow. A spouse is bound to the other by covenant promises to their partner and to God and is the cement of viewing marriage as a place of trust, confidence, satisfaction, intoxication with her beauty, friendship, and fulfillment. Consider 5:15-21... noting v. 21... “for the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord.” Husbands and wives are partners intimately for sure, but more than that... they are partners in home-building. So much of Proverbs is about a father instructing his sons. (How that is needed today!) And the wife is respected and included in home-building. (14:1; 31:11, 12, 23, & 31)

“Spouses are not just lovers and partners, but the greatest of friends.”¹

This relationship is one of real trust. (31:11) and the husband extends his heart to her. And a wife of noble character is her husband’s crown.

A Couple Warnings About What Might Jeopardize or Destroy A Marriage

1. Being given to lust (6:20-29, 32-35)
2. Being a “quarrelsome wife” (19:13; 21:9, 19; 27:10,11; 27:15-16)

PARENTING

Godly children are a delight to their parents!

- 3:11-12
- 23:24-26

¹ Keller. *God’s Wisdom for Navigating Life*. (New York, Viking.) p. 251.

A main task of Christian parents is to teach their children about right and wrong and the “fear of the Lord.” If children are to grow up with a Biblical value system, they must learn this from godly parents. This is all consistent with the 5th commandment... Exodus 20:12.

- 15:20

Train Up A Child... 22:6... **“in the way he should go”**... according to his bent is closer the Hebrew translation and concept. A wise parent learns his child’s leaning, their giftedness and skills and interests. This is no guarantee that having your child in church and Sunday school every Sunday until they leave home will ensure they will choose the path toward heaven. We need to take the pressure off here... off God and off the parents. Parents do what they can in training and God does all He can in encouraging and inviting and nudging. BUT THE CHILDREN, ONCE THEY CROSS THE THRESHOLD OF ADULTHOOD, DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES THE PATH THEY SHALL TAKE.

This matter of discipline. Godly discipline involves both BOUNDARIES AND CONSEQUENCES when the boundaries are disregarded. Of course, godly discipline never brutalizes a child (although I think I was traumatized a time or two). It is the responsibility of parents to address and challenge the folly of their children. Folly [22:15] is self-centeredness, an insistence of having one’s own way. Sometimes that requires real punishment with teeth in it, whether corporal or not. One author states that folly means the willful refusal to make moral choices. It is a refusal to enter adulthood with its moral demands. A godly parent needs to prepare their sons and daughters for adulthood. To fail here is folly... on the part of parent and child.

There is a matter of general disrespect of parents.

- 10:1
- 15:20
- 20:20

While in the home, a child should never be permitted to disrespect his/her parents. Failure to learn this here points to a life of disrespect for all authority.

The greatest goal of a parent for their children is to see them in heaven someday. If your hope is to give them the “American dream” with the finest education, a biggest toys, and all the desires of their hearts and they miss heaven, what joy will that leave you with? I suppose most all parents parent with good intentions. But good intentions based on earthly guidelines leave little real room for positive outcomes in the end. The greatest work of parents is to lead their children to Christ. Nothing else is more important or more lasting than that!

Lesson 5—GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH TIMES OF TEMPTATION

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 1:8-19, 5:1-14 and 7:1-27

*“Tempted and tried, we’re oft made to wonder, Why it should be thus all the day long,
While there are others living about us, never molested, though in the wrong...
Farther along, we’ll know all about it, farther along we’ll understand why...” (W.B. Stephens)*

*“Trials dark on every hand, And we may not understand
All the ways the God would lead us, To that blessed promised land
But he’ll guide us with his eyes, And we’ll follow ‘til we die
And we’ll understand it better by and by
Temptation, hidden snares, Often take us unawares
And our hearts are made to bleed, For a thoughtless word or deed
And we wonder why the test, When we try to do our best
But we will understand it better by and by” (Charles Tindley)*

*“Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin, Each victory will help you or some others to win
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue, Look ever to Jesus and He’ll carry you through
Just ask the Savior to help you To comfort, strengthen and keep you
He is willing to aid you, And He will carry you through. (Horatio Palmer)*

The Christians in generations before us knew and spoke and sang of the problem of temptations. (We don’t hear of that much anymore.) Maybe that speaks of how lightly we take the matter in today’s church.

For sure, we all are still tempted. And the Proverbs not only spells out the reality of temptation (mostly in the category of sexual compromise), but gives us glimpses as to why we so often give into it and how we should deal with it.

The Bible comprehensively answers so many of the issues related to temptation:

- So who among us is not tempted? (James 1:14)
- Who among us has never yielded to temptation? (Romans 3:10,23)
- Where does temptation come from? (James 1:13)
- How do I escape temptation? (1st Corinthians 10:13)
- How do I “advance pray” about temptation? (Matthew 6:13)

A closer examination of the Proverbs with an application to the broader scope of temptations reveals many of the dynamics of facing and experiencing temptations. We will take them in the order of these three major passages:

Proverbs 1: 8-19

It is valuable for the reader to note... the book includes in its first chapter a significant portion to the matter of being tempted. That in itself says something about the issue of temptation. It hits us right off the bat. It is not reserved for just young people. It is not an issue faced by the middle agers... AND seniors have not gained some special immunity from it. It plagues every generation from the time we begin to know right from wrong and it sticks with us until we are at the doorstep of departing this. One thing we can say we all hold common right now—we are among the tempted.

- The chapter 1 identification of the problem is called ENTICEMENT. (*yepathtuka from patha*) to be wide open, to be persuaded.
- This warning about temptation involves the times when other sinners try to coax you into joining in them in their evil plots. “come with us...” (v.11)
 - This plan is connived and plotted and waits for the “perfect time...” —“Let us lie in wait...”
 - This temptation is to go along with the evil crowd. (v.14). “We shall all have one purse” ... we’ll divvy up the spoils, we’ll split the loot.
 - This proverb teaching shows that while this sinful group sets an ambush to take advantage of the innocent, they wind up being ambushed themselves. They may manage to seize lots of loot, but in the end, it all comes back to bite them. (v.18-19) In the end, this robs them of life.
 - One never knows just how deep a temptation will take him. What starts out as just a plan to commit a robbery, it could end with a life being taken. (v.16)
- Just think of all the temptations which come from others pressuring or persuading a person to go along with the crowd, to be party to some evil plot. And if you remember what it feels like to face such persuasion, if one is not on guard, their whole life and reputation is wide-open to being sucked in.
 - The wise does not leave himself “wide-open” to be so vulnerable to such a plot.
 - The warning is... “Do not walk in the way with them, keep your feet from their path.” (v.15).

Proverbs 5:1-14

While this proverb is set in the attraction of an immoral woman, just think of how many temptations make sin look so attractive to us.

- Her lips may drip with honey. (v.3) That is a metaphor for how appealing a temptation can be. If it is a “get rich scheme” or some “sexual rendezvous” or “to cheat is a business deal” or to “be party to some leverage scheme” at work. The initial appeal seems so desirable.
- The tempter cares nothing about the path to life or the eventual accountability for sinning. (v.6) The path this takes is unstable or staggering... but in the heat of the appeal, the path of life doesn’t matter and the participants don’t even know what the path to life really is.

- So one enticing another with a “drink” or a “pill” or a “fix”, gives no thought at all to the true path of life. That makes no difference in the moment. It’s just about the high. It is only focused on satisfying a desire in the instant.
- The resources one works so hard for and saves so much for gets consumed by others who couldn’t care less about you. (v.10)
- Just look at the list of LOSSES, when a person caves into temptations:
 - Lose your honor. (v.9 NLT)
 - Give away your best energies and your best years (v.9)
 - Lose your resources. (v.10)
 - Lose your health. (v.11)... how many vices actually rob a person of their health.
- A person’s life comes to its close with a barrel full of regret... “My heart spurned reproof, I have not listened...” (v.12-13).
- Life ends with a groan. (v.11)
- And all that is left is public disgrace. (v.14)

Proverbs 7:1-27

This again sets the scene of temptation in the context of the immoral woman and still the spiral of giving in to a temptation follows a similar path.

- The tempted person often displays a naivety about the dangers lurking in the situation. (v.6-7)
- Some during a season of temptation will “flirt” with the situation, seeing just how close he can come without really getting involved. “He passes through the streets near her corner...”
- Temptation often escalates in the times of darkness. (v.9). Evil loves darkness. The tempter deludes a man into thinking the darkness hides him from anyone seeing or knowing what is going on. (See what Jesus says about men loving darkness in Jn. 3:19-21).
- There is a disconnect between one’s profession of faith and their private practice in life. (v.13-15) It’s like in this case, “After we finish our prayers and devotions, we can commit adultery.” There is this disillusion about temptation and sin which separates one’s faith life from his fantasy life. What happens on Sunday has no bearing on what happens on Friday night, is a distortion... it is delusional.
- Sin comes looking for us. (v.15-18) “I have looked for you and found you...”
- Another myth in times of temptation is that “no one will ever know.” (v.17-19)
 - This is the lie of temptation... there will be no consequences because no one will ever find out. But there is always a cost to caving in.
- The temptress or the temptation takes several angles at getting to the innocent. (v.20) One line in itself may not get a person hooked but the tempter keeps coming and turning up the pressure.
 - The allurements may play to a person’s fantasies for a long time, but the cave-in happens in a moment. (v.22) “suddenly...” At that moment, the victim forgets the cost.

- The tempted must always watch the heart. (v.24-27) “Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways...” (v.25).
 - Temptation always starts with inward thoughts and desires.
 - James 1:14-15—**“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”**
 - The righteous must ALWAYS remind himself of the outcomes. It makes for the ultimate tragedy when one forgets where the path of yielding ends. “Her house is the way to Sheol” (v.27)
 - The righteous will consider the house of the wicked. (21:12)

Some additional truths about temptation:

- One must “stay away from” or “run away from” the path of evil. (4:14-15)
- The righteous must learn and practice “self-control.” (25: 28 and Galatians 5:22-23)
- And one of the greatest “tricks” of all by the tempter is that a person can always convince himself that his way is right. (See. 21:2)
- ALWAYS know that the Lord knows everything we do! (5:21)

The failure to take temptation seriously just opens a person to being an easier prey. We may not take temptation as a real threat. But when we stop to realize the evil one behind it all, we will say with Peter, **“Your adversary the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”** (1st Peter 5:8)

Lesson 6—GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH MONEY, STEWARDSHIP, AND WORK

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 3:9-10, 30:7-9

Dealing with and handling money is a huge part of one's life. Money represents time and energy expended in order to receive a return or gain. The Bible has a huge amount of information on this whole matter of stewardship. One author says that there are over 2,000 verses in the Bible about money, possessions and stewardship. Jesus spoke a great deal about money with His most famous saying being...

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Mt. 6:19-20, 24 NASB)

A Christian should be vitally concerned about being a good steward of the monies or things of value that God places in our hands to use for kingdom purposes and life pursuits. Truth is... there are righteous and positive ways to go about the whole money/wealth thing and there are unholy ways to deal with it. And Proverbs as a book speaks with great emphasis on dealing with the whole money and stewardship matter.

A vital Scripture from the Pentateuch which sets the whole context for approaching the subject of finances is found in Deuteronomy 8:11-18...

¹¹ “But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. ¹² For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, ¹³ and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! ¹⁴ Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. ¹⁵ Do not forget that he led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry. He gave you water from the rock! ¹⁶ He fed you with manna in the wilderness, a food unknown to your ancestors. He did this to humble you and test you for your own good. ¹⁷ He did all this so you would never say to yourself, ‘I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.’ ¹⁸ Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath.”

How crucial it is that we remember always, that the ability to gain wealth and earn a living and have possessions ULTIMATELY comes from God. Forgetting that foundational truth causes a person to become haughty and prideful, having feelings of autonomy and independence from God who has made all things. When one goes in that direction, his value system is more prone to become warped and distorted and life takes on a godless approach to money and possessions. So let's gain something of an overview of what Proverbs teaches about this vital topic.

HOW MONEY AND WEALTH ARE GAINED

Proverbs spells out some legitimate and righteous ways for one to gain resources:

1. Work for it. (Isn't that revolutionary and radical!).
 - a. 6:6-11—learn lessons from the little creatures
 - b. 10:4,5,26- the negligent and lazy and the hard worker
 - c. 12:11, 24—the worker and the diligent
 - d. 13:4—the sluggard
 - e. 14:4,23—the profit in labor
 - f. 28:19—the worker will have plenty of food.
2. Save some of it.
 - a. 3:9-10—faithful stewardship is rewarded with full barns
 - b. 6:6-8—provisions in the summer laid back for lean season ahead (10:4-5)
 - c. 13:16—the value of planning ahead
 - d. 21:5, 20—putting a portion in savings.
3. Receiving an inheritance—the Proverbs both speak of blessing of leaving an inheritance and receiving one. But both come with responsibility.
 - a. 13:11—Some translations have by fraud while others translate the Hebrew word as “money out of the air” like a windfall. Many times children inheriting money too early without proving themselves or maturity to a point just “gulp it down” (21:20) or blow it. One can easily lose their sense of proportion and responsibility.
 - b. 13:22—a good man leaves an inheritance even for his grandchildren
 - c. 19:14—the inheritance of house and wealth come from one's father
 - d. 20:21—the timing of an inheritance can be a good or a bad thing

Significant warnings about ill-gotten or illegitimate means of obtaining money:

1. 1:19—Seizing or stealing by violence
2. 11:1—Using a false balance
3. 13:11—Gaining wealth by fraud
4. 15:27—the one who profits illicitly
5. 20:14—“sharp dealing”

6. 21:6—lying to get rich
7. 22:7, 16—taking advantage of the poor
8. 28:8—charging interest or excessive interest or usury
 - a. One might be wise to examine Ex.22:25 and Lev. 25:36-37 and Dt. 23:19-20

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT THE USE AND MISUSE OF MONEY

Proverbs includes not only how to obtain money or gain wealth in righteous ways and warns of specific abuses which obtain money in ways which are displeasing to God, there are several other practical instructions for the way we handle our money.

1. 6:1-5—Being the guarantor for another’s debt
 - a. 11:15
 - b. 17:18
 - c. 22:26-27
2. 11:4—No awareness of the limits of wealth
 - a. 11:28—Not trusting in riches
 - b. 23:4-5—Living only to gain more wealth
 - c. 28:11—Becomes delusional about his wisdom

Overall, the wise person will apply himself to discover the most positive ways of utilizing the blessings God supplies for a higher good.

1. 11:24-25—the man who sows freely and practices generosity.
 - a. 19:17—Being gracious to the poor
 - b. 22:9—Practicing generosity
 - c. 28:27—Generosity ensues blessings
2. 15:16—learning the grace of contentment
 - a. 16:8, 19 –Better to have a little...
 - b. 30:8-9—Learning to live with enough

Despite so many warnings, wealth should be viewed and handled as a great blessing from God. Tim Keller says that “Wealth is a great good so long as it does not become your summum bonum—your greatest good.” Money can be the cause of considering it a “fortified city”, rather than trusting in the Lord to be our refuge. The rich in the Bible typically considered themselves to be stewards of their wealth, not the owners of it. There is no sin in being wealthy until it becomes one’s consuming life ambition and security. Remember, no one can serve both God and money. Keeping that perspective will take one a long way on the path of holiness.

Lesson 7—GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH JUSTICE

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 1:3; 2:6-9

“When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous, but terror to evildoers.” (Prov.21:15 NIV)

While we live in the New Testament era, we must never abandon the principles of truth underscored in the Old Testament. Even Paul states that ***“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ... These things happen to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.”*** (1st Corinthians 10:6,11 – NIV)

Isn't justice at the core of what Jesus meant when He announced the launch of His ministry in the Nazareth synagogue? ***“Unrolling the scroll, He found the place where it is written: The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captive and release from darkness for the prisoners.”*** (Luke 4:17-18). To experience HIS grace, must mean seeking justice in the world, if we are truly His followers.

We acknowledge that we are not the national, physical nation of Israel, to whom the O.T. civil law applied specifically. However living in any nation and any era of time under the sovereign, universal power of God, the Almighty puts every man and nation under a moral obligation to yield to the values and expectations of God. Any nation and any person who wants to acknowledge Him as God and please Him would be WISE to hear and heed what God says about any matter, including this matter of justice. America is not the new “national Israel”. This nation was founded though on a strong measure of the Judeo-Christian ethic. And that ethic is being severely undermined by politicians, educators, and citizens alike in our times. Still every nation would benefit if it sought out its public and civil policy for dealing with matters of justice from the Word of God, both Old and New Testaments.

Some churches today emphasize social justice (social causes) while others, the more fundamentalists emphasize personal salvation. Restoration churches typically fall into this category. Yet, despite our practices, can it be one without the other and still be in line with the will of God?

There is a great deal being spoken of justice today, and in our land at least, the discussion is primarily about racial and social justice. While racial concerns and tensions were not the

primary concern of the Old Testament era, especially in the period of the United Kingdom in Israel, must be said about justice in two primary areas: civil justice and economic justice.

- ***“Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.”*** (Is.1:17)
- ***“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*** (Mic.6:8)

The word for justice in the Hebrew Bible is *misphat*. The word for love/grace/compassion/mercy is *chesedh*. Micah uses both words to describe what God is looking for to accompany walking humbly with Your God.

Tim Keller states that *“Biblical justice is not first of all a set of bullet points or a set of rules and guidelines. It is rooted in the very character of God and it is the outworking of that character, which is never less than just.”* (*Justice in the Bible*).

Herman Bavinck insists that God’s justice is both retributive (i.e. punishing evildoers) but reparative (i.e. restores those who are victims of injustice. And God’s remunerative [restorative] justice is far more prominent in Scripture than His retributive justice.” That however does not diminish the significance of His retributive justice.

Proverbs has so very much to say about justice. It is mostly in the context of dealing with the poor, but its principles must apply to every situation and circumstance of caring for the vulnerable and exploited.

Matters of Social Concern

1. 1:3—One stated purpose of the Proverbs is to pursue a position of wisdom leading to righteousness, justice and equity!
2. 2:8—The Lord gives wisdom to guard the paths of justice.
3. 29:7—“The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, the wicked does not understand such concern.” (NASB). The NIV translates that as “The righteous CARE about justice for the poor...” (Care means to search out a matter and justice here means “the claims or the rights” as the NASB has it)
 - a. This raises a question... how can we be righteous and neglect or overlook the needs of the poor?
 - b. Doesn’t Matthew 25:31-46 clearly indicate that a person’s care for society’s most needy is a reflection of how we treat the Master Himself? And doesn’t that factor into the judgment?

4. 14:20-21; 19:4—An attitude of neglect is more than “uncharitable”... it is a sin!
 - a. Keller says when we quarantine the poor or relegate them to the places of isolation in our cities and communities, it only deepens the poverty. He insists that they need a “neighbor”, not just a donor.
5. 14:31; 19:17, 22:2—Caring for the “poor” is a sure way to honor our Creator. It means respecting the poor as persons. It takes more than pity—it takes love and respect for their personhood. Yet our culture promotes “every man for himself.” And many churches just push a “winning souls” agenda which never addresses human need. (Do you see any inconsistency in that?)

Proverbs Promoting Values About Justice

1. 16:8, 10-11—“Better... than...”
2. 21:3, 7, 15—DOING righteousness and justice desired more than...
3. 22:22-23—The LORD will plead their case...
4. 29:4—Stability is restored to the land...
5. 29:26-27—Justice is associated with “being upright in the way...”

Proverbs Issuing Warnings about Injustice

1. 11:1—An abomination to the Lord
2. 13:23—Life provisions can be swept away by injustice
3. 19:28—Making a mockery of justice
4. 22:28; 23:10-11—Moving an ancient boundary stone is the equivalent of stealing a man’s inheritance... robbing a family for generations.
5. 24:23-25—Showing partiality in judgment

It is my conviction that Jesus’ words in Matthew 25 is Him saying as much as ... *“I am the poor on your doorstep, I am the victim of injustice in your local courts, I am the one that the rich and powerful have exploited, I am the homeless in your community. So what are you going to do to help Me?”*

Do we as a people, American Christians or Christian Americans need to stop relying on the “state” to handle this problem while we continue building and enhancing our great edifices as monuments to ourselves? Are we convicted at all about all forms of injustice around us? What more can we do as a church? What more can I do as a Christian?

Lesson 8—GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH CORRECTION

Texts for Lesson—Assorted Proverbs with focus on Proverbs 3:11

“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a Father the son he delights in.” (Prov.3:11 NIV)

Sometimes we find ourselves on the receiving end of discipline, correction or rebuke. And sometimes we find ourselves needing to be on the giving end of it. Both have some issues related to them.

When on the receiving end, it is all too easy to become defensive. And that can play out in many ways.

- A person may react with denial. We have our self-protective barriers up so strong that we simply refuse to see ourselves having such a fault that needs correcting. So one quickly responds with an “I didn’t do that...” or a “That’s not me... I wouldn’t think of it.”
- A person may respond with a passing the buck. “No you’ve got the wrong person. It was ... who said that, not me.”
- A person may become defensive and say something like “Well, you’ve got the wrong picture about it,” or “You don’t know what you’re talking about.” Even more so, this person may say something like, “You don’t have any right to talk to me like that,” or “It’s really none of your business.” You notice a really sharp edge to their words and after that you can expect silence. They will pull away from you usually.
- Sometimes a person may have some Bible verses in their holster and respond with ***“Judge not, lest you are judged,”*** or ***“Take care of your own house before you come straightening mine out.”***

Many other ways of negatively responding to correction are possible. And it’s true... seldom is it pleasurable. Even the Scriptures speak of this in the New Testament: ***“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*** (Hebrews 12:11) And, ***“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*** (2nd Tim.3:16-17)

There are times when it necessary to save a person from certain disastrous outcomes, so approaching them, while difficult and maybe even painful, is really necessary. ***“My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins.”*** (Jms.5:19-20 NIV)

While it is hard to distinguish it sometimes, a person can stray from the path, perhaps without intending to disappoint God or put one's relationship in jeopardy or risk. Often, the person on the outside looking in can have a more objective view, but coming to grips with that can be a hard pill to swallow. It can be difficult to broach a delicate subject with a friend or fellow-church-member and it may be even more difficult to hear. Proverbs has much to say about correction... giving it and receiving it.

Our key verse (3:11) is a father's appeal for his son not to reject the counsel and correction of a concerned dad. Notice his words: **"Do not despise..."** and **"do not resent"**. Those may be the very reactions one can have when warned or disciplined. The recipient may despise the one offering it. It can come across as intrusive and invading your space. And the hearer may feel that the person, even it is someone close (like a dad, or brother, or close friend) is meddling and interfering where they do not belong and react with resentment. The fear of that kind of reaction is what causes most people to simply let something go. It feels too risky. Too much is at stake to try and approach that person. So typically one thing often done is to turn one's head and let it go, even if it leaves that person in real spiritual danger. Just look away and "wink at it" and maybe it will get better on its own. It seldom does. How many situations will God hold us accountable for not confronting a person when possibly we were the only person in a position to address it?

An overview of the Proverbs may provide some keen insight on this matter of correction:

- 5:1-2—Another's words of wisdom and insight just may help a person maintain discretion and preserve knowledge.
- 6:23—God's teachings provide needed light in dark places (where one cannot see clearly) and correction is a way to life.
- 9:7-8—One might need to prepare himself for very different reactions: abuse, insult, and hate from the mocker or wicked; OR love from the wise and righteous man who is humble enough to add to his learning.
- 10:17—Heeding discipline actually shows the way to life, but ignoring correction can lead others astray. (Our actions have an impact on others.)
- 11:14—It is risky and costly for anyone to have a lack of guidance, even a nation. Multiple sound advisers ensure success.
- 13:18—Ignoring discipline can lead to poverty and shame. Heeding correction is actually honored.
- 15:12—The mocker resents correction, and is so prideful, he would never consult a person of experience or wisdom. V.31-32 explains the great value of a life-giving rebuke. But it also teaches that it is self-destructive to ignore discipline. And verse 33 adds "humility comes before honor." That's the question... is one humble enough to heed wise counsel or will one follow their own destructive path to failure and heartache?

- 19:18—Failure to provide discipline means being a willing party to his death. 19:20-21 adds that listening to advice and accepting instruction leads to more promising outcomes. And one may have his mind made up on his path, but it will never overrule or override the Lord’s purpose.
- 20:5—Here is an explanation that intentions and private purposes of a person’s heart are truly deep waters. A man of understanding is needed to “draw them out” where they can be faced and addressed.

Before closing our study on Proverbs, let revisit again some of these words which point to the positive factors for godly influence and the negative ways that some people demonstrate an head-set opposition to living God’s way:

- *Hokma*—wisdom—taking the moral path, even when there is no specific law to address an issue.
- *Musar*—discipline or instruction—to receive or give training with accountability.
- *Bina*—discernment or insight—being able to see distinctions even when they are subtle. Being able to identify the good, better, best in a matter.
- *Haskef*—prudent behavior, *ormah*=prudence and *mezimmah*=discretion... all related to planning a life course and choosing to live it out... especially when it deals with problems, challenges. It includes the idea of foresight (seeing the probable end)
- *Leqah*—Learning from extensive study
- *Ewil*—fool... one who lacks true wisdom and despises discipline (1:7)
- *Lesim*-the mocker. This is not a lack of mental ability, but having a haughty attitude, refuses to listen to anyone.
- *Pethiy*—the simple. This has the idea of gullibility, believing anything.
- *Keciyl*—obstinate-refusing to be told anything, hates a person who attempts to correct them. (1:22)

So one can decide to be smug about his choices and decisions, maintaining a position of prideful haughtiness, no matter the cost, no matter what anyone says to them. That’s every person’s choice. Another person may have a real heart for people and sense the most likely outcomes of the path a friend is on and would like to see it change, but considers the risk of approaching them too high a cost of losing that friend. And then there are those who prayerfully and humbly try to approach another with a sincere hope of seeing them make a course-correction to their better outcome. But this person knows from Scripture that saying nothing leaves them totally at the mercy of the rules of the law of the harvest. (A man reaps what he sows.) So they choose to ask for a “conversation” out of concern and love. Finding the way to the balance of gentleness and tenderness and getting a point across effectively with firmness may be a real challenge. But he/she must try.

Paul once asked, **“Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?”** (Ga. 4:16 NIV)