

# Seven Bible Studies 2017

## Poetry

### June 1: Proverbs 1 (Kevin Crittenden)

#### PROVERBS STUDY

Week 22

Poetry Reading for 6/1/17

Proverbs 1

1:7 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . .”

9:4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

Hello and welcome to the reading of Proverbs! For my comments, I am leaning on the wisdom in the book by Raymond C. Orland Jr. entitled “Proverbs: Wisdom that Works.”

By the way, most of the proverbs that I cite are from the NIV and ESV, except when they aren't.

Many of you have read Proverbs, perhaps several times and maybe there are some bits of wisdom that really resonate with you. Other proverbs seem “odd” or don't make much sense. Certainly, they read like a grocery shopping list, items listed as the person thought of them, with no particular direction or association to the ones around them.

Why Proverbs?

The Law and the Prophets are two of the ways that God speaks to us in the Old Testament, laying out the general patterns of the righteous life. But our lives are filled with daily concerns and decisions that must be made.

Who should I marry?

What kinds of friends should I make and which kinds of people should I avoid? Which would be the better job offer to accept?

How shall I invest my money?

How do I treat my neighbor?

And this is what Proverbs is about – God's Wisdom given to us to act as principles to follow in our daily lives. God knows that we need help and guidance in our day-to-day existence and He provides for His children.

You will not, however, find the knowledge necessary to build a fence in Proverbs. But you WILL find the wisdom not to build your fence at 7 in the morning when the neighbors are still asleep.

Prov 27:14 “If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.”

We need to know these things. Our neighbors want us to know these things.

James 3:13-18 reminds us that there are two kinds of wisdom, one that leads to Life and other down to death.

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Peter was using the wrong kind of wisdom in Matthew 16:21-23 and was sharply rebuked by Jesus for it.

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Our natural wisdom of self-preservation points to the survival of the ego but the wisdom of the Cross frees us from the distortions of our pride and points the way to resurrection and new life. We look to Proverbs for this wisdom.

The collections of proverbs began as a teaching tool for the training of leaders in ancient Israel and were written by kings and sages in the royal court for young men whose future was to be part of the nobility. You and I may not be destined to hobnob with the aristocracy but we can ascend to that level of greatness and leadership, not by our own efforts and earthly wisdom, but through God’s way, through the Cross, through humility.

An old poem reads:

When God wants to drill a man  
And thrill a man  
And skill a man  
When God wants to mold a man  
To play the noblest part

When He yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed,  
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him  
And with mighty blows converts him  
Into shapes and forms of clay  
Which only God can understand

How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes

How He uses whom He chooses  
And with mighty power infuses him  
With every act induces him  
To try His splendor out –  
God knows what He's about.

Wisdom is the gospel of Christ reshaping even us for royalty, as God places us on his anvil and we trust Him enough to stay there until His work is done.

Royalty, you say? Me? Yes.

1 Pet 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

With your kind permission, I’ll skip the Who Wrote What in Proverbs – mostly they’re written by Solomon but all represent God’s wisdom to enhance our lives.

Vv 1:1-7 present us with the purpose and the theme of Proverbs.

A proverb is a short saying of practical truth, which is a bit of wisdom, easily remembered. “He who hesitates is lost”, “Look before you leap.” We all know these.

Biblical proverbs are also sound-biteish, but offer something more. The Hebrew noun “proverb” is related to a verb that means “to represent, to be like.” A Biblical proverb, then, represents a little model of reality, which is reflected in our daily lives. By pondering the proverbs, we can learn something about our lives BEFORE stepping out into our day.

The world says “Live and learn.”  
God is saying “Learn and live.”

The goals of the Book of Proverb are stated in 1:2,  
“To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight.”  
The first goal – to know wisdom and instruction – is to develop deep character.  
The second – to understand words of insight – is how to think straight.

No one reaches the end of wisdom as stated in 1:5.  
“Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser.  
Let those with understanding receive guidance”

We all continue to grow in the Lord – the simple, the youthful and the wise.

To develop deep character, we need to know WHAT wisdom is. Memorizing the Bible will make you impressive but will it make you wise? Knowledge without application is reminiscent of the Pharisee on the street corner, very versed in Scripture but ignorant in application. Wisdom is skill, expertise, competence that understands how life really works, how to achieve successful and even beautiful works that align with the will of God.

What is wisdom?

Perceiving wisdom – This type of wisdom asks the hard questions about life and understands God’s answers.

Acting wisdom – This type of wisdom guides us in our practical conduct on a daily basis.

Communicating wisdom – We attend the school of the sages, learning from the best and brightest.

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But the word "instruction" in 1:2 is also translated as "discipline." We often need to be chastened and corrected. Oops. That's no fun. But if we are teachable, then we can progress and grow in wisdom.

When he described his conversion to faith in Christ, the Reformer John Calvin said that God subdued his mind and brought it to "a teachable frame."

A Christian, then, is a teachable follower of Christ.

"I'm a proud man pursuing humility by the grace of God." – C. J. Mahaney

We remember that Job asked (Job 28:12) "But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?" and answered (28:28) "The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding."

Verse 1:7 is the theme of Proverbs. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

What is the fear of the Lord?

It is not a cowering dread of His fearsome anger, as you await some dire punishment for your guilty behavior. Rather, the fear of the Lord is:  
Prov 15:33 - an openness to Him, an eagerness to please Him and the humility to be instructed by Him.

Job 28:28 - a willingness to turn from evil and change.

Gen 22:12 – surrender to His will

Deut 6:2,5 – one way we love Him

Eph. 5:21 – meekly fitting in with one another.

The fear of the Lord changes our mindset from "I am the measure of all things" to "I am being measured."

The fear of the Lord matures us so we no longer need lists of do's and don'ts to tell us how to behave but rather, our motivation comes from deep within. We know what is right and what we love because it is of God.

"In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." – C. S. Lewis

Back to Proverbs:

In 1:8 we see a father speaking through his wisdom to his son. Sons (and daughters) need (and want) this kind of guidance and course-correction in their lives, especially in the teen-age years. Children need the comfort and security of limits, so they push boundaries, just to satisfy themselves that Someone is in control and cares about them.

The dad says "Son, I love you. Listen to your mother and I. Here is what you will find, out in the world. And here's what you should do about it." Unlike a helicopter parent, who mistakenly hovers and protects, this wise dad PREPARES his son for the realities of life.

To me, this scenario is like a Kodak moment – one of those ideal situations that in real life, rarely occur. How many of us fathers have sat down with our sons and daughters, as they are about to launch into the world, and passed on our wisdom, our experience, our concerns, our hearts and our enduring love?

1:9 “They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” The father explains that wisdom makes us attractive. God, through wisdom, made us for glory, not mediocrity. We beautify ourselves by removing the rags of ego and putting on the humility of Christ.

Rom 13:14 “ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh”

Vv 1:10-19 are the father’s warning against sinful men. He knows that his son WILL encounter these kinds of people and tells him what to do. OUR children WILL encounter these people someday, sooner or later, whether in school or at work or wherever. And we need to prepare them.

But these verses seem to be talking about murderers. That seems rather extreme. How does that pertain to us? The father, in 1:19, says “Such are the paths of ALL who go after ill-gotten gain . . .”

The father is talking about ALL those who take advantage of others for their own personal gain. You and I have met some of these people: Bullies, racists, unethical Wall Street insiders, terrorists, hackers, abusers, bent politicians, gossipers . . .

Are we ourselves like this? Are we happy when others succeed? Or are we happy when they get what’s coming to them? Do we pray for our persecutors to be blessed or to be punished? When we are driving and some reckless fool cuts us off, do we wish a policeman would pull him over? And put him in jail? Where he can rot for all we care? Envy and resentment is where violence begins. Our hearts are lying in wait for blood.

Rather, accept the promise of Wisdom by accepting the peace of Christ.

Col 3:15 “ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

We now pass from the wisdom of the father to Lady Wisdom who debuts spectacularly in v. 1:20. You don’t have to travel to an ashram in India to find her. You don’t have to climb a mountain to consult a guru living on the top to find her. You don’t need to drop acid or smoke peyote to find her. So where is she?

Well, right in front of you!

Lady Wisdom stands at the crossroads of culture, where business, government, education, the arts, athletics, all intersect. She stands right here in the bustle of our daily lives like a street preacher and shouts loudly to all who will listen. Why does she go to the public square (shopping mall)? Because that’s where the people are. Many of us just walk right by, intent on getting the chores done on our endless list of Things To Do. But God has time for you right now. He makes Himself free for your benefit.

“Unbelief says: Some other time, but not now; some other place but not here; some other people, but not us. Faith says: Anything He did anywhere else He will do here; anything He did any other time He is willing to do now; anything He ever did for other people he is willing to do for us! . . . God wants to work through you!” – A. W. Tozer

Lady Wisdom's rebuke covers the rest of chapter 1.

"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?"

Rev 3:20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

Lady Wisdom comes with a warning. Jesus is knocking but if you continue saying "I'll get that later," you are playing Russian roulette.

V 1:28 "Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me."

If we are too busy for God now, He will judge us later and He will not apologize.

Who are the simple? Well, me, for one, for the longest time. Uncommitted, lackadaisical about God, not sure of my beliefs, conformist, whatever, tending to procrastinate . . . But Lady Wisdom calls to the simple. They still have a chance.

James 1:6-8 "6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Hence the warning. Do we want to receive something from the Lord? Well, yeah!!! I thank God that He nudged me into the direction of finally sitting myself down in the corner and really thinking about my beliefs – what I actually did believe in, what direction I wanted to go, and what I was going to do about it.

To adopt the attitude that "I'm OK as I am" is to miss the instruction of Wisdom. Wisdom is purifying – a method of refining us by ridding us of the dross and increasing the purity of what remains. It's not always a comfortable process.

The mockers and scoffers and fools cited in 1:22 are more hardened cases than the simple. Fools are thickheaded and stubborn, with their eyes shut tightly and their hands covering their ears. They always know better and have an endless supply of excuses. Scoffers are aggressively confident, sometimes impressive in their arguments and actively hostile to God. We've met both scoffers and fools. There is no happily-ever-after for them.

"How long?" Lady Wisdom asks. How many sermons will it take before you take the better path? How many pits must you fall into before being led by the Spirit?

1:23 "If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you."

The word "turn" is the Biblical word for repentance. If you turn to Jesus, He will make the Bible come alive for you. That is His promise.

1:27 "when calamity overtakes you like a storm,  
when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,  
when distress and trouble overwhelm you."

Not “if” but “when.” The storm is coming. And the perfect storm is when you succeed and get your perfect life with you at the center of it. It is the calamity of YOUR kingdom coming and YOUR will being done.

C. S. Lewis reminds us of the danger of Hell: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, “Thy will be done.””

The storm is coming. But if your house is built upon the rock of the wisdom of Christ, you will be prepared.

Matt 7:24-27 “24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Is your foundation secure?

### **Comment:**

Butch O’Neal:  
Excellent, Kevin! Thank you!

### **Comment:**

Michael Babb:  
Lots of good thought here Kevin. One I wanted to ask about was your section of fear of the Lord.

“What is the fear of the Lord?

It is not a cowering dread of His fearsome anger, as you await some dire punishment for your guilty behavior. Rather, the fear of the Lord is:  
Prov 15:33 - an openness to Him, an eagerness to please Him and the humility to be instructed by Him.  
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The fear of the Lord matures us so we no longer need lists of do’s and don’ts to tell us how to behave but rather, our motivation comes from deep within. We know what is right and what we love because it is of God.”

I always struggle some with the idea of fearing God. Do you think God wants us to fear him, or does he simply understand that is one natural response to the relationship we have? To put it in perspective: Since I am the source of authority, punishment and consequence in my children’s lives, they do fear me on some level. Do I want them to fear me?

Since we are talking about learning and wisdom, do I want my teaching them to have a basis in fear? In the conversations I have had before a lot of times people end up equating this kind of fear between children and their parents as a healthy respect, but it always sticks in my craw just a little bit.

I ask because fear does have such a negative connotation. The list of examples you gave and the reasoning, would the words humility or humbleness work the same? The idea of acting out of fear never sits right with me, because it doesn't sound, well, wise.

To quote an author no where near as smart as C.S. Lewis, "Fear is the mind-killer." It does seem that God wants us to fear him because it is referred to as a choice at different times. How would you describe that fear that would make it different than humility or deference?

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you so much for this question. Indeed, it would seem that the word "fear" really is misleading and detracts from the relationship that the Lord wants us to have with him.. With your kind indulgence, I'm going to ponder this overnight; I don't want to just give a knee-jerk response.

Michael Babb:

Take all the time you need.

Charles Fry:

I can't wait till tomorrow to see Kevin's comments (literally, I probably won't have a chance to see them), and he can give a more balanced answer, which I hope to read before long. Meanwhile, two quick things.

Regarding the father illustration, it is true that as a youngster I had some fear of my father's wrath, fear of punishment. I don't really remember trembling in fear too much though. Maybe I did, but it isn't what I remember. I do remember the last time Dad spanked me, how I clung to his legs as I cried, desiring his comfort, even though he had given me a deserved (and I knew it) punishment. In the course of time my fear of Dad really became a fear, not of the man or his hand of discipline, but a fear of disappointing him, letting him down, embarrassing him. That continued even after he died.

And then there is fire. God is illustrated as "consuming fire" more than once, for multiple reasons. I am delighted by fire. It warms my house, cooks my food, makes my car go. It lights my world. It is pleasant to sit by a fire and watch it, hear it, fuel it, and so forth. And I fear fire. I've seen fire raging through structures, I've had an engine fire, a bbq ablaze, a grass fire started by the muffler on my mower, a toaster afire in the kitchen.... Such events are terrifying in the moment, demanding action, potentially disastrous. It would be a mistake in dealing with fire to ever completely forget the reality of its nature, its power, to lose all fear of the flame. Without fire, we'd be in the dark, cold, dead. It provides life and light, and pleasure, but it is also a fearful thing. Our God is a consuming fire.

Kevin Crittenden:

Good morning!

You ask: "Does God want us to fear him?" in the sense that we use the word "fear" today or is it our natural response to the relationship that we have.

I posit that fear is our natural response. God often manifested Himself in the form of destructive natural forces – whirlwinds, pillars of fire, smoke, earthquakes. This showed His mighty power and acted to chasten those whom He addressed. How much attention would you pay to a Deity who manifested as a cute little mouse? Also, whenever angels would visit people, they often had to say "Fear not." You and I and most people react with fear at the unknown. We have grown accustomed to and are comfortable with the world as we know it. Anything that disturbs the predictable world that we know is a cause for alarm. Our first reaction is "Is this a threat to me?"

Fear is a negative emotion and I hear that you don't wish to inflict that on your children. You might have to accept that the very fact of your adult bodily size may cause a bit of awe in the littles. They have to look way up to you and all adults. They live in a sea of legs.

Yes, you are the source of authority. Children need this structure; families need this structure. This structure is Biblical and good. It is comforting to know that somebody is there for protection and guidance. Authority is not a basis for resentment and fear (unless you are a teenager), but rather a source of great comfort. It shows that you CARE about your family, that you LOVE your family enough to provide the guidance that they need.

Quite honestly, if the main emotion that your children felt when seeing you was fear, then they would avoid you. Don't mean to beat a dead horse but my brother and I avoided any interaction with my father until he left us. So I know. I suspect that I and Samantha know something that you may be a bit clueless about – how much of a good father you are.

As a father, you do need to inflict punishment and levy consequences on your children. Again, this is Biblical and good.

Prov 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go;  
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Prov 1:8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction,  
and forsake not your mother's teaching,

Certainly, there are NATURAL consequences, which act as good teaching tools. If a child is going on a field trip and you remind her to take along a jacket but she ignores that advice because she is comfortable at the moment, then don't nag or force her to take one, rather let her be cold. That is a natural consequence. I use this example because our son was like this. NATURAL consequences take you out of the "bad guy" role.

And, of course, there are times when your children will push the boundaries of your parental authority. Rather than nag, which children quickly learn to ignore, calmly state a consequence (as befitting the circumstance) and end the discussion. Don't fall into the trap of trying to justify the consequence. You are the authority. By justifying, you put them on an equal basis with you. Children push the boundaries because they need the comfort of knowing that they are still cared about.

Do you want them to be afraid of you? Well, no. Our job as parents is, over the course of their childhood, to teach them how to be good adults and valued members of

society. So we carefully allow them to grow from complete dependence on us to independence by the time they launch from the parental nest.

Will you make mistakes along the way? Sadly yes. I did. You will. We stumble but we get back on track. One of the greatest gifts you can give your child when you stumble is to show her respect by apologizing to her. It actually is a good lesson – that parents sometimes make mistakes and are not perfect.

Do humility and humbleness have a negative connotation; that they are fear-based? No. We learn to humble ourselves before Christ because it becomes our deepest desire to do so. Have I done this? No. I struggle with my desire to be in charge and change God's timing to suit my own agenda.

I remember that quote about fear from Frank Herbert's epic novel "Dune."

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

How would I describe the fear that God wants us to have of Him that differentiates it from humility or deference? I would say that the "fear" that God wants us to have includes living in accordance to His will. Our daily choices, the actions that we take go towards this idea. Humility and deference are attitudes but not actions. We put aside our own egos, our own need to hold the reins and allow Him to guide us.

Hopefully this helps. Always good to talk with you.

Michael Babb:

Thank you both for the responses, I genuinely appreciate the effort. Some really good things for me to ponder when the idea of fearing the Lord comes up.

The basis of God's relationship with us is love and when fear comes into the conversation it always gives me pause.

I understand that fear of God is a normal reaction, given His position and power, not to mention the possible consequences of failing to follow his word, but I always get stuck when it seems that He wants us to fear him.

Just one more thing to consider I suppose.

And thank you for the kind words about my parenting Kevin, but there are witnesses that can attest that I am fair to midland most days. Sam is amazing though and she pulls up our average.

Kevin Crittenden:

I wanted to give you a full-body jerk reaction rather than just a knee-jerk reaction. So, Sam does the heavy lifting?

Michael Babb:

I lift all the heavy things, because that's the easiest part.

Kevin Crittenden:

Ah, well, stitch that on a sampler and then, in a few years from now, when you're all in family therapy and everyone is looking accusingly at you, then you can haul that out and show everyone. They'll be so impressed!  
By the way, on a completely different subject, how much do you enjoy making a fool of yourself in public? Have you ever acted in a play? Or during a job interview?

Michael Babb:

Hrm, the closest I ever came to acting was Mock Trial, and I am certain I made a fool of myself a few times during that.

And though I wouldn't call it acting, I have occasionally been "extra me" while out with friends. With mixed results.

Kevin Crittenden:

Good enough.

## Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin! I enjoyed your excellent thoughts! You really need to consider writing a book.

😊 1:7 is truly the theme of this book. Fear of the Lord is a loving reverence for God that includes submission to His Lordship and commands of His Word. Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. James 3:7

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger. If I were to write anything, it would be a description of my own journey - what helped me, what I found to be a hindrance, why I persevered, why I sometimes gave up, and certainly the presence of the Holy Spirit which, as you know, is really beyond our ability to describe in mere language.

And, by the way, I once wrote a book of cigarette papers. I'm also good at blank verse.

^\_^

Joanne Caffie:

Books that show others how we gave up being apprehensive and submitted our lives to the Lord is what the world could use more of. I'd definitely read it.

## June 8: Proverbs 2-3 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 23

Poetry Reading for 6/08/17

Proverbs 2-3

Hopefully you like poetry, 'cause this week's certainly a long fellow.

2:10 "For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul."

In Proverbs 2, the father continues teaching his son, giving him the keys to the kingdom, in a sense, by guiding him through the process of growth. These verses offer an explanation of HOW to move forward in our walk with God and avoid the many pitfalls of the world along the way.

Although, on the face of it, we are sinners and undeserving of God's mercy, yet God is willing to work with us. 2:1-4 tell us the attitude that is best for us to adopt. We come to a place where we want to change, we then call out for insight, we cry aloud for understanding, and finally we see His wisdom as more precious than silver. Perhaps the hardest step to take in today's world is this first one – realizing that we need to change. And then realizing that we want to change. And finally, doing something about it; all the while being distracted by friends and family who are often pulling in the opposite direction.

Who will not benefit from wisdom? 1:32 tells us “. . . the complacency of fools will destroy them.” Complacency. Being content with oneself. You don't have to be an atheist to lose out. Or even an agnostic who is searching. You merely have to be satisfied with the way things are – I'm ok, my life's ok, so no need to add Christ to my busy life – to lose out. And perhaps it's a mistake to reason that since you've been saved by obedience to the Cross, that it is now ok to act as if you haven't. Is complacency in our Christian walk a bad thing?

Proverbs 2 flows like this:

1. You can be renewed in God (vv. 1-11)
  - a. Get real with God ( vv. 1-4)
  - b. And God will get real with you (vv. 5-8)
  - c. And you will change (vv. 9-11)
  
2. You can be protected in this world (vv. 12-22)
  - a. Safe from devious men (vv. 12-15)
  - b. Safe from deadly women (vv. 16-19)
  - c. Safe forever in God's place of blessing (vv. 20-22)

Note that vv 1-4 have a couple of “if” statements, followed by the “then” statement. Computer programmers use this construct liberally in their software. IF (some condition is met) THEN (this will happen). We use this in our lives all the time: “Michael, IF you get your room cleaned up, THEN you will be able to have some of this delicious raisin pie.”

Ah, but now I see you raising your hand to offer a demurrer. Your point is that God's grace is unconditional. He doesn't say “IF.” We don't deserve His grace nor can we earn it by our meritorious behavior. So what about these “ifs?” Well, vv 1-4 give an answer. There is a condition. His grace is freely given BUT we have to ask for it. We have to want it. We have to reach out for it decisively and forcefully. If God's grace is unconditionally given to everybody because they are nice people, then where is the need for baptism? (I wrestled with this one for a while.)

Are we willing to trade in the comfort of our status quo, our complacency, for a closer walk with God?

“God cannot bless us, unless he has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, God claims all. There's no bargaining with him.” - C. S. Lewis

Verses 5-8 explain what God's promise is to those who earnestly seek Him. God loves us all, but . . . is He saying “If you seek me, I'll love you even more?” No. He is saying, “If you seek Me, you will find Me, for all that I am worth.”

Vv. 9-11 start with another THEN which says that, when you abide by the IFs, you can become a better person, leading a more upright life, letting your light shine a little brighter, able to be more of a blessing to those in your circle of influence.

It's a shifting of attitude from "Do I have to?" to "I really want to."

Matt 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

So what is God saying in Proverbs 2?

"If you will seek newness in life in Christ (vv. 1-4),  
you will go deep with Him (vv. 5-8), and  
you will change within yourself (vv. 9-11).  
Then you'll be prepared for life in the real world (vv. 12-22).  
That is how grace works.

We WILL encounter at least two temptations in life. Chocolate is a close third.

Vv. 12-15 describe the first temptation "the ways of wicked men." Such men are often in positions of power and you may secretly envy their status and success. Evil tends to want to e-x-p-a-n-d, so you might be invited to become a part of their circle. This would include a little "bending of the rules" from time to time or little "white lies." Maybe done just to nudge the company's bottom line into a more favorable light. All for the good, you see. No skin off your nose. Each time, though, that you go along with such behavior, you back away further and further from the Cross until, one day, you've lost sight of it entirely. But, you remind yourself, you'll get back to it once this push is over at work. Right?

You WILL live and work among such men. Use the wisdom that God has put into your heart and which offers lasting protection.

The second temptation, wicked women, is described in vv. 16-19

The adulterous woman uses seductive words uttered in her mellifluous voice to get her way. She's bored with her own husband and her static life and wants to feel the giddy excitement of new love again. She has mastered the tremendous power of her sexuality and wields it unstintingly. She may be the young shapely woman at work in the tight clothing who smiles often, holds your gaze and listens attentively and sympathetically as you describe the problems you have with your own wife.

But if the wisdom of God has entered your heart, you will know what to do in that moment of temptation. You will run. You will go home and mend that relationship with your wife. SHE, after all, is the one that once made you feel giddy with excitement. Go relive that. We will revisit this later in Songs.

If you are a single man in thrall to a married woman, go home, kneel in prayer and give yourself, body and soul, all over again to your Savior and Lord.

But wisdom is more than just avoiding sin. In vv 20-22 we find that we're in good company if we walk in the ways of the good. We mingle with the good, the righteous, the upright and those with integrity. And, we are all together in "the land", which is to say "in Christ." When we "inhabit the land," we "abide in Christ."

John 15:7 "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Christ is telling us “Come to me. Deal with me. I am able to restore you out of your past failings and defend you for the future. Hurl yourself at me in all your need and I will give myself to you in all my grace. My wisdom will enter your heart in ways you’ve never known before.”

Proverbs 3

3:5 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

In 3, the third parental lecture, the father explains how wisdom bestows well-being. God’s wisdom helps us to come more alive as we learn to deal with life’s difficulties.

Wouldn’t we like to be fully alive?

“The glory of God is man fully alive.” – Irenaeus

This chapter of Proverbs educates us in how to live well in every area of our lives. However, it does seem to have overtones of the prosperity gospel. “They will prolong your life many years”, “This will bring health to your body”, “your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine.” A brief skim through these passages makes it sound like if you have enough faith, then a good worldly life can be had here. (Another IF . . . THEN . . .)

But the prosperity gospel, Crass Materialism in sheep’s clothing, is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Phil 3:7-11 says:

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

And - I’m not sure if the prosperity gospel showcases these verses from Proverbs:  
Pr 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof,  
12 for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Sure, God may bless us with overflowing barns and brimming vats in this life (I’d prefer ovens overflowing with pizza) but vv. 11-12 tell us that we will be disciplined as well. God sends us both earthly blessings and earthly sorrows. Set your hearts on the Giver, not the gift. The gift will surely fail but the Giver will never fail you. The first (setting your hearts on the Giver) emphasizes loving Him; the second (setting your hearts on the gift) is an attitude of entitlement; What’s in it for me? (Free pizza with every Baptism? No.)

The structure of this paternal lecture is not “Do what I tell you to do because I’m your father and I said so” (which rarely works), but rather “Do this and it will benefit you this way.” The Father offers us inducements for following his advice. Note the aspect of control here. In the first case, the son has no control, no free will. In the second, the son (us) has control, he has free will to make choices. Which would be more appealing to you; being told what you have to do or having some say in the matter? Again, one of the challenges of raising children – ceding control to them little-by-little as they mature. And letting them make wrong choices.

God is telling us that in this world of cacophony and competing distractions, that we should listen to Him. Only He can offer us lasting peace. In our culture, marketing forces whine, wheedle and pander, offering us a glimpse of how glamorous our lives could be if only we

bought their products. But how lasting will that new Tesla be? How lasting will that new diamond necklace be? Politics is a major and depressing distraction – if only THOSE people who voted for HER or voted for HIM would grow a brain, then things would be great again! Have you noticed how this issue has helped to create division within the church? Render unto Caesar what belongs to him but otherwise, let's keep our thoughts on things above. I read this somewhere.

What are you being distracted by today?

Vv 3:1-2

1 My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but keep my commands in your heart,  
2 for they will prolong your life many years  
and bring you peace and prosperity.

What brings us lasting peace? The Word of God and the centrality of Christ in our lives.

Sooner or later, as it must to all men, cessation of labor comes into our lives. In our culture, some think we have “arrived” when we reach retirement. Then we can do what we want. Life is good. I’m retired and life is indeed good but I’m busier than ever. That “cessation of labor” clause hasn’t kicked in yet.

If, however, you think that the apex of a successful career means you’ve “arrived,” then your work has become a false idol and you can never relax because you are literally working for your salvation.

Thirdly, if you believe that having a Norman Rockwell family filled with Kodak Moments is having “arrived,” then you can never quite relax, because our children or our spouse can do things which will break our hearts. (Present company excepted, of course.)

Whatever your definition of having “arrived” is, if Christ is not at the center of it, then you are chasing a false idol which can never give you peace. Our beliefs are subject to dynamic change, always attracted by the latest fad and fashion. This is why the Proverbs father says “Keep my commands in your heart” so you may test your beliefs daily. Only God’s wisdom can enable you to lie down in green pastures and beside still waters.

V 3:3 “Let love and faithfulness never leave you; . . .”

God is faithful and steadfast in His love for us. He is Who He is and we can count on Him, as we learn through reading our Bible. We know what we can expect from Him and what He wants from us. Should God’s expectations change with the times? Should we expect God to change for us? Perhaps much of religion in this country is not so much about God as He IS, but how we think God should be “modified” to support our needs. God Version 2.0. It’s about a God who helps us feel good about ourselves without the need for examining ourselves and repenting or the pesky necessity to change our lives. Actually, this message is quite appealing for many.

“You have been taught that there is something wrong with you and that you are imperfect, but there isn't and you're not.” – Cheri Huber

But God, as He is, is the model of love and steadfastness – and we want to change to become more like that. We can trust Him but can He trust us?

So how do we change ourselves and move to that place of peace in God? Verses 5 and 6 point the way.

“ 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
6 in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.”

Our confidence is not based on some impersonal theory of ethics but on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Solomon, probably wiser than you or me or even my wife, leaned on his own understanding in the end and look where that got him.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Matt 22:37 “Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

A. W. Tozer said “Pseudo-faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God fails it. Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or makeshift substitutes. For true faith, it is either God or total collapse. And not since Adam stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or woman who trusted him.”

With God, no Plan B is needed.

The instructing father talks about Wealth and Suffering, two cusps of our lives.

Anybody over the age of 2 knows that sometimes life is good and sometimes life is difficult. When things are going great and everything is coming up roses, then – hey! – we can put God aside for awhile. We don’t need Him right now. And when life turns bitter, trusting God with all our hearts seems impossible.

Of course, God is with us always, no matter how our life is going. In vv. 3:9-12, He guides us in how to trust Him in both extremes of our lives.

9 “Honor the Lord with your wealth,  
with the first fruits of all your crops;  
10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing,  
and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

The LORD says “Do this and here’s your incentive.” The Hebrew verb translated “honor” means “to treat the Lord as weighty”, much as we mean “a person carries much weight in the community”. Prestige. Rank. Importance.

If we merely honor ourselves with our money (“Look upon my fancy car, my Rolex watch, my hilltop mansion, my trophy wife – here’s my business card embossed in gilt lettering”) then we just come across as pompous and somewhat pitiable.

1 Tim 6:10 “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

But wisdom says “Make the Lord famous and prominent by means of your wealth.” If you spend more time fussing over your stock portfolio than in the Word, perhaps a bit of course-correction is needed. The glory of God is the central theme of the Bible. Let us not obscure His light by casting the shadow of Self.

“Then your barns will be filled to overflowing. . .”

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

He does NOT mean that if you give money to Him, He will make you rich. That would not be HONORING God but, instead, USING God.

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Matthew Henry said “God will bless you with an increase of that which is for use, not for show, for giving away, not for hoarding. Those who do good with what they have shall have more to do more good with.”

Vv 3:11-12

11 My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline,  
and do not resent his rebuke,  
12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves,  
as a father the son he delights in.

On the other cusp of life, across from the horn of plenty, lies the area of pain and suffering. And this is the time when we wonder where God is and why isn’t He helping us. After all, doesn’t God love us?

What is God telling us in these verses?

First, when we suffer, it’s not because God is taking something from us, rather it is God lovingly reinvesting in us.

Hebrews 12:7 “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?”

Loving parents guide their children through discipline so that they may develop their full potential.

The second thing that God is telling us is that our wisest course of action when we are being disciplined is to accept it and wait until God fulfills His purpose. When you are being disciplined you have a choice:

1 - despise the Lord’s discipline (react in anger or take the passive response of despair) OR  
2 - be trained by it.

Heb. 12:11 “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.”

In Phil 3:10, Paul says: “ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,”

Paul looked beyond himself to the Cross where Jesus shed his precious life’s blood for sinners and Paul’s heart said “THERE is the wealth I want. THERE is the suffering I trust.”

We come now to why wisdom matters in vv. 13-26 and what wisdom creates in vv. 27-35. Wisdom matters because it is how life works best. And wisdom creates new life in the midst of the worldly culture of death that we inhabit.

In vv. 13-18, we are told that wisdom enriches everyone who finds it. But “enriches” doesn’t mean making a solomonic pile of money. As v14 points out, wisdom is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. Acquiring wisdom means increasing your skill at living life well, something that money cannot do. Money will put food on your table but wisdom will put laughter around that table.

Too often, - far too often - I hear of fathers who leave for work before the children awake and return home after the children are asleep. Surely our culture can seek God’s wisdom to find a better balance by encouraging companies to elevate the importance of family over profit.

In vv. 19-20 we see that God uses wisdom in forming and maintaining His Creation as well as His ongoing providence.

Here is an example, written by Dr. John Piper, about the wisdom of God’s providence:

“Picture yourself as a farmer in the Near East, far from any lake or stream. A few wells keep the family and animals supplied with water. But if the crops are to grow and the family is to be fed from month to month, water has to come on the fields from another source. From where?

Well, the sky. The sky? Water will come out of the clear blue sky? Well, not exactly. Water will have to be carried in the sky from the Mediterranean Sea, over several hundred miles and then be poured out from the sky onto the fields. Carried? How much does it weigh? Well, if one inch of rain falls on one square mile of farmland during the night, that would be 27,878,400 cubic feet of water, which is 206,300,160 gallons, which is 1,650,501,280 pounds of water.

That’s heavy. So how does it get up in the sky and stay up there if it’s so heavy? Well, it gets there by evaporation. Really? That’s a nice word. What’s it mean? It means that the water sort of stops being water for a while so it can go up and not down. I see. Then how does it get down? Well, condensation happens. What’s that? The water starts becoming water again by gathering around little dust particles between .00001 and .0001 centimeters wide. That’s small.

What about the salt? Salt? Yes, the Mediterranean Sea is salt water. That would kill the crops. What about the salt? Well, the salt has to be taken out. Oh. So the sky picks up a billion pounds of water from the sea and takes out the salt and then carries it for three hundred miles and then dumps it on the farm?

Well, it doesn’t dump it. If it dumped a billion pounds of water on the farm, the wheat would be crushed. So the sky dribbles the billion pounds of water down in little drops. . .”

If God, by His wisdom, can work this marvel in nature, then what can He accomplish by His wisdom in you?

In vv. 21-26, we are told that God’s wisdom protects us from the snares of sin. Christ is always by our side, strengthening us.

2 Tim 4:16-17 “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.”

In vv. 27-35 we come to what wisdom creates, which is a culture of life in opposition to the world’s culture of death.

First, the verses talk about our neighbors and how we treat them in our new life. We are to:

- help our needy neighbors. After all, Jesus withheld nothing good from us.
- protect our innocent neighbors. Do you feel God’s protection?
- avoid our violent neighbors. God’s retribution awaits. Not ours.

Matt 22:37-39 "Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Does this mean that we can be critical of others, looking for faults in them and gleefully pointing them out? After all, it's for their own good, right? But that is not what Jesus did for us. He defended us, even with all our faults. So let us defend our innocent neighbors.

3:34 "He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed." God knows how to deal with arrogant people while simultaneously building you up. So humble yourself and trust in Him with all your heart.

We see this sentiment echoed in James as well as 1 Peter 5:5

James 4:6 "But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

V 3:35 "The wise inherit honor, but fools get only shame."

Who, in your opinion, are the wise and who are the fools?

### **Comment:**

Steven Wright:

A most excellent study brother Kevin! Thank You! And I Kant (ok he was a philosopher, not a poet -I guess) see why there should be anything wrong with it's length ;) but what I can say is Colin read this!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

I'll leave off tending my Bacon long enough to comment that in this day and age ( a favorite expression throughout history) most people prefer sound-biteish bits of information. "I'll take my info in small bytes, please." This is how commercials are. So when people see a long posting, they may shy away from it, saying, "I'll get back to this when I have more time. Like when I'm retired."

### **Comment:**

Charles Fry:

But rain is such a simple and obvious thing..... 🤔

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

As with everything else in Creation, the simplest-seeming things turn out to be really complex. I think we can have a much better appreciation for rain, now, knowing a bit about its complexity.

The idea that "Man is the measure of all things" presumes a simplicity to the world that just isn't borne out by examination. It is my contention that the pursuit of science, engaged in honestly, reveals the complexity of our existence and thus points us in the direction of our Creator.

### **Comment:**

Yvonna Hartman:  
Appreciate all of your work. Thank you.

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:  
Thank you, Yvonna! It's a blessing to be in this position, I'm learning a whole lot!

Yvonna Hartman:  
You sure are blessing me!

Kevin Crittenden:  
That's a two-way street!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin! This is a great post.

### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:  
Wow, Kevin Crittenden! You put so much effort into every week's study. Thank you for blessing us with great take-aways. It's also been nice to hear your perspective and history in becoming a Christian.

### **Comment:**

Lori Watt:  
So, Michael Babb, did you clean your room?

## **June 15: Proverbs 4 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 24  
Poetry Reading for 6/15/17  
Proverbs 4

Good whatever!

4:7 "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."

In Chapter 4, the father continues his frank talk with his (probably teenaged) son and mentions that he, too, was the recipient of his father's wisdom. Thus, we learn that wisdom is a tradition, passed from generation to generation. Someday, hopefully, the son will pass this wisdom down to his own children.

I must admit to you that writing about these poignant father-son talks is bittersweet for me. It is a reminder of what I have missed, an experience that I never had. The wisdom passed to me from my father came in the form of negative space and the silence of abandonment.

But Proverbs 4 is filled with hope and tells us how we can live fully.

We see this sentiment echoed in the gospel of John:

John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

Jesus came so that we may have life! And not only life, but life lived abundantly! Fully! THIS is the gift that Christ gives us, not because we earned it or deserved it or because we're nice people, but through the eternal love of His saving grace.

James 1:17 “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

In a sermon on James 1:17, Gardiner Spring said “Other sources of enjoyment there are, but He is the great Source; other givers there are, but He is the great Giver. The sun gives its light, the clouds their rain, the earth its fruits, the sea its treasures; angels give, men are givers; yet of all givers in the universe, God is the greatest – the Father of lights and of mercies, Himself the source, the contriver, the dispenser of every ‘good gift and every perfect gift.’ . . . God is the greatest of givers.”

Proverbs 4 reminds us of the value of tradition and the authority of those who have gone before. Many in this current generation are tempted to seek wisdom only from the horizontal structure of others in their age group and come up empty. They seek guidance through text messages, Twitter, WhatsApp, FaceBook and New Age signs and wonders. Better for them to look to the vertical structure of generations long past, the wisdom they gained in the living of their lives, their triumphs, their failures and their dogged determination to enter the arena even though they often get knocked down to their knees only to rise once again and try once more.

Heb 13:7 “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

Those who have gone before have made our path just a little bit straighter, a little bit easier – wouldn't it be foolish to leave that path, ignore that wisdom and plunge off into the dark woods on our own?

What do the previous generations tell us? They shout: “Jesus didn't fail us, and He won't fail you. Go for it!”

V 4:7 “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”

If you want God's wisdom, it will cost you. You will have to forfeit all your preconceived ideas about how life works, what success means, what your duties are and where your loyalties lie. Why pay that price? What will wisdom do for us? We are told in v 4 “. . .and you will live.” V 6 “. . . and she will protect you . . . and watch over you.” V 8 “. . . and she will exalt you . . . and honor you.” V 9 “. . . and present you with a glorious crown.”

Contrast this to what society wants us to be: Young, slim, the top dog, sexually active, rich, uncommitted, hedonistic, materialistic and married to the Home Shopping Network. Above all, society wants us to be consumers. Poor people can't buy much so they're relegated to the bottom rungs of society. This formula for “success” filled with empty promises and piles of empty shopping bags is a recipe for disaster and death.

Can you think of even ONE person who has given themselves fully to that consumerist lifestyle and grown into the type of person you would want to be?

Anyone?

Naturally, as a red-blooded American male, I immediately thought of Hugh Hefner, surrounded by a bevy of Playboy bunnies in various stages of dishabille. He was (is?) the epitome of success for men, yes? Richer than King Croesus, luxuriating in the Playboy mansion, lounging all day long in his pajamas, hobnobbing with the rich and famous, evaluating shapely and naked young women for his magazine and . . . lessee, what else did he do? Would I want to be him? Would you?

Now think of 2,000 years of peoples from diverse cultures and all walks of life who set their hearts on Christ, turned to His wisdom in the Bible, and found fullness of life. Think of your church family.

Which camp would you rather be in?

In vv 10-19 note the use of the metaphor “the way”. We have 11: . . .the way of wisdom . . . straight paths. 14: . . .path of the wicked . . . the way of evildoers. 18: the path of the righteous . . . the way of the wicked.

How many paths do you see? Two, right? Now perhaps you and I and Fred over there might like to have a compromise, a third choice:

Path 1: The way of wickedness, a terrible life of folly and self-gratification.

Path 2: The way of righteousness and wisdom which gives glory to God

Path 3: The middle road of mediocrity that we don’t mind settling for.

But, gee whiz, God gives us only two choices. God’s wisdom is not just an add-on feature, an accessory that we can tack on to our indecision.

In vv 14-17 we are given both a warning and hope. If evil is our choice, then evil becomes compulsive, and none of us are above it as it is the nature of our depraved hearts.

John 8:34 “ Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”

In Milton’s Paradise Lost, when Satan gave up on God, he thought:

“So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,

Farewell remorse; all good to me is lost;

Evil, be thou my good.”

But there is hope.

V 18: “The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”

The light of Christ within you may only be a glimmer on the horizon now but you may have confidence and hope in the expectation that His light will increasingly illuminate your life as you learn to trust Him.

Phil 1:6 “ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

The final verses in chapter 4 tell us how not to get lost along the way. We need to keep ourselves focused on Christ.

23: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

The counsel of our culture and our age stresses the importance of Numero Uno. So you buy the big exclusive house that you deserve, the expensive car that advertises your importance, the trophy wife who engenders envy in your colleagues, a stock portfolio that would choke a hippopotamus . . . (I keep a hippopotamus in the bathtub for the purposes of demonstration.)

Having all these things tells others that you are more successful than they are, that you are higher on the social ladder than they are and therefore should be envied and adored. Maybe even worshipped a bit. You also have the added perk of looking down on others.

But, sadly, the people who have all that are still depressed because those baubles, those idols of happiness that they worship, only mock the sadness within. There is always the lure of "more." In only one year, your brand spanking new car will be last year's model, needing a carwash.

Life does not flow from the outside in; it flows from the inside out. From our heart. And what we carry in our hearts colors the way we live our lives.

We need our hearts continuously filled with the nourishing life of Christ through faith in the gospel.

John 37:39 "On the final and climactic day of the Feast, Jesus took his stand. He cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says."

Geneen Roth, in her book *Women, Food and God* says "Women turn to food when they are not hungry because they ARE hungry for something they can't name; a connection to what is beyond the concerns of daily life. Something deathless, something sacred. But replacing the hunger for divine connection with Double Stuf Oreos is like giving a glass of sand to a person dying of thirst. It creates more thirst, more panic."

Men, too, need to be wary. What are we taking into our hearts through our eyes from what we look at on our computer screens and video games? Remember the cautionary tale of Medusa; anyone who gazed upon her turned to stone.

Alexander Pope writes about the process of embracing evil within our hearts:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien  
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Getting back to Proverbs, note the references to the parts of our bodies that the sage references in vv 24-27. Your mouth . . ., your lips, your eyes, your feet, your foot. Jesus claims you from the top of your head to your tippy-toes.

Rom 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

It is easy to misstep and be distracted by the constant seductions of this world. But if we are receiving by faith the outpouring of Christ's love in constant supply from His Throne of Grace, we cannot lose our way.

## Comment:

Charles Fry:

Medusa as a metaphor. 😏 Never thought if that before. Thanks for your thoughts on the Word and life.

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I usually mix up a batch of metaphors in the kitchen before posting these musings.

## Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!

## Comment:

Steven Wright:

A most excellent treatise brother! Thank you! Thanks especially for including (James 1:17) it has always been a favorite verse of mine! The supporting quote from Gardiner Spring, is spot on! Milton quote speaks to the mind and actions of so many today! I am truly sorry for your poor (non-existent) paternal example! The longer I live the more I know how blessed I was and am by my own earthly father. I know that your bad experience was probably the leading factor in your resistance all those years to our heavenly father, but I am So very glad you yielded! You are a great blessing to the body of Christ!

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Steven. You are right about the father reference. I did have to pace back and forth along the edge of the chasm for the longest time before making the leap of faith. Trust - the most difficult thing for me. But, with God, all things are possible. I am hoping that my experience will encourage others who are pacing back and forth to come to know that a safe landing is assured, that a precious family awaits them and that, in this case, the grass is definitely greener on the other side.

Matt 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Father's Day is nigh and you are so right to honor your dad. I'll honor him as well from over here. And you, and all the other dads who are such blessings to their families, more than they know.

Ginger Hermon:

Yes, thank you, Kevin, for sharing your experience with us. You've been a great blessing to the family of Christ. Think on Christ's response to his family that was looking for Him, "who are my family?" Those who follow me. I know there are Christian brothers who think of you as a son. Heed their fellowship and love. And ultimately continue to hear God's wisdom and instruction to you, a beloved son, in whom He's well pleased. ❤️

## Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

I was a day late reading this... good excuse... it's been a week of studies with John Lee at Dean Avenue. I stayed home tonight to catch up on today and last night's 7 bible study. While

reading chapter 4:23 I thought on Matt. 12:34, "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Truly we need to guard our hearts & store it up with good things.

## June 22: Proverbs 5-6 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 25

Poetry Reading for 6/22/17

Proverbs 5-6

To make up for Steven posting late, I'll post early.

5:18 "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth."

In Chapter 5, the father has the frank talk about sex with his sons. This isn't about the nuts and bolts of sexuality but rather about the extremely important wisdom necessary for men to glorify God in the steadfastness of their covenantal commitment to their wives and avoid destruction by seeking comfort and pleasure in the arms of other women.

We may feel squeamish when the subject of sex arises and may have difficulties in broaching the subject with our children, but the Bible has no such difficulties. Sex within the covenantal relationship of marriage is a good and perfect gift from above. God knows that we need sexual wisdom and He has provided us with what we need.

Proverbs 5 is divided into three parts:

1 – vv. 1-6 God the Father says "It's time we had a talk"

2 – vv. 7-19 He says "Here is what I want you to know"

3 – vv. 20-23 He continues "Now you have a decision to make"

We can treat our sexuality foolishly – which leads to folly and destruction - or we can treat it wisely - which leads to satisfaction and fulfillment.

Sex is like a fire. In the fireplace, it keeps us warm. Outside the fireplace, it burns our house down. V 5 tells us to keep our fire in the fireplace and keep it stoked up.

The wise father tells his son that he WILL be tempted. The word "honey" in v3 is the attractant (who doesn't like honey?) but in v4 we see that the result is "bitter as gall." The pleasures of the moment, the instant gratification, are very compelling to our fleshly selves but wisdom wants us to rein in our unbridled desires and look beyond to the end results. Is the game worth the candle?

Note: Proverbs details the minefield of sex from the male viewpoint but I'm trusting that women can make the necessary adjustments to fit their circumstances. Fortunately for women, I don't think that they are so visually driven as men are. But what do I know. If, as a man, I say this while walking through a forest alone, I'm still wrong.

Who is the adulterous (forbidden) woman introduced in v. 3? Is she your co-worker who flatters your ego with her words and draws attention to her body with her gestures?

We once had a DEC (Digital Equipment Corporation) sales rep who was interested in selling our department some VAX cluster systems; she would come to talk with us and idly play with the hem of her short dress as she sat across from us. Such fabulous legs! You can imagine the effect she had on a cishet man like myself. We called her Miss Flippy-Skirt. But as everyone

knows, Sex Sells. Were we influenced? Of course we were! Did we know we were being played? Of course we did! Did we care? No! We (a bunch of nerds) enjoyed the attention.

Perhaps you feel that you are above such things now, that your maturity protects you from sexual misconduct or wrongful desires. Think again. There is a book by Mark Driscoll called Porn-Again Christian, available as a free download from [relit.org](http://relit.org).

So, in a nutshell, in words that even a testosterone-crazed young man can understand:  
Vv 7-14 "Keep your mitts OFF every other woman."  
Vv. 15-19 "Keep your hands ON your wife."

Verse 8 tells us "Keep to a path FAR from her, do not go near the door of her house."

Don't tell yourself, "Well, I'll get involved a little bit; it's just a harmless flirtation. I can stop anytime. Nobody will know."

Martin Lloyd-Jones says "Be careful how you treat God, my friends. You may say to yourself, 'I can sin against God and then, of course, I can repent and go back and find God whenever I want him.' You try it. And you will sometimes find that not only can you not find God but that you do not even want to. You will be aware of a terrible hardness in your heart. And you can do nothing about it. And then you suddenly realize that it is God punishing you in order to reveal your sinfulness and your vileness to you. And there is only one thing to do. You turn back to him and you say, 'O God, do not go on dealing with me judicially, though I deserve it. Soften my heart. Melt me. I cannot do it myself.' You cast yourself utterly upon his mercy and upon his compassion."

Be careful if you think you can flirt with sexual sin and keep it under your control.

V 11 says "At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent."

Lord Byron was the playboy of the nineteenth century who was secretly admired for his free lifestyle. On his 36th birthday, in Greece, all alone, he wrote:

My days are in the yellow leaf,  
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone.

He's 36. All alone on his birthday, feeling old and at the end of his days. Which he was. In place of friends, he has, as harvest from his sexual proclivities, venereal disease and depression. From Wiki: "He died in 1824 at the age of 36 from a fever contracted while in Greece. Often described as the most flamboyant and notorious of the major Romantics, Byron was both celebrated and castigated in life for his aristocratic excesses, including huge debts, numerous love affairs – with men as well as women, as well as rumors of a scandalous liaison with his half-sister – and self-imposed exile."

So now you've messed up and, like misusing your Android phone as a shim to level your refrigerator, you have misused God's gift of sexuality. Unlike Lord Byron, though, you still have a friend – His name is Jesus Christ. Through humility, you can be healed as seen in vv. 12-14 where you realize your mistakes.

12 You will say, "How I hated discipline!  
How my heart spurned correction!  
13 I would not obey my teachers

or turn my ear to my instructors.  
14 And I was soon in serious trouble  
in the assembly of God's people."

The sexual fool finally confronts himself and makes the decision to return home like the prodigal son described in Luke 15:11-24. Are you ready to come home to your loving Father who will rejoice at your return? Do you not know that He will receive you and exclaim over you and restore you? Why do you tarry?

2 Cor 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

1 Cor 6:11 " And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

God renews us.

In vv. 15-17, God, knowing how strong lust can be, addresses our sexual desires by saying "Satisfy your lust with your own wife." Paul addressed this as well – his preference would be for people not to marry but in some (most) people, lust will be a problem. Therefore, he says:

1 Cor 7 1:2 "Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

Note that God does NOT say, "Are you feeling horny with all that temptation out there? Well, what YOU need is a will of iron so you can suppress all that nonsense. Take a cold shower. That's for animals anyway and I made you better than that."

Of course we are expected to have some degree of discipline (v. 23) but negation of our sexual desire is NOT what God has in mind. God's remedy for our thirst for sex is . . . sex. An overflowing sexual joy with our wives.

On another note, I realize that many couples are unable to have an overflowing sexual joy because of body shame or impotence or whatever. And that is an area for another study group. And isn't it difficult to even imagine such a group? God isn't ashamed or horrified by our sexual life within the covenant of marriage. But we seem to be. Why do we spurn His gift to us?

But there is still the elephant in the room that hasn't been mentioned. In the days when Proverbs was penned, marriages were (often?) arranged so that (I'm guessing) everybody was married at a fairly young age. However, in our Oh So Sophisticated Modern Culture, where people treat marriage as a DIY project, expect to marry for love despite the divorce rate standing at 50% (and climbing?), the question stands:

How do single people handle their sexual urges? Or rather, what is the Godly way for unmarried people to handle their sexual urges?

What is your answer? What advice would you give a single man or woman who is experiencing a sexual crisis and living in the throes of shame and guilt?

In our society, people find their answers in "hookups", porn, "one-night stands", "affairs", porn, "date-rape", alcohol, drugs, and porn. A veritable pornucopia of erotica.

The young man or woman, not wishing the commitment of marriage, says “Why buy a book when there’s a free lending library in town?”

Just FYI, I’ve had several women in my ESL groups whose weddings were arranged for them. Every one of them is in a happy relationship. The parents and elders have the wisdom to know what qualities in a spouse will complement their child. And the child respects and honors the wisdom of their elders. Of course, if we had widespread pre-marital and Godly counseling, then that would go far to ensuring lasting marriage. When Kathleen and I tell people that we have been married for 41 years, they often look at us as if we were a rare specimen of an endangered species. However, many young couples (aren’t they precious!) tell themselves that “Love conquers all” and their marriage vows say something like “as long as love shall last.”

The internet tells me: The phrase "love conquers all" is derived from the following phrase in the Latin poet Virgil's Eclogues X.69: "Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori." It means "love conquers all, let us all yield to love." The beginning of the phrase was subsequently translated as "love conquers all" by Geoffrey Chaucer, an English poet of the Middle Ages, and thereafter passed into popular usage.

Look how that turned out for Romeo and Juliet.

In vv. 18-20, the wise father raises his hands in blessing and prays over the marriage bed of his son and daughter-in-law. He says be happy with your own wife, enjoy her often, find ways to keep that spark alive between you. When you have your own Eve in your own Eden, why throw it away for another woman?

And finally, in vv. 21-23, the father says “Now decide! Will you stay a sexual sinner immersed in shame and regret or will you accept the liberation offered by Christ?”

Another thought for you to ponder: The author of Collection I (1:8 – 9:18) is Solomon. He is the one writing this scenario of Godly wisdom between father and son, the wisdom being “stick with your own wife, the wife of your youth.” But Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. How do you reconcile these facts?

Proverbs 6

6:16-19

- 16 There are six things the Lord hates,  
seven that are detestable to him:  
17 haughty eyes,  
a lying tongue,  
hands that shed innocent blood,  
18 a heart that devises wicked schemes,  
feet that are quick to rush into evil,  
19 a false witness who pours out lies  
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

In Proverbs 6:1-19, God gives us advice for three areas of our lives:

vv. 1-5 How we handle money (using a bad example)

vv. 6-11 How we discipline ourselves (using a worse example)

vv. 12-19 How we build community (using the worst example)

In the first area, the father speaks to his son. In the second area the father speaks to the sluggard (doesn't call him "son"). In the third area, the father speaks about a disruptive person. (doesn't even talk to him).

vv. 1-5 speaks to the son who is acting as a surety for his neighbor's debt. This is like cosigning a loan; you put yourself up as collateral.

There is a danger in doing this and God is warning us about it. He tells us that if we have acted as a surety, then we have already become ensnared.

Even the Federal Trade Commission says this about cosigning "You are being asked to guarantee this debt. Think carefully before you do."

The Bible tells us that we are to be generous, however, we are not supposed to gamble.

Deut 15:7-8 " If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. 8 Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need."

If you throw your financial future in with someone the bank already considers a bad risk, then you are acting irresponsibly towards yourself and your family and encouraging irresponsibility in the other person.

God thinks this is urgent as seen in vv. 3-5. Do everything you can to get out of this situation.

Jesus, through His immeasurable love, acted as our surety. We were a bad risk and could never pay off our debt. So it fell to Him and He bore the crushing weight of our debt on His bleeding back to Calvary where He wrote "Paid in Full" across the record of our debts, then tore up the Book of Death in which our future debts could be written and nailed it to the Cross.

Col 2:13-14 " When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."

In area two, vv. 6-11, the father speaks to the sluggard, the lazy one, the one always choosing the easy way, the procrastinator, the one who lets other people do the work. The sluggard lies on the couch with the TV remote, day after day, year after year. If you ask him to mow the lawn, he'll say "Mañana." He probably has a wonderful knowledge of TV culture but is that what you want to be known for at the end of your life?

There are three things that Proverbs says about the sluggard. First, the sluggard will not make up his mind.

Verse 9 "How long will you lie there, sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?" This is a direct challenge to the sluggardly way of life. But he cannot give a definite answer to the question, choosing instead to equivocate.

Secondly, the sluggard will not finish things. Seeing a task through to completion is not his thing. "Like I told you, mañana. I'll finish it tomorrow."

Prov 26:15 "A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth."

Thirdly, the sluggard will not face things as they are. Rather than face the realities of life, he makes up excuses not to live fully.

Prov 22:13 “The sluggard says, ‘There's a lion outside! I'll be killed in the public square!’”

Obviously, he's been watching too much TV. What's REALLY out there in the public square is a life, a job and a mission aligning to God's will.

What should the sluggard do? Observe the ways of the industrious ant. We all remember Aesop's Fable about the Ant and the Grasshopper. The ants worked hard and had food to eat while the grasshopper fiddled about and so went hungry.

How do you apply this lesson to our world today? Do you see those on food stamps or welfare as being sluggards who now need to be bailed out by the hard-working ants who are forced into supporting them?

And isn't it easier for us sluggards to talk with our friends about things, debate those things, speculate on other things, speechify about really important things . . . than to humble ourselves, be an ant and “Just Do It.” But nowadays, we (men) are adopting a wait-and-see attitude, a laissez faire mindset. We hang back to see what someone else might do. Can you imagine a church filled with men who are energized, men who are working, men who are engaged, men who are filled with intensity, men of conviction and action? Ants are like that.

What can ants teach us?

First, inner motivation. V 7 Ants do what they do on their own without the need for a supervisor ant standing over them. There are no foot-dragging ants.

Second, hard work. V 8 Ants are industrious. They don't stop until the job is done. I don't even know if they sleep or not.

Third, they prepare for the future. V 8. The ant works today to meet the needs of tomorrow.

Let us learn from the ant. There is a storm coming our way. It will find us. Are we preparing ourselves today with God's Word to prepare for hardship tomorrow?

In the third area, community, vv 12-15, the Bible calls a disruptive person “worthless”, a “troublemaker”. Some people sin aggressively, through little acts of disharmony which add up over time. V13 outlines these – winking maliciously, signaling with his feet, motioning with his fingers, all to sow discord.

God indicates in v15 that He will punish that sort of behavior. He feels rather intense about it as shown in vv. 16-19.

16 “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable.”

So which is it, six or seven? When the Old Testament uses this literary device (x // x+1), as in “three//four” (Prov. 30:18-19, 29-31) or “six//seven”, it is the last item in the list that matters most.

The last item in our list, “ a person who stirs up conflict in the community,” is pointed to by the previous items. The arrogance of haughty eyes stirs up discord among the brethren, a lying tongue gossips and slanders, sowing discord among the brethren etc.

God loves unity and this is what Jesus does. He gathers His flock together and, if even one errant sheep goes astray, Jesus is there to welcome it back.

Psalms 133:1 "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

In the rest of 6, the father once again counsels the son in sexual matters. But why should our insignificant personal lives matter to God?

Augustine asked God "What am I to you that you command me to love you, and that, if I fail to love you, you are angry with me and threaten me with vast miseries?"

But our sexual lives DO matter to God because romance stems from God and reveals Who He is. God's love for us is not merely a platonic love but a love filled with passion.

Marriage, then, is a divine creation, pointing to something beyond us, to the romance of Christ and the church. What better love story than the Son of God coming down to win, at great suffering, a bride not worthy of Him.

In vv 20-35, the father warns about the consequences of sexual folly. The point in these verses is that there is a very high penalty for committing adultery. The wise man will notice that a woman is beautiful and then go about his business. But sin is not always ugly. Sometimes it can be very tempting.

2 Cor 11:14 "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."

The point of these verses is that there is a high price for committing adultery. These are real-life arguments, not so much about the rightness or wrongness of the act. There are two practical consequences to sexual folly.

First, you WILL experience pain.

27: "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?"

Nobody I know has ever come up to me and said "Kevin, I committed adultery and I'm so glad I did. My whole life has gotten better." Do you know anybody like that?

Secondly, adultery is an offence that incurs a debt that cannot be paid off.

34: "For jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge."

YOU: "Hi Fred. Look, I slept with your wife. Here's a hundred bucks. Are we good?"

FRED: <You can fill in this blank.>

The blot of adultery can never be wiped clean.

V33: "Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away."

He will forever be known and whispered about. He will be set apart (and not in a good way) at family gatherings and people will be nervous if he is around their daughters or nieces. Nobody will talk much about whatever business success he has achieved or his social status. Nope, he'll forever be the guy who couldn't keep his pants on.

Sexual folly is demonstrated as a good thing and perfectly acceptable on the TV shows that we see and the movies that we watch. But in real life, it WILL always cause us pain. Consider the businessman who was sent to another city. Away from his wife, he hires a call girl over the

phone. Subsequently, when the knock on the door came, what should he see when he answered the door but his own daughter. He immediately had an apparent heart attack.

Note v 26: "For a prostitute can be had for a loaf of bread, but another man's wife preys on your very life."

Do you think that visiting a prostitute is less of a sin than adultery? We remember Jesus' words to the prostitute: Jn 8:11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

How do we, as sexual sinners to some extent or other, know how we stand with God?

"The difference between an unconverted man and a converted man is not that one has sins and the other has none; but that the one takes part with his cherished sins against a dreaded God, and the other takes part with a reconciled God against his hated sins." - William Arnot

Have a great week!

### **Comment:**

Charles Fry:

Good comments, very important perspective in our times. I use the fidelity/promiscuity passages in these chapters whenever I do premarital counseling or teach on marriage (which I did last week in Manila). I really like the poetic depiction of the wife as a chosen source of satisfaction and devotion, chosen and chosen again, and again.

I also very much like the 1984 NIV take on 6:[26] for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread,  
and the adulteress preys upon your very life.

The sense I think Solomon had in mind here isn't that a prostitute is cheap, but the parallelism that illicit sex reduces a person to a consumable commodity or to prey. Illicit sex turns humans into objects to be used and used up/discarded.

Really important life concepts here! Thank, fellow man.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:

Indeed, a great breakdown! Thank you, Kevin!!!

### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:

For two nights straight John has boldly preached, "sexual relations outside of marriage is an abomination to God!" The kingdom needs to hear and adhere to this Biblical teaching! Thank you, Kevin, for covering this passage. Much to consider. As well, chpt 6. Always easy to remember where the 6 things the Lord hates- proverbs 6. I appreciate you putting in so much time for this study.

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger, and thank you, John!

## **Comment:**

Kevin Crittenden:

For me, the injunction against adultery comes not only from Biblical teachings but from personal experience. My own father chose the Adulterous Woman and didn't even look back to his wife and children. So I am well aware of the destruction that lies in the path of sexual sin; unfortunately it was my mother, my brother and myself that were left in darkness, gnashing our teeth.

I'm a bit strident on the subject.

I think that the concept of "politeness" has morphed since my youth into including the thought that one should keep one's mouth shut when other people are misbehaving in social situations. "Live and let live" is the generally accepted standard. "Follow your dreams" is another.

We live in an era of entitlement, coddled by our parents, pandered to by marketing, kowtowed to by school districts and politicians. Bumper stickers that elevate our children above the other children. Where is the bumper sticker that says "My child is loved by me and by God?" Every high place in our society has a temple dedicated to the worship of us. And we respond to that by rampant disrespect for Him who gave us His only Son to die on the Cross for the remission of our uncountable sins. We tear down the sacred place in our hearts where He resides, evict Him to the gutter and attempt to fill the vacuum with technological baubles. How dare we! There is a place within us that only He can fill and don't I know it.

Sorry about the rant.

## **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:

LOVE YOU, Kevin!

## **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Love you as well, Brother Butch!

## **June 29: Proverbs 7 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 26

Poetry Reading for 6/29/17

Proverbs 7

Top o' th' mornin', to you! (I'm keeping the bottom part.) Today, we move along to Chapter 7 in Proverbs.

7:21 "With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk."

Vv 1-5 again show us the father continuing the counsel of his son, emphasizing the importance of keeping Wisdom uppermost in his thoughts as the son goes through his daily life.

And how does the son do this? How does he keep Wisdom in the forefront of his thoughts in this fallen world? He becomes born again of the Holy Spirit as delineated in John 3:1-8.

John 3:1-8:

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

When we are born again of the Holy Spirit, the innermost depths of our being transform and we begin to treasure God's commands from our heart. We no longer rely on an intellectual list of things that God wants us to do and begin to LIVE as God wants us to live, nurtured by His life-giving water.

Proverbs vv 7:6-9 describe the fallen world we live in. The father sees danger there and wants his son (on the brink of adulthood) to see it as well. He spends the rest of chapter 7 talking to his son about the three strategies of sexual temptation:

Vv 6-13 The approach of temptation

Vv 14-20 The speech of temptation

Vv 21-27 The impact of giving in to temptation

This section of Proverbs needs to have a Romance Novel cover featuring Fabio ensnared in the eight-fold embrace of OctoPauline.

The father singles out one of the simple as an illustration. The simple man is uncommitted, keeping his options open, accepting of everything. He has plenty of time later on (he thinks) to sharpen his focus about what he believes and what he'll choose to give up. He is young and strong, you see, and is able to handle anything that comes his way. We men believed ourselves to be immortal once, didn't we? Right now, the simple man is just curious. He's never been with a woman. He wants to see for himself the bad part of town where the adulterous woman lives. He's heard rumors. So he takes a walk.

And there she is! Whoa, Mama! The young man comes to rigid attention, eyes front and grown as large as saucers, drawn like a magnet to her. She is "dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent."

How do prostitutes dress? Like any seller of goods and services, she needs to market her wares. Make them irresistible to the consumer. How often do you need to admonish your daughters not to wear such revealing clothes, only to be met with the rejoinder “But, Mom, this is the fashion. ALL my friends wear this style and THEIR parents let them. I don’t want to look all straight-laced and fuddy-duddy - like you.”

You may be wondering why the woman has to be described as adulterous – certainly men can force their unwanted attentions on virtuous women as well. (Tamar). But I think that the force of the father’s argument has to do with something larger. I’ll get to that in a minute.

So, our naïve young Everyman stands there, transfixed, with his bare face hanging out and, being crafty, that Fallen Hussy takes charge immediately and kisses him in v. 13. Oh look - a dead man walking.

In v 14, she tells him: “Today I have fulfilled my vows, and I have food from my fellowship offering at home.”

She has offered a sacrifice, a fellowship offering, which binds the deity and worshiper by a shared meal. (Lev. 7:11-21) The meal that fulfilled the vow had to be eaten on the same or following day. Her invitation to sex might have been a way for her to have a partner in some Canaanite religious fertility rite.

In vv 16-17, she alludes to her rich lifestyle – hardly anyone could afford these luxuries. And she’s willing to share them with this tongue-tied fool.

And then, just in case his light bulb has completely gone out, she plainly states in v18: “Come, let’s drink deeply of love till morning; let’s enjoy ourselves with love!” In other words, “Come on in, we’ll do Kinsey from cover to cover.”

She has made her bed and she wants him to lie in it.

However, as one commentator says: “To have a full sexual relationship with somebody is to give physical expression to what is meant to be a covenanted relationship – that is, stable, faithful, permanent. To say physically, ‘I am giving myself to you,’ while emotionally and spiritually holding back from covenanted commitment is in fact to live a lie – a split in the personality which is ultimately stressful and destructive.” - David Atkinson

But try explaining THAT to a smitten 18-year old male leaking testosterone all over the driveway. Naturally, this statement precludes any readers of this material; you are all made of sterner stuff.

In vv 19-20, we learn that the husband isn’t home. Nope, he won’t be back until the full moon. He’s such a tedious, tiresome doofus anyway. Nobody will be the wiser, so . . . Carpe diem! Seize the day! Strike while the iron’s hot Go for it! Go for the Gusto! Nike’s wisdom? Just do it! What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Make hay while the sun shines!

In the movie “City Slickers,” two guys are talking about a hypothetical situation, namely: “If you could have sex with a most beautiful woman and no one whatsoever would ever find out about it, especially your wife, would you do so?”

We men may well find ourselves in this situation, which is why the wise father wants to pound into his son’s head the notion of holding fast to Wisdom.

But the Adulterous Woman's offer of sin with no regrets is much like Satan's offer in Eden. Try it, you'll like it.

The young man (being simple, uncommitted, unable to rely on God's support) falls for it and trots off behind his mistress, like a lamb to the slaughter. For he will die.

Rom 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Our victim is not alone.

V 7:26: "Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng."

We remember the warning given by Matthew:

Matt 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Proverbs is written from the viewpoint of a father advising his son and so the choices a young man needs to make are couched in the form of women, Lady Wisdom and the Adulterous woman (Lady Sin. Or Lady Folly).

These two women compete for the attention (and loyalty) of the simple man. They are both present within us.

Lady Sin:

She is the one that immediately appeals to our animal senses; our knee-jerk desire for hedonism. She seduces us with her smooth talk of instant gratification and is employed overtime by marketing forces in this country. She has her own temples with all the trappings of luxury, wealth and status. Her temple is never hidden from our sight, beckoning to us with promises of untold physical pleasure.

"All this I will give you," she purrs, "if you will bow down and worship me."

What does her smooth talk sound like?

"You'll miss the playoffs if you go to church; the guy doing the sermon is boring anyway."

"Sure, I'll join you guys for one more drink before I hit the road."

"Look how she's dressed. She's just asking for it. Go ahead, she's drunk anyway."

"If you buy that new truck, the woman in the commercial will think you're a stud."

"Ashley Madison – Life is short, have an affair."

"Don't think about that bad situation now, you deserve to relax with a drink."

"Hey, go ahead and do it. Nobody will ever know."

"Why feel guilty about THAT? Everybody looks at porn. It means you're normal."

She coos: "You deserve."

She looks intensely into our eyes, "You are entitled."

Her perfect face is inches away from ours, "You are numero uno."

Her carmine lips part ever so slightly, "You should have more."

Her sensuous hands draw us even closer, "You are mine."

People who worship the sensuality of Lady Sin live on the Me-me planet. We are becoming a society of entitlement. How long before we, as a society, move from feeling entitled to pleasure

to feeling entitled to God's forgiveness? If, indeed, we remember God at all. I don't see any commercials for Lady Wisdom on the TV. Her appeal is focused far above the belt.

We know more about Lady Sin than we do about Lady Wisdom; indeed how could we not?

Lady Wisdom puts Jesus Christ at the center of her being. He is the cornerstone and the foundation of a wisdom-filled life. And she invites us to join her there. Oddly enough, the more we get to know her, the more attractive she becomes. We may not have the same quick gonadal response to her as we do to Ms. Bimbo but, over time, we can form a lasting and permanent bond with Lady Wisdom, which affords us a greater amount of lasting pleasure and satisfaction than the quick liaison with Lady Sin, which leads to the downward path of servitude, weeping, gnashing of teeth and destruction.

Which of these women would we like for a wife? Which one would we prefer to be the mother of our children? The one that will cheat on us, fill our ears with empty promises and introduce spiritual disease into our lives? Or the one who partners with us on the road to Salvation with lasting grace, beauty and the solid support of God's Wisdom?

## **July 6: Proverbs 8-9 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 27

Poetry Reading for 7/06/17

Proverbs 8-9

Hello All –

Today we will soldier on through chapters 8 and 9 of Proverbs. Buckle up.

In Chapter 8, Wisdom calls out and says this about her birth at the beginning of Creation, when she was at the Lord's side:

Prov 8:30-31 "Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, 31 rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind."

If I happen to wake up and glance at the newspaper, then I rarely feel the joy expressed in these verses nor do I tend to delight in mankind. Solution? Don't start my day out reading the newspaper. Rather, start my day out in prayer with a heart of gratitude for the opportunity to do His will and hopefully be a blessing to somebody. Actually, we stopped taking the physical newspaper because they wanted a King's ransom for the leaflet filled with ads that they delivered. But we can read it now online for a dowager's ransom.

Leaving Lady Sin to fester in her faux fur chamber of pleasurable death, we now come back to the brighter and life-affirming aspects of Lady Wisdom. She's beginning to develop a patina of allure, now, don't you think? Something that, perhaps, you didn't notice when you first met her.

The father has given his son some sage advice about behaving in moments of temptation, but now we are being given a Weltanschauung, a particular worldview. This is what Proverbs 8 is about: the joy of a Christ-centered life, offering us rewards far greater than silver, more precious than gold, more brilliant than diamonds and rubies. Those physical treasures are merely transient anyway.

James 5:3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

I'm sure that you already have experienced the joy of helping out a brother or sister in need, so you are aware of the kind of joy that is being expressed here in Proverbs. Imagine a life filled with that joy!

Do you not know that God is the Author of Everything? That He created all to the praise of His glory?

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

And yet, perversely, we often live our lives more attuned to T.S. Eliot's description of modern culture in his 1925 poem "The Hollow Men:"

"Shape without form, shade without colour,  
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;"

Why do we allow our paths to spiral down into this joyless place? Because we place our trust and our hope in worthless idols, things that we pin our hopes on but which let us down. We concentrate on our family, or our career, or making money, or achieving success, or attaining social status with the expectation that we will, with enough personal grit and determination, succeed. Certainly, we need to take care of business in order to support ourselves and our families. But some of us focus primarily on success in these areas and if we don't measure up, we are deemed failures, so must be shamed by society.

I didn't pursue my PhD, so I'm a failure. (My cheeks are getting hot.) I didn't rise very far up at Lockheed so I'm a failure. I don't hobnob with Mayors or Governors or CEOs or other Important People, so I'm a failure. (I'm turning bright red now.) I don't vacation in Bora Bora at \$1,000 a night or at Dubai's best hotel at \$20,000 a night, sailing around on the ruby yacht of Omar Khayyam, so I'm a failure.

Well, boo hoo.

But here is God to the rescue with the wisdom of His Creation that exalts Christ and revitalizes our lives.

Proverbs 8 describes this wisdom in 4 sections:

vv. 1-11 Wisdom commands us to prize her above rubies

vv. 12-21 Wisdom is powerful

vv. 22-31 Wisdom is profound

vv. 32-36 Wisdom is the one necessity for true life; without her, we embrace death

In vv. 1-3, we see again that wisdom does not wait for us on the top of some lofty Tibetan mountain or in some windowless carrel in a forgotten corner of a mouldering monastery awaiting us to find her. She is right out there, where we go about our daily lives.

How does she speak to us? Softly and tenderly like in the hymn?

"Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
Calling for you and for me;  
See, on the portals He's waiting and watching,

Watching for you and for me.”

Nope. Not so much. Lady Wisdom is standing in the middle of the thoroughfare, RAISING her voice, she cries ALOUD like a costermonger, so her message can be heard over the ceaseless din of our culture.

4 “To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.”

Jesus is inclusive. He issues His invitation to the simple as well as the fools. However, scoffers are a special case.

V 9:7 says “Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse.”

Scoffers not only refuse to listen respectfully, they can be rather rude and distasteful in their abuse. We’ve seen this attitude on Facebook as well as in our daily lives.

What do you think? Should we continue reaching out to scoffers or stop offering pearls to swine? Is it our duty to bring a scoffer to Christ or shake the dust from our sandals and move on? I think Wisdom is telling us to let sleeping dogs lie, lest we get bitten.

To the rest of us, God offers the gifts in vv. 8:6-9

In v 6, He says “Listen!” Everything God says to us is trustworthy and true. And also, sometimes, very difficult to hear. He gets to the point quickly and tells us what we need to hear without a lot of sugar-coating or beating around the bush. I can just imagine the O.T. prophets equivocating, saying things like “Um . . . have you thought of doing it this other way instead?” or “You might want to reconsider . . .”

V 9: “To the discerning all of them [Wisdom’s words] are right; they are upright to those who have found knowledge.”

How the Words of God are received says a lot about you. Are you open to them? If we are bound up in Self, we might resent or misunderstand His teachings and admonitions.

James 1:21 “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

In v 10, Wisdom says “Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold.”

You have to make a choice (and delaying a choice IS making a choice). Whom will you serve? You cannot serve two masters.

Vv. 12-31 tell us why Wisdom is the better choice.

James 3:13-18 tells us that there are two kinds of wisdom, natural wisdom and spiritual wisdom:

“13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”

Lady Wisdom is spiritual wisdom. She is a councilor who gives practical advice. She is resourceful, insightful and gives us the courage not to quit in the face of hardships. But we must humble ourselves to accept her teaching because (v 13) she “hates pride and arrogance.”

In vv. 17-21 we hear Christ’s voice through Lady Wisdom showing His love for us.

V 17 “I love those who love me. . .”

Who does He love? Geniuses? Wise men? Observant Christians? Nice people? Republicans? Wall St. moguls? The Joneses that we’re always trying to keep up with?

No. Jesus loves those who love Him enough to seek Him out.

V 17 “. . . those who seek me find me.”

And where do we look for Him? Behind our swelling Pride, underneath our expansive Ego, beyond our greedy Self, inside our hardened Hearts, above our superior Intellect. Behind the mirror where we are admiring ourselves.

vv. 22-31 go back to the beginning of Creation where Wisdom was formed as “the first of his works.”

What do we learn from this?

First, wisdom comes from OUTSIDE of ourselves; it is not something that WE create. Our senses are attuned to the outside world, not the inside. So let us spend less time gazing inward at our navels and less time listening to ourselves babble, and less time making ourselves feel good about ourselves and less time enjoying the sweet smell of our success and less time relishing in the taste of our own victories and less time resting on our laurels. Less of self and more of Thee.

Instead, let’s turn more of our attention outward. “Love one another.” That’s what God tells us. His commandment wasn’t “Love yourself first and then, in your spare time, love your neighbor”. He already loves us. And His love is beyond measure.

Secondly, v. 31 tells us that wisdom is joyous over us. Wisdom was God’s first tool to help shape the chaotic mess when things were without form and void. She was indispensable to God and now she is indispensable to you. Christ tells us to offer ourselves to wisdom and let her recreate us. We were created in God’s image but sin has disfigured us. Wouldn’t we like to be made beautiful again?

Let us be joyous in the experience of Creation along with Lady Wisdom. Enjoy a beautiful sunset or the mist rising from a lake in the still morning or new life springing forth through a crack in the sidewalk. It is good for the soul.

Prov. 17:22 “A cheerful heart is good medicine. . .”

vv. 32-36 tell us how to guard our cheerful heart and deepen it, for the glory of God.

To do this, you must embrace wisdom. How? By accepting the invitation of Christ, who promises a truly meaningful life, a life well-lived and worth living.

1 John 5:12 “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

## Proverbs 9

9:4 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” – Lady Wisdom

9:16 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” – Lady Folly

As stated before, the simple are the uncommitted ones, the procrastinators, reeds which bend in whatever direction the wind takes them. Without deep roots, they are easily moved and will dry up at the first signs of trouble.

James 1:6-8 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

There is hope for such as these, which is why Wisdom calls out to them. Folly also calls to them with her siren song – the uncommitted **MUST** make a choice.

Do you really have to make a choice? Can't it wait?

The Valley of Indecisiveness (aka The Valley of the Shadow of Death, see Psalm 23), where I spent a goodly number of years, is a land lacking in nourishment or sustenance. It is a land lacking in light, so the future is only dimly perceived. One cannot easily see further than one foot in front of the other. You can make progress, to be sure, but the goal is lost in the mist. One cannot (I could not) find comfort in setting up a permanent residence there, even though there is a bustling populace abiding in that place. They (we) spent our time seeking for the nourishment that is lacking and groping for the light. Many trinkets and baubles claimed to be the prize we were looking for but all were miserable disappointments, pulling us further into spiritual despair. We were unaware of, or chose to ignore, the words of the psalmist:

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

It's no good to try to live with one foot in Wisdom's door and the other foot firmly planted on a banana peel in Folly's door. “Hedging your bets” is really not a viable option.

Sure, you might have a million questions. I did. And I thank God for the people in my life that helped me patiently with the answers to those questions. But what does Wisdom say?

V 9: “Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.”

Wisdom is the best teacher you will ever have. She is patient, She is kind. She does not envy nor boast. She is not proud. She does not dishonor others, she is not self-seeking, she is not easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. Wisdom does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. She always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

The wise father wraps it up in Proverbs 9. He has patiently explained much to his son and now it is up to the son to make a decision. The son cannot just stand in the middle of the road nor continue on, bypassing both Wisdom's house and Folly's house. He must choose to turn into one OR the other.

In this day and age ( I love this phrase; it's so ambiguous ), if I want to know something, I'll Google it.

So I just did. I asked, "Why should I turn into Folly's house?" And Google gave me a link to a historic house in Kernersville, NC called Körner's Folly. So now we know that Folly lives in North Carolina. (And here I was thinking it was Washington, D.C.)

And now I asked, "Why should I turn into Wisdom's house?" And Google gave me (at the top of the list) a link to Proverbs 24:3. "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established"

So even Google knows that it is best to build your house (your life) on the wisdom (rock) of Christ.

Meanwhile, you and I are probably scurrying back and forth between Wisdom's house and Folly's house with our "Yes, but"s and "I'll get to that in a moment"s, and our endless "I just have this one more thing to do"s.

Matt 8:21-22 Another of His disciples requested, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father. But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

The invitation to Wisdom is a wide-open door for all. With the exception of scoffers (mockers) who stand at Folly's side and throw stones at the windows of Wisdom's house. How easy it is to stand back and criticize what another has built without building anything substantial of your own.

V 2: "She [Wisdom] has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table." Mixed wine is wine mixed with spices to enhance its flavor.

What is Wisdom offering you at this sumptuous feast?

Chapter 1 – Wisdom preserves us from violent people

Chapter 2 – Wisdom enters our hearts with peace of conscience

Chapter 3 – Wisdom improves us financially

Chapter 4 – Wisdom elevates our status in society

Chapter 5 – Wisdom makes sex better

Chapter 6 – Wisdom gets us off the sofa and successfully accomplishing worthy goals.

Chapter 7 – Wisdom protects us in temptation

Chapter 8 – Wisdom opens our eyes to the joyous creation in which we live.

Christ has set a good table for us and He invites us to partake.

V 3 "She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city."

Christ has sent his workers into the world to issue invitations to his banquet. And we are his workers.

Is the banquet free for us? Not quite. V 6 says we must leave our simple (uncommitted) ways. We have to stop procrastinating, think deeply about our lives, and then make a choice. Will we choose life (wisdom) or death (sin)? Are we willing to make the necessary changes in our lives that the gentle yoke of Christ demands? Are you unaware that you already labor under the heavy yoke of sin?

We are social creatures and, therefore, need to be in community with others. Christ is building a new community for us. A community built on wisdom for those who are able to tap into the power of sharing Him together. Your old community of the simple cannot offer you that. Love them but leave them for a new life in the Light of His Presence.

vv. 7-8 are a warning against the scoffers and mockers which abound in our society. They love to be seen in the marketplace, in their flowing intellectual robes, throwing stones at the elegant structures that others build and yet building nothing for themselves. Sometimes they go out of their way to denigrate the beliefs of others. They are the people who always know best, don't know how to listen, always pooh-pooh the ideas of others, and believe they are God's gift to humanity. Which is rather ironic, don't you think?

William McKane says: "No man earns more universal detestation or deserves it more than he who wears a perpetual sneer, who is himself incapable of deep loyalty and reverence and supposes that it is his mission in life to promote the corrosion of the values by which individuals and society live. He is the person with the knowing wink and the clever phrase who has seen through the hollowness of everything."

Scoffers are dangerous and they are legion. And there just aren't that many herds of pigs around.

Mockery is the mood of our culture. Paul Vischer, creator of Veggie Tales, in a speech at Yale in 2005 explained: "For me and many others in my generation, the real root [of our cynicism] is . . . personal. When we were very young, our parents broke their promises. Their promises to each other, and their promises to us. And millions of American kids in a very short period of time learned that the world isn't a safe place; that there isn't anyone that won't let you down; that their hearts were much too fragile to leave exposed."

And sarcasm, as C.S. Lewis put it, "builds up around a man the finest armor-plating . . . that I know."

As human beings, we let God down. A lot. But He is different from us in that He always keeps his word.

Hosea 11:9 "I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man-- the Holy One among you. . . ."

In vv. 13-18, we have Folly's invitation to worldly pleasure. There is a parallel structure with the description of Wisdom's invitation in vv. 1-6. They both issue the same invitation, "Turn in here and I will change your life." Both are situated at the top of the hill. But whereas Wisdom offers a sumptuous feast that she has prepared herself, Folly has stolen some bread and water. Folly says that the stolen water tastes sweet. And she is right about that.

Have you ever stolen something, not because you needed it but because it was an exciting thing to do? I have. When I was around 11, I stole a pack of Salem cigarettes from the grocery store. I should probably make amends by going back and paying for it. What were they, about 2 bits a pack back then? Oh well, confess your sins to one another. So – your turn.

Augustine, that old reprobate, wrote in his autobiography that he once stole something BECAUSE it was the wrong thing to do. He was getting his jollies because it was exciting. He later wrote: "Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss."

Lady Folly wantonly displays her wares of worldly distractions like a red-light hooker – and we become passionate about our status, our belongings, our power, our wealth, our many idols. None of us is spared; we’ve all peeked in (or gawked) at her door.

And if our passion for these lesser and fugacious things, which lead to Death, occupies our souls, how then can we be passionate for Christ – the one who offers true and everlasting Life?

By hearing the Gospel again.

Charles Spurgeon helps us see this when he says: “The gate of Mercy is opened, and over the door it is written, ‘This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ Between that word ‘save’ and the next word ‘sinners,’ there is no adjective. It does not say, ‘penitent sinners,’ ‘awakened sinners,’ ‘sensible sinners,’ ‘grieving sinners,’ or ‘alarmed sinners.’ No, it only says, ‘sinners.’ And I know this, that when I come, I come to Christ today . . . I dare not come as a conscious sinner or an awakened sinner, but I have to come still as a sinner with nothing in my hands.”

### **Comment:**

Butch O’Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:  
Kevin Crittenden: Wisdom or Folly? Most excellent, interesting, thought-provoking post on this week’s poetry reading on wisdom and folly. Missed being able to read everyone’s posts this week on the assigned day but thankful we can now. Wisdom’s gifts to mankind are a great banquet.

### **Comment:**

Lori Watt:  
I stole a small glass bird when I was a kid. I took it back and left it at the store several years later, as I recall... someone at the store probably found it and thought someone had accidentally left it-- never realizing it had actually belonged there at one time. My life of crime.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:  
And now you lie awake at night, terrified that the police will fingerprint it and roust you out of bed in the middle of the night, never to be heard from again. Why is it that we remember forever the things we are not proud of but forget almost immediately the good that we do?

Lori Watt:  
That is a question for someone far wiser than I.

Kevin Crittenden:  
Ask your mother?

Lori Watt:  
Yes, she would definitely meet the qualification.

## July 13: Proverbs 10 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 28

Poetry Reading for 7/13/17

Proverbs 10

Prov 10:16 “The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death.” And you can take THAT to the bank!

Hello again!

We come now to Collection II of the proverbs of Solomon, beginning in Chapter 10.

This chapter was written by Solomon when he had some downtime; a moment of relative quiet in his palace when only 847 of his wimminfolk were clamoring for his undivided attention. I’m sure he’s the first guy on the planet to have a man cave.

There are 31 chapters in Proverbs and we have gone through the first 9 of them. Chpts 10 – 31 are collections of bits of wisdom, somewhat like a grocery list. All are things you need at the store but there isn’t an obvious connecting thread between one item and the next.

So – how to lead any kind of a meaningful study on this? Not that I’m supposed to lead a study; I’m merely here to remind you to read such and so on a particular Thursday.

I could just say “Today’s reading is Chapter 10. Read, enjoy, go forth and be wise” and call it a day.

Howsomever, Marc’s not paying me the big bucks to be a sluggard. So here is how the rest of Proverbs is going to go. Please adhere to Marc’s reading schedule: one chapter this week, two chapters the following week, repeat as needed until the end. (Not the end of time but the end of Proverbs. Or the 2nd Coming, whichever occurs first.) Meanwhile, my notes will follow the example of Dr. Ortlund, Jr. and will be topical, covering:

The Tongue  
Humility  
Family  
Emotions  
Friendship  
Money  
Life and Death

These topics will be spread out over this week and the next 14 weeks. On the last week, we’ll have the midterm which I’ve decided will be open book and open notes.

### THE TONGUE (PART I)

The tongue is a mighty weapon in our hands and we can use it not only to build up but to tear down. We have expressions in our language about the tongue: honey-tongued, sharp-tongued, loose lips sink ships, speaking with a forked tongue, speaking out of both sides of the mouth at once, nagging women (who ever heard of a nagging man?), tongue-lashing, slip of the tongue, wagging tongues, cat got your tongue?, bite your tongue, and, most parents of

teenagers belong to the Short Tongue Club because we have to bite our tongues in order not to say something taken amiss by our precious darlings.

“The pen is mightier than the sword, but the tongue is mightier than them both put together.” – Marcus Garvey

The tongue is extremely important and, as Christians, it is important that we recognize that when we arose from the waters of Baptism, we ceded certain of our rights under the First Amendment (Free Speech) to say whatever comes into our head. It matters to God what comes out of our mouths.

Mark 7:20-23 “He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. 21 For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

Saying or writing something that promotes these negative things is offensive to God. And His laws trump our First Amendment rights.

Perhaps you remember being taunted by others in school and you may have replied “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.”

But, of course, their words DID hurt. A lot. They detracted from your self-image and made you feel badly about yourself. More than that, their cruel words may have helped shape your ideas about who you are. Ideas which still define you today. “I’m the ugly one. I’m the fat one. I’m the stupid one. I can’t do anything right. Everyone else is better than me. Nobody wants me.”

Words penetrate to the heart. Derek Kidner writes, “What is done TO you is of little account beside what is done IN you . . . for good or ill.”

Gossip is a particularly nasty piece of work exercised by the tongue. And we love to hear it and we love to pass it on. The more malicious, the better. Because it takes attention away from our own shortcomings and focuses the spotlight of blame on someone else. Has gossip within the church ever brought harmony to the members? Or edification? Or has it ever been used to build each other up?

Prov. 29:11 “ A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

And James tells us:

James 3:5 “Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”

Studies show that we speak about 16,000 words in a day; obviously some speak much more than others. Our many words matter and we are to use them to glorify God.

1 Cor 6:20 “you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

Prov 20:15 “Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.”

As listeners, we can tell when somebody is babbling on and on about something about which they have no knowledge. We encounter this a lot. But, on rare occasions, a person of good reputation and slow to speak, will begin to say something and everyone falls silent so they can

hear him. Such a person never babbles; his words are edifying and helpful. He can use speech much as an artist uses his brush to create a work of art which is pleasing to others as well as God.

Prov 12:22 “The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in people that are trustworthy”

We say, “Well, I’m not a liar!” and then we immediately share untruths and pass along libel through Facebook. (One might argue that passing on false information is different than lying – it goes to the issue of whether it was consciously done or not. Much like drunk drivers not being held responsible for the havoc they cause because they weren’t in control. They will have their day in Court.)

John 8:44 “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

That’s pretty harsh. But truth can be harsh. As well it should be. Lying is repulsive to God.

But consider the story in 1 Samuel 21:

1 Sam. 21:1-3 “[a]David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

2 David answered Ahimelek the priest, “The king sent me on a mission and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. 3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

David flat-out lied to Ahimelek. So what do you think about this situation? Is this a case where lying was justified and acceptable in God’s sight?

Since the term “lying” seems pretty bad, society prettifies it by calling lies: whoppers, little white lies, fibs, slips-of-the-tongues, taradiddles, etc. All are euphemisms. But they’re just window dressing. You in the Midwest might call it putting lipstick on a pig. Does God merely wink at these minor infractions?

Is withholding the truth the same as lying? What do you think? If somebody asks you how you are doing and you answer Fine, even though you’ve had a rough morning, is that acceptable? We’ve all done this, it’s part of our culture to answer “fine” because we don’t want to cause concern in others nor do we always have (or want) the sympathy of others.

Is lying the entirety of this problem? Not really. If a man is walking alone through the forest and telling lies, who cares? What’s lacking is a listener. Listening to lies and gossip is a moral problem.

Prov 17:4 “A wicked person listens to deceitful lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.”

By listening to gossip, lies and slander, you participate in that sin. We tell ourselves that we are only listening but what we tell ourselves is a lie. And gossips flock to good listeners, don’t they? So pretty soon, you, the good listener, are filled with malicious information. How can you not be affected by that?

What should you do?

So imagine that I come to church, make a beeline over to where you are standing (near the end of the fourth pew towards the left), and eagerly start to share my juicy gossip.

Me: "Guess what I saw?!! (And before you can open your mouth, I barrel onwards) I think I saw one of the elders come out of a liquor store! Can you believe that?" I'm looking very gleeful at this point.

You: "Whoa there! Rather than tell me what you think you saw, there's Elder Berry right over there. Let's go over and then you can tell him to his face what you're telling me behind his back. Alright?"

Could we all develop the courage to disentangle ourselves from the snares of gossip?

Prov 18:8 "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts."

And let's be honest. We love gossip. We love to hear negative information about others. We love the controversy it ignites. But as we take in these corrupt words through our ears, they sink down deep inside us to our inmost parts and make an impression.

Have a great week!

### **Comment:**

Steven Wright:  
I like it ! Thanks!

### **Comment:**

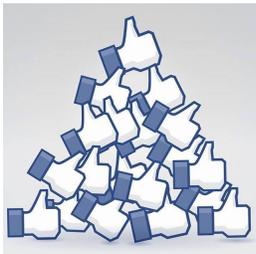
Marc Hermon:  
Elder Berry was just probably selling his wine to the liquor store.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thanks, Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Denise Waits:



### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:  
Excellent verses, Kevin! Thanks for edifying & giving me laughs this evening.

## **Comment:**

Joanne Caffie:

Over the years I've tried to associate myself more with those who can find a rainbow on any given day to help prevent me from falling victim to scenarios such as these. For the past 24 years people like Ginger and Sue Reddy have shined a light tremendously for me in this area. I often pray that I can someday be that same light for others. Thanks Kevin!

## **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

One of the hardest skills we need to learn along our path is the art of pruning. At some time, we realize that certain friends or relatives are toxic to our growth and well-being. They drain us by demanding our emotional investment in their issues without reciprocation.

## **Comment:**

Charles Fry:

Joanne, I do believe you are "that light" for others. Keep on praying, God is working in you and through you.

## **Replies:**

Butch O'Neal:

Ditto what Charles says!

Kevin Crittenden:

Ditto what Butch says!

Ginger Hermon:

Joanne Caffie: YOU ARE A BRIGHT LIGHT TO SO MANY!!! Because of YOU there are children who have obeyed the gospel. Because of YOU others have seen how to deeply love and care for their parents in their old age. BECAUSE OF YOU SO MANY WALK CLOSER TO OUR LORD!!! You are living testimony of pure religion. I've witnessed your constant love and service to all men. You're truly an inspiration and glorify HIM. Galatians 6:9-10 "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." I know you do these things, Joanne. May God continue to bless you, strengthen you, and supply all your needs, as you have blessed me and others. <3

## **Comment:**

Lori Watt:

Taradiddles???

## **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Yup. Would I lie to you?

## July 20: Proverbs 11-12 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 29

Poetry Reading for 7/20/17

Proverbs 11-12

My apologies for posting this early 'cause I'm leavin' on a jet plane. Don't know when I'll be back again. Oh babe, I hate to go. But, Kathleen and I will be swanning around San Diego, showing Katelyn the sights (The zoo, Legoland) and I wanted to remove this tremendous burden from my shoulders before we left.

### THE TONGUE (PART II)

You have a tongue. And you can use it for good.

Prov 31:8-9 “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9 Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Somebody who is being gossiped about is not there to defend themselves. God is telling us to speak up when others are being put down. “Speak up!” He commands. Because with every unkind word that goes unchallenged, a reputation dies.

Prov 18:21 “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

Who has not heard the tragic stories of teens who commit suicide after being bullied on social media? Words can literally kill. Propaganda has been used to this purpose in wartime. Tokyo Rose comes to mind, a fictional name given to a group of female Japanese broadcasters whose job it was to undermine the morale of U.S. troops during WW II.

How we speak and what we say IS important. And words that we utter which harm others will need to be justified. Again, scoffers come to mind. Those that belittle the cherished beliefs of others.

Matt 12:36 “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”

Is it best to remain silent? No, because the tongue also has the power of life. Our carefully chosen words can bring peace to a troubled heart. Here are three little words that, said in a truly contrite manner, can bring healing to a relationship: “I am sorry.”

In his book, “The Mark of the Christian,” Francis Schaeffer teaches us how to love one another in healing ways:

“What does this love mean? How can it be made visible? First, it means a very simple thing. It means that when . . . I have failed to love my Christian brother, I go to him and say, ‘I’m sorry.’ . . . It may sound simplistic to start with saying we are sorry and asking forgiveness, but it is not. This is the way of renewed fellowship, whether it is between a husband and wife, a parent and child, within a Christian community, or between groups. When we have shown a lack of love toward the other, we are called by God to go and say, ‘I’m sorry . . . I really am sorry.’ If I am not willing to say, ‘I’m sorry,’ when I have wronged somebody else – especially when I have not loved him – I have not even started to think about the meaning of a Christian oneness which the world can see. The world has a right to question whether I am a Christian.

And more than that . . . if I am not willing to do this very simple thing, the world has a right to question whether Jesus was sent from God and whether Christianity is true.”

Prov 12:18 “The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Have you been hurt by cruel words? Rhetorical question, right? We’ve all suffered from this. But even if those people never get around to saying they are sorry, you can rely on Jesus to be your Comforter. As we are told in Romans, we are God’s children.

Rom 8:16 “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Therefore, the indwelling Holy Spirit will whisper, with wise lips, healing words to us. Let us listen to Him.

Prov 12:25 “Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.”

Let’s suppose we are anxious about something. Perhaps, like Kathleen and me, you have a son in the military who is being sent into combat in a war zone. You worry. Had we just kept to ourselves, stewing and fretting, we would have descended even further into anxiety. In such times, we need to seek the company of trusted others who can supply us with kind words. We need to share our concerns.

This country treats self-reliance as a virtue. We love the lone hero who rides into town, saves the day, and then disappears before anyone can learn his name. The pretty girl sighs and thinks “Now THERE’S a man!” Even if we admire such a man, this is not God’s ideal for us. He tells us to love one another. Not to ride off into the sunset by ourselves. So this idea of “Grin and bear it” all alone in the face of adversity may be an American ideal but is not God’s ideal.

Let us look for opportunities to speak a kind word to others. Whether they are weighed down with anxiety or not. Let us build one another up.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. . . The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.”

Prov 10:11 “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”

Prov 10:21 “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense.”

Have you ever been a caregiver to someone who is unable to do anything for themselves? It’s very tiring, right? You give and you give of yourself so that this person’s life is made possible. But you only have so much water in the well and, over time, it is natural that you begin to burn out. Unless you find a way to refresh yourself.

Our words can be (should be) nourishing to others but what is nourishing to us? By walking more closely with Christ. In doing so, we replenish our inner reservoirs and are then able to reflect His light into nourishment for others.

Eph 4:29 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

But our words need substance. "Empty talk" is of little use; it may make promises but delivers little. Certain people are skilled at rhetoric, which stirs the people up, but then their rhetoric falls flat in the face of reality.

Prov 14:23 "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."

Our subsequent excuses and spin doctoring don't impress God.

Prov 24:12 If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

Gen 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Are you your brother's keeper? Well, yes, you are. Who, among your circle of friends, is suffering or anxious or depressed? Do you merely talk about helping them or are you actively doing something about it? (Sending a card of support, maybe, delivering a casserole (I can give you my address), buying some groceries to tide them over. . .)

There's another aspect of our words. By expressing ourselves openly, we may become targets for our enemies.

Prov 13:3 "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."

There are stories, perhaps you've heard them, of people who express their views (and thus their character) openly on Facebook and subsequently go in for a job interview. The candidate looks promising up to the point when the employer researches that candidate's Facebook posts, which run contrary to the company's ideals. Would you, as a Christ-centered hiring manager, want to employ somebody who boasts about being a Wiccan on their Facebook page?

I suppose it can't be helped. We have the right and responsibility to let people know where we stand. Just be aware that whatever you say may be held against you, in life as well as a court of law.

Jesus is THE example of how we should speak. He also knew when to remain silent.

John 7:46 "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards replied.

However, Jesus' guarded mouth did not preserve His life. He stepped up to the plate and took upon himself the sin of our unguarded words, our lies, our slander, our guilty silences, our braggadocio, our gossip, our mockery and griping, our angry words and empty excuses – all these He took upon Himself and, without glancing at them, hit the Delete button.

Words, of course, are a form of communication.

Matthew 27:46 says "About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

What happened here? At this point, the true horror of the crucifixion, the separation from God, took place. This was done for a purpose. God stopped communicating acceptance to his

Son, so that Jesus would never stop communicating acceptance to us. Jesus IS the Word and the model of how we should speak: To Him, through Him, and about Him.

Have a great week!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Yvonna Hartman:  
Excellent. Thanks!

### **Comment:**

Lori Watt:  
Another wonderful post... I'm just a "bit" behind...

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:  
It doesn't help that I write too much.

Lori Watt:  
You do write a lot, but no "too much". You put a lot of work and thoughts and effort into your writings, and that is a good thing. :-)

## **July 27: Proverbs 13 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 30

Poetry Reading for 7/27/17

Proverbs 13 (And, no, this is NOT a collection of unlucky proverbs)

Prov 22:4 "Humility is the fear of the LORD; its wages are riches and honor and life."

HUMILITY (PART I)

This week, we begin the topic of Humility on which, as you should already know, I am an expert.

Wouldn't it be great, though, if I could just say, "As far as humility goes, just follow my example, okay?"

Umm. Not so much. There is still a lot of pride in that statement. Saying "I'm more humble than you are" is an oxymoron.

So I'm a bad example. But Jesus is a perfect example. So, while I'm eating a large serving of humble pie, let's learn from Proverbs together how to be more like Him.

"Get off your high horse!" - That's not in proverbs but maybe it should be. Most people didn't have horses in those days.

Anyway, a proud (arrogant) person is hardly amenable to accepting the teachings of others. They are the ones that have their answer running in any conversation so do not really listen to others. How can we learn and grow in wisdom if we are not teachable?

When we are baptized, we are saying clearly, "Lord, I want newness of life. I want to turn my life over to You. I want to learn from You as we walk together. Please show me your Glory." This is a radical change for us and it requires humility. The Bible is clear about this:

Matt 23:12 "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

Matt 18:4 "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Isa 40:4 "Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.

Etc., etc.

So we see that pride humiliates us whereas humility exalts us. This is God's message, not the message of the society that we live in. Dog eat dog. Top dog. Climbing the ladder. Pushing our way to the top of the heap. Success at any cost. Second place is the first loser.

I mention the disparities between our culture and God's wisdom to keep us cognizant of the conflicting forces that live without us and within us. We ARE in conflict and again, I recommend spending some time revisiting your long-standing ideas of what success means. AND what you might have to give up to live successfully.

What is humility?

Prov 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,  
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding

Prov 22:4 Humility is the fear of the Lord;  
its wages are riches and honor and life.

Now, I'm a big believer and adherent of the concept of self-esteem. So how can we feel better about ourselves? How do we grab hold of the happy life that we want? And deserve? The many (really many) published self-help books out there give us tools to build up our self-esteem, make us feel better about ourselves. And who wouldn't want that?

However, here is an article by Lauren Slater citing studies about self-esteem that point us in a different direction:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/magazine/the-trouble-with-self-esteem.html>

"The fact is," Emler (one of the researchers) says, "we've put antisocial men through every self-esteem test we have, and there's no evidence for the old psychodynamic concept that they secretly feel bad about themselves. These men are racist or violent because they don't feel bad enough about themselves."

Slater goes on to say: "Perhaps, as these researchers are saying, pride really is dangerous, and too few of us know how to be humble. "

But we can learn to be humble. We don't come to Christ because we are humble but because we are proud. He accepts us and helps us with our issue of pride. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Matt 22:4 Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

Jesus doesn't say that WE have to be ready to come to the feast. It's is the feast that has been prepared. We just need to show up and partake.

Prov 28:14 Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble.

It seems odd to juxtapose being blessed (happiness) and trembling (fear). But this is in opposition to the B-line of the proverb, having a hard heart. Thus, trembling before God means approaching Him with an open heart, nothing held back, nothing hidden (as if you could), but being aware of your own limitations and failings and coming to Him anyway for forgiveness. Which, as you know, brings true happiness.

We will continue this next week. Stay tuned!

<https://mobile.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/magazine/the-trouble-with-self-esteem.html?referer=http://m.facebook.com>  
"The Trouble with Self-Esteem"

### **Comment:**

Charles Fry:  
Good thoughts, good article too.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:  
Thanks, Kevin! I hope you are edifying your local congregation with sermons. The Lord has blessed you with talents. :-) There were some popular verses in chapter 13 - for example - verses 22 & 24. A good man leaves an inheritance and discipline rooted in love.

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Actually, I have yet to give a sermon. What can I tell people that have been walking with the Lord far longer than I have?

Craig Hensley:

Kevin Crittenden this sure sounded like a sermon. And a good one at that. Thanks for the spiritual edification.

Janet Gordon Gentry:

There will always be those who have walked with the Lord longer than you, and always will be those that have come in behind you. I have learned many lessons from the young (in spirit and/or age). Please use your gift to teach and encourage others in your group. This was a great lesson! Thanks for teaching me today!

Joanne Caffie:

You could share with them how you yourself came to know the Lord, the importance of following him and the commitment you now have towards obedience. The Apostle Paul constantly used where his background to bring others to the Lord and I think that your history could help others too.

It is very easy for us to hide behind FB rather than help our brethren face-to-face (which is needed more). I find myself doing the same thing from time to time. But the Lily white field is right in front of you waiting for you to step out of that comfort zone. We all know you can do it and so does HE. Sometimes you just gotta step out on faith. We believe in you brother now all you gotta do is believe in you too.

Kevin Crittenden:

Joanne Caffie - Thank you, and others, for the encouragement! I will start writing up my first sermon, speaking about the greatest sermon ever given - The Sermon on the Mount.

Joanne Caffie:

Please have someone record it so that I can be uplifted by it too.

Kevin Crittenden:

It will say "Blessed are the encouragers of this world for their light shines forth to glorify God in the hearts of the timid."

Ginger Hermon:

Kevin Crittenden - this decision brings great joy! Thank you for glorifying Him & teaching others.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:

Ditto what Craig said, Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Joanne Caffie:

This was a VERY uplifting "sermon" Kevin. Thank you for your continued diligence in searching the scriptures and sharing them with us.

### **Comment:**

Kimra Grantham Robinson:

Kevin, your thoughts have always been appreciated - both in class and private studies. A sermon is nothing more than an extension of that. We, at 7th street, would love to have you "sermonize" from the pulpit. Finding your voice and the right audience is tough. As a woman, even harder in some respects. There are a couple of men in our group that I would love to hear more from in the pulpit. You are one of them. Thanks for a great start to my morning! Now I'll go and be awesome - hahahhaa! BTW - clothes went into can. 😊

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I should explain that the remark about clothes going into the can does not mean that Kim has become a naturist but rather somebody left trashbags of clothing at the church. People seem to think that they can dump stuff in our parking lot, maybe thinking that as a church, we can find a "use" for their unwanted stuff.

Kevin Crittenden:

P.S. Kim is awesome 24/7

## August 3: Proverbs 14-15 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 31

Poetry Reading for 8/03/17

Proverbs 14-15

Hello again –

This week, we continue on with the topic of humility.

### HUMILITY (PART II)

Prov 15:33 Wisdom's instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honor.

Prov 18:12 Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

Prov 29:23 Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honor.

The value of humility is exhorted throughout the Bible. The least shall be the greatest. We should, nay, we must strive to follow this pattern in our lives by slowly deflating our pampered egos, chipping away at the imprisoning walls of our hardened pride, abdicating with grace our nominal position as Number One, and, through Baptism in Jesus Christ, submitting ourselves to our Lord and Savior. How HARD it is to cede our authority, to bend our knee to Him, to abdicate our accustomed position of control; not by giving lip service, showing up to church on Sunday and merely going through the motions but REALLY, TRULY draining the swamp within. But ONLY when we have made room in our souls for HIM by clearing out the excess of US, can we then be built up into MAGNIFICENCE, reflections of HIS GLORY. And what better honor is there than that.

I must admit that I play a game of Tug-of-War with God, not willing to let go of my fantasy of control. Sometimes I'm more inclined to give in, other times I dig in my heels and say "Just this once (meaning lots of times), let me do what I think is best."

Rom 8:30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Notice it says “glorified.” Not “made mediocre.” He glorifies us! We are able to transcend our mundane lives through His justification. First humility. Then honor.

If you are a child of God and your life still seems rather mundane, then don’t worry about it. You are significant in His eyes and He keeps His promises.

Perhaps you remember Bob Dylan’s lyrics:

The line it is drawn  
The curse it is cast  
The slowest now  
Will later be fast  
As the present now  
Will later be past  
The order is rapidly fading  
And the first one now will later be last  
Cause the times they are a-changing

Here are more proverbs for consideration:

Prov 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Prov 28:26 Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.

Prov 30:12 There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth.

Prov 16:2 All a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

Prov 14:12 There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

Pride is natural to me and perhaps to you as well. It feels like the right thing. We are “lifted up” by pride. The Hebrew words translated “pride” and “haughty” both have to do with height, of being lifted up.

We remember that in the Book of Daniel, Daniel tells King Belshazzar that Belshazzar’s father, King Nebuchadnezzar, was given glory and majesty by God. But when his heart became hardened from putting on airs, down he tumbled like Humpty-Dumpty. All the way to the ground, a shattered man eating grass like an ox.

Dan 5:18-20 “Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. 19 Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. 20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:7 “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.”

Our brains are, au fond, wired to follow pleasure and avoid pain. They help us survive in the natural world (see bear → run screaming) but they (our brains, not the bears) are not dependable as good moral compasses.

What can we do to overcome our natural leanings? Follow the Instruction Manual and ingest its Wisdom like an infant being nourished by its mother's milk. Got Wisdom?

How do the humble behave?

Prov 13:13 Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded.

Prov 15:31 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.

Prov 28:13 Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

The humble behave by revering, by listening and by confessing.

Humility REVERES the Word of God but pride scoffs at it. Humility treats each verse as a blessing from God but Arrogance tramples them into the mud.

Humility LISTENS to reproof, which keeps us on the path with Him. Reproof which is abusive, though, should be ignored and perhaps that relationship should be questioned. But we do need loving correction.

Humility CONFESSES and forsakes sin. Let us confess our sins to one another but NEVER in a shaming environment. Let us not be like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11 who concentrated on the shortcomings of others: "The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector.'"

In his work "Thoughts on the Revival," Jonathan Edwards says: "Spiritual pride tends to speak of other persons' sins with bitterness or with laughter and an air of contempt. But pure Christian humility rather tends either to be silent about these problems or to speak of them with grief and pity. Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others, but a humble Christian is most guarded about himself. He is as suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. The proud person is apt to find fault with other believers, that they are low in grace, and to be quick to note their deficiencies. But the humble Christian has so much to do at home and sees so much evil in his own heart and is so concerned about it that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts. He is apt to esteem others better than himself. "

I know I have a long way to go. Perhaps I'll see you on that road too. But we have an example and a guide for how to get from wherever we are to there.

Phillipians 2:6-11 tells us:

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
7 rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!  
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Next week we will begin talking about the Family.

Have a great week!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

## **August 10: Proverbs 16 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 32  
Poetry Reading for 8/10/17  
Proverbs 16

### **FAMILY (PART I)**

Good morning, Family! Remember that we only have one bathroom so stop hogging it!

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

And if he does depart from it, it's probably his mom's fault. ^-^

All of us are part of some kind of family, so we know that **SOMETIMES**, family relationships can be difficult. Not because of us, certainly, but because of that other family member. Each of our families probably has a "black sheep," you know, the one that doesn't really "fit" in. Who that black sheep is depends on which family member you ask. Anyway, sometimes it's hard to maintain that Norman Rockwell illusion of Happy Families.

Proverbs offers practical wisdom on making family relationships work in a way that is pleasing to God. For instance, what kind of woman is ideal to take as a wife?

Prov 31:10-11 [a] An excellent wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.

The climax of the book of Proverbs is a description of this ideal woman who fears God. The phrase "an excellent wife" is more literally translated as "a woman of strength." The ideal woman is strong – she is a hard worker, earns money, is kind to the poor, is fearless about the future, enhances her husband's reputation, speaks with wisdom etc. Her strength is not meant to be in competition with her husband, but rather to augment his strength.

A husband and a wife each have their own strengths, which ideally are brought to bear within a marriage to overcome the difficulties that beset every life. Difficulties, like sin, lie crouching at the door, but with the confluence of strengths present in a good marriage, those difficulties can

more easily be borne. And there are many difficulties in every marriage; it can be a rocky ride sometimes.

Malcolm Turnbull, current P.M. of Australia says:

“Let us be honest with each other. The threat to marriage is not the gays. It is a lack of loving commitment - whether it is found in the form of neglect, indifference, cruelty or adultery, to name just a few manifestations of the loveless desert in which too many marriages come to grief.”

In Prov 31:11, the word “gain” means “loot, plunder, the spoils of war.” So is the virtuous wife also a buccaneer?

“Oh, Honey, I’m heading out with some quilting friends for a little looting and plundering but I’ll stop by the store on the way home and pick up dinner.”

As enticing as that fantasy might be, this wording is used to indicate the realities of our lives. Life is a struggle, sometimes a war. And this “excellent wife” is up to the challenge. She has donned the full armor of God and can stride into the maelstrom of life with confidence. She’s got her husband’s six and he loves her deeply for that. This beautiful woman, this precious gift from God, is her husband’s greatest earthly treasure and he cherishes her deeply.

If you, as a woman, are thinking, “I’m sure not THAT woman. Sometimes I’m afraid of life, sometimes I need to be held, sometimes I lack confidence, and, if I’m honest, sometimes I wonder if my husband secretly thinks he could have done better.”

(Just between you, me and that fly on the wall, I’ll share that men sometimes have similar thoughts. “Whatever does my wife see in me? She could have done so much better.” )

If you are feeling that way, then remember that your wedding, performed in the presence of God, means that He approves of your union. That you are the right woman for your husband and that he is the right man for you. We will talk more about marriage in Song of Songs, coming soon to a FB posting near you!

[And just to be clear, I know that some of you might be a bit skittish, knowing that I’m a native Californian, now living within a stoned throw of Berserkely, and therefore possibly subscribing to certain regnant social mores including: “If it feels good, do it” and “if you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with” and “Love your neighbor but don't get caught.”

So, again, to clarify, when I’m talking about marriage, I’m talking about a man and a woman. I’m not talking about a union between Not Sure and Undecided. ]

By the way, did you notice that there is no line in Proverbs 31 that says: And she is eternally 25 and looks smokin’ hot in a low-cut blouse and stiletto heels? That is the ideal promoted in our culture but has no place in God’s culture.

You may be wondering why there isn’t a Proverbs 32 man. (No doubt it is because I hadn’t been born yet so there wasn’t a model. ) Remember, Proverbs was written (mostly) for the education of men and boys, most likely for budding royal officials but narrowing in on young men of marriageable age. At that time and in that culture, women didn’t enjoy the full equality, equal pay, heartfelt gratitude, praiseworthy respect and lauded honor that they now enjoy everywhere in our current culture.

If you, as a man, are thinking “I haven’t trusted and valued and affirmed my wife as she deserves,” ah well, then, you’re probably right. Go make it up to her right now. (Sorry, couldn’t resist.)

The word “husbandry”, as you know, has to do with cultivation. You tend your crops to maximize your yield. You, as a husband, are to cultivate, encourage, support and nurture your wife so she may develop her potential and grow into the person that God intended she be.

How do we husbands do that? By nitpicking and browbeating and pointing out areas where she should improve? “Louise! I sure wish that someday when I come home from work that the cooking pots and pans are as warm as the TV set!”

No. Definitely not. Proverbs 31 tells us.

31:28-31 Her children arise and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her:

29 “Many women do noble things,  
but you surpass them all.”

30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

31 Honor her for all that her hands have done,  
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Guys, note that the word “praise” appears three times in these verses. You, as a husband, need to praise your wife at home where the children can see and learn from your example. Put-downs and bickering, fault-finding and angry silences are also examples that your children will absorb like a sponge.

Perhaps you are focusing angrily on your wife’s wasteful spending habits or the fact that she doesn’t cook as well as your mother (yes, I’ve heard of this) or . . . Can you find something praiseworthy about the woman you married? Surely you can! What qualities attracted you to her in the first place? Tell her tonight. The Gospel is speaking to you.

Men, how you see God will inevitably show up in how you treat your family. A.W. Tozer wrote, “The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him.” If your concept of God is less than who He really is, then you will think unworthy thoughts about your wife and say unworthy words to her. God is not wanting you and your wife to live in silent, sullen, dejected and defeated mediocrity. Take time to affirm one another every day and watch your marital life bloom.

Prov 15:20 A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.

Prov 20:20 If someone curses their father or mother, their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.

Prov 23:25 Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice.

Since, at last count, all of us have parents, these bits of wisdom apply to all of us. How are we to grow in wisdom towards our parents? Note the words “despises” and “curses.” Those are opposite of what is required.

What is required of us?

Ex 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

You might be asking yourself, Who would do such a thing as to hurl swear words at their parents? Nobody I know, certainly.

To despise someone is to treat them as worthless; to curse them is similar to despising them – you treat them as beneath you.

To honor our parents means to treat them as worthy. Just because they are our parents. Not only if they have earned our respect.

How can we honor our parents?

First, by thanking them. Stop blaming them for their failures and thank them for their successes. Stop blaming them for YOUR failures, take responsibility for your own choices and then move forward in the direction you want to go using the tools that your parents (and God) gave you.

Secondly, if your parents are or were Christians, then imitate them.

Heb 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

On a personal note, my father left our family, preferring the pleasures of the Adulterous Woman to the responsibilities of family. I was 4 and my brother was 7. My father was a non-presence in our lives – I didn't even realize he had left. He didn't say goodbye to us, never visited, never wrote, never sent presents, never taught his sons how to be worthy men.

So why should I honor him?

My mother was the strong one who put herself through college so she could shoulder the responsibility of supporting us. She is the embodiment of the Finnish word "Sisu." But my father – how should I think about him? Charles gave me helpful insight into this – namely, to honor my father by being the best father I could be to my own children; by being the best husband I could be to my wife; by modeling the Christian life to everyone I meet.

THAT, I can work with.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Excellent!

### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:  
Thanks, Kevin. Another interesting read. I liked Charles Fry advice. I'm storing that away for future reference with others who have had a painful experience. Once again good thoughts on the family. Also a good reading in Proverbs 16. Commit your works to the Lord & your thoughts will be established!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger! I hope that you never have occasion to need Charles' advice. ( By that I mean his advice on THIS particular matter; not ALL of his advice.)

And thank you for being a cheerleader for Christ! Your encouragement is a blessing to me and others. People wonder about the role of women in the church but your role shines brightly as an example to all.

## Comment:

LuAnn Woody:  
Good proverbosity!

## August 17: Proverbs 17-18 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 33  
Poetry Reading for 8/17/17  
Proverbs 17-18

### FAMILY (PART II)

Good morning!

Today, we will continue with the wisdom that Proverbs has to offer on the subject of families and why your children are well-mannered but misunderstood while other people's children are often ill-mannered brats.

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

Raising kids is a tough job and, if you have children, you don't need me to tell you that. Kathleen once asked her Uncle Chet about children: "Which age is the most difficult?" His answer: "Whatever age they are."

How hard it is to train a child in the way he or she should go when they think you are possibly the most irritating and stupid person on the planet.

So what IS "the way he should go"? Are the following your thoughts? My son needs the best education so he can get a really good-paying job! You can't make it in this world without a lot of money. And how can he afford to get married if he doesn't have a college degree? My daughter needs the best education she can get so she can support herself because you just can't depend on men anymore. And it is really important that I caution her away from the wrong kind of men, men who don't have good prospects. My kids need me every step of the way, otherwise they will make mistakes.

We might be thinking along these lines but the American Dream is not from God. There is no Eleventh Commandment that says "Wealth Equals Success." The "way your child should go" is along the path that leads to Heaven. How do you help your child to find THAT path?

The word translated "train up" means "dedicate." We remember that Samuel was dedicated to the LORD.

1 Sam 1:28 Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

I'm not suggesting that you bundle your children into the back of your pickup truck and drop them off at the nearest church for them to raise (although it may seem tempting), but rather that you model for them what it means to be a Christian dedicated to the LORD. If you are enthusiastic about Christ, then your children will see that and remember.

Please keep in mind, though, that you do not have total control over your children – they are unique individuals who will either follow your example or go their own way. In other words,

there is no guarantee that your good example will cause your kids to follow in your footsteps. Some people, knowing this, attempt to limit their children's interaction with the world so they won't stray from God. Let me know how that works for you.

Francis Schaeffer wrote: "One of the greatest injustices we do to our young people is to ask them to be conservative. Christianity today is not conservative, but revolutionary. To be conservative today is to miss the whole point, for conservatism means standing in the flow of the status quo. . . [W]e must teach the young to be revolutionaries, revolutionaries against the status quo."

And here is an article about effective communication with your children: [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_parents\\_can\\_communicate\\_more\\_effectively\\_with\\_children](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_parents_can_communicate_more_effectively_with_children)

22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Foolishness is the willful refusal to make moral choices. Because to do so is a major step in becoming an adult and our young folks are often resistant to cross that bridge. We live in a world increasingly filled with half-adults. They often still live with their parents, don't have a purpose, don't have a career, don't want marriage, don't have kids, have only a nebulous idea of what they stand for, and don't contribute. They have been brought up to feel entitled, but that feeling isn't shared by the world beyond the doorstep of their parent's house.

A recent article by Tatiana Sanchez in the San Jose Mercury, (April 20), says "Meanwhile, a majority of young people in the nation have ditched the centuries long tradition of marrying and having kids early in life to pursue educational and professional goals. More than half of Americans believe marrying and having children are not as important for becoming an adult. In the 1970s, 8 in 10 people married by the time they turned 30, according to the report. In 2015, 8 in 10 people married by age 45. 'If one theme describes how adulthood has changed over the last 40 years, it is growing complexity,' the report said. In 1975, there was one predominant adult milestone—family formation— that people largely experienced during their 20's. Today, while the milestones have remained the same, the pathways are more diverse."

Robert Bly addresses this topic in his book "The Sibling Society," where the word "sibling" is used as a metaphor. He says: "Adults regress toward adolescence; and adolescents – seeing that – have no desire to become adults. Few are able to imagine any genuine life coming from the vertical plane – tradition, religion, devotion." He then goes on to quote the neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky: "My students usually come with ego boundaries like exoskeletons. Most have no use for religion, precedents, or tradition. They want their rituals newly minted and shared horizontally within their age group, not vertically over time. The ones I train to become scientists go at it like warriors, overturning reigning paradigms, each discovery a murder of their scientific ancestors."

Young folks today ask their same-age friends (horizontal plane) for advice. Elders (vertical plane) are ignored and left feeling useless, unnecessary and in the way.

Typical exchange on Facebook (Names unchanged to lay blame):

WorrydGirl: I think my boyfriend cheated on me.

SexxyThang12: He an ass.

SheRulesAll: men R pigs.

As parents, part of our job is to prepare our children to launch, thus avoiding perpetual puerility. We help them emerge from their immaturity and set them on the road to greatness in Christ using the rod of discipline. This does NOT mean beating them into submission or breaking their spirit. Gentle correction can sometimes be achieved by a look. Most husbands recognize that look when their wives use it. And inwardly quail.

Some people feel that a child should never be spanked – but it’s hard to get that concept from a reading of the Bible. As parents, you know your family best and can work out a system of coaching, punishments and rewards that help your children grow up to become worthy men and women.

Prov 14:26 Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.

The fear of the Lord is the greatest legacy that we can leave our children. It will be a place of refuge for them when the trials of life seem more than they can bear. And our children WILL suffer. In those times, they need to know how to draw strength from God. Will you show them how?

And do you remember that we are all as children to the Lord?

Heb 12:5-7 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”a] 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

Nowhere in the Bible is there a mention of a money-back guarantee that our lives will be trouble-free once we adopt the mantle of Christianity. The wise Father continues to guide and discipline his children; His will is for our own good whether we think it is or not. Yes, we suffer but we come through that Valley of Death a stronger people, wiser than before. He refines His people. Us. And nowhere in the Bible have I read God saying, “Oh, they’ve had enough. I’ll ease up now.” God, the wise parent, gives us what we need. Whether we like it or agree with it or not.

God does not take half-measures. Jesus lived fully as a man, suffered fully during his brief life, was fully rejected by the ruling authorities, suffered fully on the cross, endured fully an agonizing separation from God. Why? Because He fully loves us.

Have a great week! Next time, we begin to look at Emotions.

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_parents\\_can\\_communicate\\_more\\_effectively\\_with\\_children](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_parents_can_communicate_more_effectively_with_children)  
“How Parents Can Communicate Effectively to Their Children”

## **Comment:**

Butch O’Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

## **Comment:**

Joanne Caffie:

Another great sermon Kevin. Thx for sharing

## **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Joanne! Does it count as a sermon if not delivered orally?

Joanne Caffie:

I believe that anything that helps draw someone closer to God can be a sermon. In my humble opinion, a sermon is nothing more than someone adding their thoughts to help the audience better understand the Word. And not to lift you up too high but I think you do a most excellent job in this area.

Because you came into the Body much later than most affords you an opportunity to reach those that others can't. Beware, if you don't use that talent the Lord will surely take it back (Matt 25:27-28). #luvubrother

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Joanne! I am blessed to be a part of this community which, indeed, lifts me up. As far as I know, this group is limited to those in the Body; therefore I like to write things on my personal page which hopefully are seen by those who need it. In my experience, people see the word "Christ" or "religion" and immediately stop reading because they've seen it all before, etc. etc. My challenge is to find a way through that. Once I complete my notes for the 7 Bibles Study (in early September), I want to reach out to people like myself. Seekers, not satisfied with their life, knowing that Something is out there but not sure what it is.

## **Comment:**

Joshua Riggins:

Good points well made on these passages.

What are your thoughts on the second half of 22:6, "when he is old, he will not depart from it."?

## **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you!

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

Wise people, when they plant a sapling, anchor the new tree to a sturdy support to protect the tree from winds, or from things that might hit it. Like soccer balls or wayward children. The support keeps the trunk from bending because the trunk is not yet strong enough to rebuff the strong forces that might bend or even break it.

Children are not strong enough to withstand the forces of the world without support. Thus, we parents don't allow our 2-year olds to play in the street, nor do we allow our 15-year old daughters to dress in a suggestive manner. A person's mind doesn't fully develop until about 25 years of age. This, of course, is the physical world.

As you know, there are forces at work in the spiritual realm as well. As we physically protect our children in the physical world, it behooves us as parents to also bolster our children in the spiritual realm.

It does no good, however, to keep our kids in a spiritual straightjacket as I've heard some people try to do. (Example: if you stop attending church, you'll be kicked out of the house.) As parents we guide, we provide examples, we make resources available, we communicate with our children which means that we LISTEN to them.

If church is not their "thing" right now, it may be that they are exploring internally what they DO believe. As all men must, we have to, at some point, really tease out the differences between what WE believe against what others have told us and what society has told us and what teachers have told us. It's not easy to do.

The sapling, once it reaches a certain size, no longer needs its training wheels. It will continue to grow straight and true, as long as it continues to be nourished.

Our children, once they reach a certain age, will outgrow us. But they will never outgrow the memory of our good teaching in which we stressed the encouragement of Christ in their lives and lived ourselves as Godly people, without hypocrisy, without gossip, without judgement, humbly, in service to others and always compassionate. And loving our children always as Christ loves us always.

Yes, our children have free will and can exercise choices. We cannot make their choices for them. But we can help them to see the Beauty of and hear the voice of Lady Wisdom over the distracting cacophony of this fallen world.

Like the tree, our children need constant nourishment, the living water that Christ provides. Let us partake of that nourishment along with our children so they may see and learn.

Charles Fry:

Solomon's proverbs are collected wise sayings, general truths, observational conclusions, principles to live by, but not divine promises or guarantees.

When Solomon concluded "Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth." (Proverbs 10:4 NIV) we hopefully recognize that there is a correlation between persistent work and having enough, but not every lazy person is poor, and not every industrious person is rich. This isn't a promise, it is a principle that encourages being a diligent worker, which is much better than being lazy.

Likewise, there is the principle that proper preparation of children by parents produces lifetime benefits, but this is not at all a guarantee that diligent parenting will always produce godly children. Children can be taught, guided, disciplined, and it is in their best interest to have such parental guidance, but ultimately they do accept or reject what they are taught, in whole or in part, including faith. They can't be "programmed" for inevitable success. Generally, those good things learned in childhood provide benefits for life, and perhaps good return eventually if not immediately, but free will is real, and Ezekiel 18 dramatically and explicitly affirms that we each answer for our own choices, not parents for children nor children for parents.

Joanne Caffie:

Kevin Crittenden I had that rule at my house but to me it didn't quite sound like that. It was a house rule... It was MY rule... and it went something like this... "In this house we

worship God on Sundays. I can't tell you which church to go to but it is required for you to attend somewhere in order to continue staying here."

This rule was established for those who thought they could move in & out with no boundaries. As for the younger, they did not have a choice in the matter because I was/ am training them up in the way they "should" go.

Joshua Riggins:

Thank you for the commentary. I agree, Charles, that these proverbs are presented as general truths. (22:11 is another good example)

That said, it would seem that even a child who rebels against their upbringing cannot depart from that upbringing. Once knowledge and practice have been established by the parents, there cannot be a time when the child is ignorant of the right way. (Hebrews 6:4-6 for instance)

Joanne Caffie:

Amen

Charles Fry:

Joanne Caffie I think it is reasonable to have "house rules" for adult children or others who may seek shelter under our roof. Those rules might include various things, such as moral behavior, sobriety, efforts at productivity, and yes, church attendance. Not everyone will necessarily have the same set of rules in such a case, or maybe the same needs or situation to address, but it is reasonable to attach requirements for tolerable behavior and/or good effort when providing room and board to someone, and perhaps even moreso if there are young ones still in the home who might be influenced.

Joanne Caffie:

If I have or ever offend someone by my posts here on FB please, Please, PLEASE forgive me. Sometimes I get caught up in my emotions when replying but I never mean any harm.

I wrote a post to my niece the other day & she called me to tell me that it was funny AND firm all at the same time. I know that words can be misinterpreted so I'm asking for forgiveness early should my comments be taken out of context. #thatisall. LOL

## **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin! That was an alarming statistic.

## **August 24: Proverbs 19 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 34

Poetry Reading for 8/24/17

Proverbs 19

Well, I see by the clock on the wall that the little hand is on the 5 and the big hand is on the floor, so you know what THAT means. Yup. Time to buy a new clock!

EMOTIONS (PART I)

Grab your hankies, because we are about to get emotional.

Prov 15:30 Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.

In our culture, the expression of emotions might be regarded as an activity that Makes Others Uncomfortable, so generally should be avoided. After all, who knows what Strangers Might Think. Women are regarded as being more in touch with their emotions, and are therefore freer to express them than men. Men, not wanting to appear epicene, are expected to quash all their emotions. Except anger. So, if you men in the audience and your wives are sharing a box of Kleenex at the movies while watching Richard Gere ascend the escalator in the movie, "Shall We Dance?," then you will be expected to turn in your Man Card at the front desk. And you'll forevermore be thought of as the kid who was chosen last for football during P.E.

Tough-as-nails, surly, taciturn John Wayne wouldn't cry. Nor would his horse. But what does the Bible say?

John 11:35 Jesus wept.

Was He alone where nobody could see? No. Was He embarrassed? No. He was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." Does this mean that God is showing us that it is okay for all of us (men included) to be in touch with all our emotions? Well, yes.

God is emotional. Jesus is emotional. Emotion is part of humility. Jesus didn't just stand on the sidelines taking notes about humanity like some cold, bespectacled, dispassionate, objective scientific researcher. No, He got into the trenches WITH us and got all sweaty and stinky and bloody. He was knocked about in the mud and verbally reviled. "Pearls before swine" describes Jesus before the Pharisees.

In her book, "Rising Strong," author Brené Brown quotes from Theodore Roosevelt's famous 1910 "Man in the Arena" speech:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; . . . who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

It's no good criticizing others from your safe seat in the bleachers. You need to get into the arena. Jesus was that example for us.

Isa 53:4-5 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.  
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

What emotion do we see in Christ? Primarily, we see compassion.

Mk 10:21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

If you are a man, would it be awkward to tell another man that you love him? How can men today develop and express deep bonds of affection without seeming effeminate?

Mk 1:40-41 And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."

Luke 19:41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it

Paul wrote:

Phil 1:8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Emotions are an important part of creating a gospel culture within the church so that people can experience the compassion that flows from God.

Have you ever felt less than thrilled about going to church? I have. I admit it. Some days, we may resist getting out of bed, the megrims have settled in and going to church seems like an effort. We trot out all the rationalizations: the singing is terrible, this guy's lessons are insipid, my mind wanders during class, it's raining and I feel tired. My wife's wisdom imparted to me is BE the spark that you wish to see, BE the encourager that you wish to hear.

Beyond compassion, Jesus also felt anger.

Mark 3:4-5 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

He was indignant (Mk 10:14), offended (Jn 11:33), hostile (John 2:13-17), called people "pigs" (Matt 7:6), "hypocrites" (Matt 15:7), "wolves" (Matt 7:15). Jesus wasn't much into euphemisms or political correctness nor did He feel the necessity of employing spin doctors to make His message palatable to everybody to the extent that it said essentially nothing.

His emotions also caused Him suffering.

Isa 53:3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

But Jesus endured the cross for a reason.

Heb. 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Ps 45:7 you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

Why did Jesus come?

John 15:11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus came, among other things, to offer us the fullness of His joy and serve as an example of living a fully human life in close fellowship with God.

And in the Book of Proverbs, we have His wisdom for dealing with our own emotions.

Our own emotions are often fueled by desire. Our desires may seem harmless enough, often good, but what does James say?

James 1:14-15 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James warns us that we cannot trust in the goodness of our desires; our feelings about them are tainted by our wants and perceived needs.

“I know that God wants me to be happy, so I’m going to commit adultery with my secretary; why else would God have crossed our paths? “

“I think a sparkling wine would really set off this dinner party. I know that Alvin used to be an alcoholic but I think he’s over that now.”

“I really want that promotion and raise but it would mean taking a position in which I would be expected to misrepresent our product (just a little) to our customers in order to make the sales.”

So are we supposed to suppress all our desires? By no means! But let us measure our desires against the standard of the Word given to us by God and see if our desires align with His Will for us. And it might be a good idea to use a trusted person (like your spouse) as a sounding board.

Prov 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Prov 28:1 The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

If you are like I am, then you worry too much about what others think. I might make a comment on Facebook or in these studies and then worry if I’ve offended someone or said something erroneous or come across as arrogant or . . . We ALL want, indeed need, to belong to social groups. There is little worse than feeling socially left out. Or shunned. Which is a tool the Amish use to great effectiveness. (I, personally, have never been shunned by the Amish and I hope to keep it that way.)

But the wisdom of Proverbs redirects our hunger for acceptance and approval by men to Him who loves us. God may correct us as a loving Father would but He will never shun us (like my earthly father did). And when we have THAT assurance, are we not drawn closer to Him in trust? And when we are filled with spiritual wisdom, guess what? Our desires, our goals – change! We WANT to be pleasing to Him.

Col 1:9-10 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Yes, we would like other people to like and accept us. They may or they may not. But we must be pleasing to God. That is the fear of the Lord.

Personally, I have a problem with this issue. I do put too much emphasis on people liking me. If people indicate that I've done well, then I feel successful and accepted. If I hear a note of criticism, then I feel down and guilty, that I did something wrong. And even if there's approval, I feel like a fraud, thinking If they only knew what I was REALLY like – my mother called it Showing My True Colors – then they wouldn't like me. And I think I translate this behavior over to my relationship with God. He'll like me IF . . . He'll accept me IF . . .

Perhaps some of you understand this feeling.

Let us remember Psalm 23:6 - Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

It doesn't end with “. . . but only if He likes you.”

Have a great week! Next time, we'll continue on with the subject of emotions.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! You inspire me to think deep!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

God gave us reasoning abilities, my friend. He wants us to use our brain - no matter how deeply you think, you'll find Jesus waiting. Jesus the byeman.

Byeman - a worker underground in a mine

### **Comment:**

Charles Fry:

Good job, Kevin! (See, I want to make you feel good. Appropriately good, not arrogantly inflated, of course.)

And blind guides, and hypocrites, and white washed tombs, and snakes and vipers. (Jeopardy answer: What else did Jesus call people? -- Matt 23) And sheep, and goats...

I recently saw a little boy, a very little boy, fall down hard. It clearly hurt. He rolled over to hide his face, curled up, but didn't make a whimper of complaint. I went to him to ask if he was alright, and with a not quite suppressed tear in the corner of his eye he nodded that he was okay. I'm sure if he'd spoken he would have cried, and this little boy was determined not to cry. It made me want to cry. I'm very sorry little boys get such an idea, however they get it, that displaying feelings of pain or sadness or tenderness is bad. There is a place, for not only feeling but also showing feelings.

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

The gender messages come very early in life. "Big boys don't cry." "Don't be such a baby (or girl or wimp)", "Put on your big boy pants", "Oh that didn't hurt", "Stop whining!", "Make your mommy proud", "Come on, you can do better than that!" "Why can't you be more like Charles?" (Not to inflate you, either, you understand.)

For girls, the praises come in the form of appearance. "She looks so pretty", "Come in right now! You'll get your dress dirty."  
Etc. after dreary etc.

I can't remember the last time I cried.

Charles Fry:

Kevin Crittenden, don't make me make you cry. 😬

Some of those type casting comments come rather easily and even "naturally."

Kevin Crittenden:

Now that you come to mention it, the last time I cried was when you didn't inflate my ego enough. 😬

Kevin Crittenden:

[http://www.nyparenting.com/stories/2015/6/sc-gender-rules-hines-2015-spring\\_2015\\_6.html](http://www.nyparenting.com/stories/2015/6/sc-gender-rules-hines-2015-spring_2015_6.html)

"Do You Typecast Your Kids?"

LuAnn Woody:

Thanks guys, it really fills a void in my life when I hear these discussions. Just enough back and forth on Scriptural topics with occasional witty repartee. You are modern day Bible Inklings. Also, thanks to those who host each day and those who comment.

## Comment:

Steven Wright:

Amen brother! Tears of grateful,appreciating are flowing!

## Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Like a river of tears your love pours upon us;  
like a sunshine of blessing your grace will sustain us;  
like a star-studded sky your spirit shines o'er us,  
renewing our spirits with courage and faith.

Like a bird in free flight by windows around us;  
like a wind in the forest that breathes life among us;  
like a phoenix that's rising from ashes around us,  
renewing our spirits with vision and grace.

Like a pillar of cloud you promise to guide us;  
like a bright firey bush you come to speak to us;  
like a calm cooling breeze your spirit breathes in us,  
renewing our spirits with loving embrace.

Like a lover's caress your spirit revives us;  
like a song of the soul you come to be with us;  
like a prayer of the heart you heal and restore us,  
renewing our spirits, the future to face.

- John Oldham

## August 31: Proverbs 20-21 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 35

Poetry Reading for 8/31/17

Proverbs 20-21

I'm sorry that this is a bit late for me to be posting. But (and when I say "but," it means I'm not really sorry a bit), Kathleen and I were off the grid, ensconced in a small crab fishing village just north of Topeka, no bars (the signal kind), no phone, no TV, no computer, no safety nets. Just love that 'ol Midwest corn-fed crab!

So here we go. . .

Good morning, All, and welcome to: EMOTIONS (PART DEUX)

Since we're supposed to be looking at Proverbs, lets list a few of them that relate to anger:

Prov 10:12 Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.

Prov 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Prov 29:22 An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.

Prov 14:29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

Prov 16:32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Are you now, or have you ever been, hot-blooded, hot-tempered, hot under the collar, hot headed? No? Even when that jerk almost side-swiped you on the freeway? Even when you are in a long line to exit the freeway and 3 or 4 dive-bombers cut their way in? For some reason, incidents while driving generate a lot of anger within us.

Anyway, I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that most of us (and when I say "most," I mean "all") get angry from time to time.

Is all anger bad, then? Are we supposed to suppress our anger? Indeed, it's my understanding (experience) that underneath depression, you'll likely discover layers of unexpressed anger. The woman who cannot express her own anger without an angry, abusive tirade from her husband comes to mind.

Some anger is justified – anger at sin, for example. If hubby cheats on you, you bet you're going to be justifiably angry. He'll have a special spot on the Wall of Hooks.

The anger, however, that is to be avoided is anger that "stirs up conflict." Proverbs 10:12 has to do with gossip and its daughters: judgments and opinions. Would you like an example? Can you imagine anything that has stirred up more conflict among the brethren than the last presidential election? All that political claptrap that appeared on Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, etc. was posted. Why? To promote harmony? To be edifying? To turn our minds to Things Above? And even now, there are STILL political postings with the express purpose of turning our thoughts away from God to things below. All this intentional strife makes my blood boil! I just get SO angry!!!

So what are we supposed to do with our anger then? What's the wise thing to do? Not feel it? No.  
No.  
Stuff it down deep inside us? No.  
Instead, Wisdom asks, WHY should I feel intensely about that issue? And does anybody really NEED my opinion about it?"

What does God want us to be stirred up about?

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,  
  
Politicians come and thankfully go but the Word is everlasting. Our need to love one another is everlasting. Our duty and desire to put God first is everlasting. Our eventual home in Heaven, our prize at the end of the race, our crown bestowed upon those good and faithful servants – let us be mindful of those and less worried about worldly slights.

Prov 19:11 says that it is a glory to overlook a personal offense. Somebody spreads malicious gossip about us. Shall we get even? Take her out behind the toolshed and beat the living daylight out of her? She deserves it right? Justice will be served, right? She's got it coming, right?

But we are called to a higher standard than getting even. Our standard is glory because God is glorious. Jesus didn't go to the Cross to "get even" with us for our sins. He forgave us.

The word "glory" in v. 19:11 can be translated as "beauty." This word is used to describe beautiful garments (Isa 52:1), beautiful jewels (Ezek 16:17), a beautiful city (Isa 28:1) and the beauty of God Himself (1 Chron 29:11).

God makes beautiful things.  
We are his creation.  
We are beautiful people who know how to ignore a slight.  
We judge ourselves instead.

Matt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Anger is an emotion that involves judgment, and, whereas we are prone to direct that anger instantly, Godly wisdom asks us to first look at the judgment involved. Fools are in a hurry and don't do this. "but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." (V 14:29) In doing so, they display their own lack of discretion.

Is it easy to conquer our anger? V 16:32 implies that it is more difficult than conquering a city – which takes a day or so. Dealing with our anger can be a life-long process.

The gospel tells us that Christ is coming again in wrath to punish all evil with terrible finality. You may find comfort in this – as a resource to exercise patience and tolerance right now.

Miroslav Volf said, "The certainty of God's just judgment at the end of history is the presupposition for the renunciation of violence in the middle of it."

Christ is coming with His winnowing fork and a lighter and He isn't pleased with sin. Therefore, YOU don't need to be anybody's judge right now.

Prov 27:4 Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

Why would jealousy be worse than anger? Because anger is a response to sinful behavior and jealousy is a reaction against something that is right and good. If you stole something and get caught, the victim might forgive you. All well and good. But if you are more successful or prettier than someone, they may never forgive you.

Cain didn't kill Abel because Abel had stolen his prize watermelon. No, Abel's gift was more righteous than Cain's and Cain was jealous of that.

1 John 3:12-13 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

Jealousy was at work in those who betrayed Jesus.

Matt 27:18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

The early church was persecuted as well:

Acts 5:17-18 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

How did Paul handle jealousy? Remember, he had been jailed, which removed him from the spotlight, so that other preachers could step into it. Paul removed his ego from the equation and was glad that the Word was still being spread.

Phil 1:12-18

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

When Christ is our focus, not our own Self, then we are freed to rejoice, even when we are ignored, passed by, and shoved aside by others. Our life becomes more tranquil.

Prov 14:30 A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

In Joseph Epstein's book "Envy: The Seven Deadly Sins", he says that of those seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all.

The currently recognized Seven Deadly Sins are: Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, Pride. I've earned a medal for each one; they sit not in pride of place on my mantelpiece but hidden under the floorboards of my heart. Like Rachel's idols, I carry them with me and I need to bury them somewhere. Away from me.

We've met such a list in Proverbs 6:16-19. Also see Gal 5:19-21 and Rev 21:8

Envy rots your bones.

Let's say that you are envious of Jane Doe because she's a star and everybody knows her name. Do you feel bad when she succeeds and good when she fails? When you think about Jane, do you always see her in a bad light? Do you just lump her into a category and dismiss everything she does? If the President (either Obama or Trump) does something, must it be bad because you've already put them into a disfavorable category?

And if Jane Doe is indeed wicked, then here is the advice from God:

Prov 24:19-20 Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked,  
20 for the evildoer has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

Wicked people often prosper. It happens and we envy their success: their wealth, status and lifestyle perhaps. But truly, can you name even one such person whose lifestyle you would really want to have for yourself?

Prov 15:15 All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast.

Prov 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Prov 15:30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.

Everybody wants to be happy, right? And we know when that will occur. We will be happy when everybody around us treats us as we should be treated, and when everything goes according to our plans. We will get that promotion, and a raise, of course, our work will be noticed and lauded by management, we will be the go-to person for advice, we will win the lottery and our relationships will all be like BFFs

But external things cannot inner happiness make. And you say, "Platitudes, platitudes – why don't you get that crocheted into a sampler and hang it in your kitchen!" So, don't believe me? In that case, I'll tell you that Science (with a capital "S", supports this idea.)

In her book, "The How of Happiness" by Sonja Lyubomirsky, she states unequivocally, "I support what Kevin just said."

Since external things cannot satisfy an inner desire, it means that even when life is difficult, we can be happy through the love of God for us in Christ.

Psalms 34:5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

This doesn't say, "Depending on circumstances, those who look to him are radiant." No, the Gospel makes people who receive it radiant. And that radiance is contagious.

Have a great week! Go out and be contagious!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Charles Fry:

Sonja always did like you better. But that's okay, I'm happy for you... 🙄

You know, Brother, a fellow could take an essay like this one, with very few changes, and read it over a couple of times, amending slightly if needed, and then read it another couple of times out loud, noticing about how long it takes to read it aloud, and then after a little more time read for review again, before reading it out loud once more in front of a friendly audience of fellow Christians. A fellow could do such a thing with an essay like this. It might even be a Scientific process. 👍

### Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Maybe I could get a gummint grant! All in the interest of Science - with a capital "S" of course. And, BTW, Sonja likes you just as well. 😊

Charles Fry:

That would be very sciency!

### Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin! I enjoy being edified by you. Lots of funny, lots of serious. Good mix. So glad you're my brother! And glad you got away with Kathleen 😊

### Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thanks brother Kevin! Superb! Just wondering where to fish for crabs north of Topeka? Canada?

### Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You have to know certain people. Actually it's in a cove, a hollow nestled at the base of steep cliffs which serve as nesting sites for albatross and flamingoes.

## September 7: Proverbs 22 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 36

Poetry Reading for 9/07/17

Proverbs 22

Good Morning and Welcome, Gentle Reader and Other Good Friends! What makes good friends? Besides their willingness to loan you lots of money? Let's find out.

### FRIENDSHIP (PART I)

Prov 18:24 One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Who is your best friend? I know many of you will say "Jesus," but I'm asking about a worldly best friend. Suppose you are just feeling down, the world seems blue, and there is little motivation to do anything. Who can you reach out to and say "Can we talk and pray together?" Who is there in your life that sticks closer than a brother?

When speaking of friendships, I think of David and Jonathan, or Ruth and Naomi. What other Biblical examples can you think of?

Now you might be one of those people, like me, who really values your private time. Some of us enjoy our solitude and need times of aloneness to recharge our batteries. Crowds and parties are enervating. Jesus went off by himself to get away from the crowds and pray. You may enjoy the book "Quiet" by Susan Cain, which talks about being an introvert. Just don't read it out loud.

Virginia Woolf described the importance of "a room of one's own" (and money) for women who wanted to write. But Virginia Woolf also walked into a river after filling her pockets with rocks.

In "Jayber Crow," Wendell Berry says "For a long time I liked it that way. I enjoyed coming and going without telling or explaining, being free. I enjoyed listening without talking. I enjoyed being wherever I was without being noticed. But then when the dark change came over my mind, I was in a fix. My solitariness turned into loneliness."

And extended solitude makes that dark change more likely. We are social beings. We are to love others and be loved by them in return.

In their book "The Lonely American," associate clinical professors of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School Jacqueline Olds and Richard Schwartz (and married to each other) make the point that friendships can be separated into friendships of commitment and friendships of convenience. They say that, even though people often say they have a lot of friends, the trend is towards friendships of convenience. "The General Social Survey finds that more and more Americans have no people that they confide in. We are only likely to talk about matters of importance with people whose connections to us have stood the test of time."

Friendships of commitment are important. We NEED them in our lives.

We grow in wisdom when we work to replace our preconceptions about how life should work with the knowledge of how God created the way in which life actually works. We become skilled in knowing almost instinctually which path to choose when faced with our myriad daily decisions. Wisdom is skill for living when the rules aren't obvious. And the book of Proverbs provides this skill.

In the area of friendship, we begin by realizing (knowing) that God Himself is our friend through Christ. The Father, Son and Spirit are Love reaching out from the heart in friendship to us.

And what about our own hearts? The Assyrian king Adad-Nirari II (911-891 B.C.) looked lovingly at himself and said "I am royal, I am lordly, I am mighty, I am honored, I am exalted, I am glorified, I am powerful, I am all-powerful, I am brilliant, I am lion-brave, I am manly, I am supreme, I am noble." He evokes the story of Echo and Narcissus and we all remember what happened to HIM.

Anyway, this king thinks he is the great I AM. He is just the kind of guy you'd want for a best friend, right? NOT! This guy obviously didn't need anybody but himself. Proud, arrogant, self-important jerks don't have many, if any, friends, only sycophants.

But it's true that God also talked about Himself:

Ex 3:14 God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"

But God also says something the Assyrian king did not:

Ex 3:12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

"I will be with you." That is a friend. Not of convenience but a friend of commitment. Someone who is there FOR YOU. Rain or shine.

And what does Jesus say?

John 15:15 No longer do I call you servants,[a] for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Jesus calls us friends. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry, ev'ry thing to God in pray'r.

But what is a committed friend?

Prov 20:6 Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?

Prov 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Rare indeed is the faithful friend who loves at all time. You are born into your family – they are stuck with you. But a friend chooses you. And if they love you, not only when life is all skittles and beer but also when the wolf is at the door, not because they have to but because they choose to, then you are lucky enough to have a friend. This definition excludes people whom you know only in a one-dimensional sense. You might say, "Oh, I have a lot of friends at work." But do they know the names of your children? What your interests are? What issues you are grappling with? What you have are a lot of work associates. Similarly, you might say, "I have a lot of friends at church." Do any of them call YOU when they need to talk? Guys, I'm especially singling you out. Friends aren't people with whom you only talk about sports, work, food, cars, video games and women.

It's not always easy to be a friend.

Psalms 15:4 Those who despise flagrant sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the Lord, and keep their promises even when it hurts.

Titus 2: . . . but must show themselves to be entirely trustworthy and good. Then they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way.

When God gives you a friend like that, hold on tightly.

"The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel." – Shakespeare, Hamlet

A true friend knows who you really are and does not walk away.

Prov 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Prov 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

Prov 24:26 Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.

One of the great blessings of a true friend is not just unconditional acceptance and solicitude but also a blunt honesty. And good friends sharpen us – left to our own devices, we become dull. Our friends refine us. By means of respectful confrontation, they help make us better.

We are called to be good friends to our brethren:

Matt 18:15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over."

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

Committed friends, true friends, real friends provoke and challenge us, not to tear us down but to build us up in stronger ways. You might not like what they say to you but you WILL want to listen.

Good friendships are waiting for you. If there is no one in your life like that, then are you seeking that person out? Unfortunately, Amazon doesn't deliver.

What does it mean, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend?"

When you are sharpened by your friend, it creates friction. When a friend wounds you, it hurts you.

Hurt is not harm.

To help you grow, a friend will someday hurt you with respectful words that are blunt but true. Accept them, realize the love behind them, and be refined. Jesus spoke blunt words out of love to refine us. People felt hurt. So they crucified Him. Look beyond the hurt of the message to the love that is there.

Next week, we will continue on this theme. Your assignment this week is to make a new friend.



### **Comment:**

Debbie Bolinger:

I'll try & do the assignment!!Thanks 4 the reminder what a True Friend is...

### **Comment:**

Steven Wright:

Yes indeed! We love in a true friendship starved culture!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden

Indeed! I'm so glad that you are my best friend!

Steven Wright:

And we "live" in one too!

Steven Wright:  
My new friend's name is Alex btw.  
Kevin Crittenden:  
A stranger is just a friend I haven't met yet. - Will Rogers

### **Comment:**

LuAnn Woody:  
Your comments reminded me of a song I learned in the Junior Girl Scouts, "Make new friends, but keep the old; one is silver, and the other gold."

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, friend!

### **Comment:**

Gaylene Green:  
I learned that song too.

## **September 14: Proverbs 23-24 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 37  
Poetry Reading for 9/14/17  
Proverbs 23-24

Good morning!

Today, we will continue our exploration of the topic of Friendship as seen through the lens of Proverbs.

### **FRIENDSHIP (PART II)**

Prov17:9 Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.

Guess what? Sometimes we do things that annoy our friends. We commit an offense. Maybe more than one. It happens. Maybe we forget ourselves and start to gossip.

You: "Kevin's sermon today was SO insipid! And the way he dresses! Was he raised in a barn?"

Friend: "Gossiping is so easy to fall into, isn't it? But I know you're above that."

The wise person covers this offense with forgiveness, as God does.

Psalms 32:1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

God covers our sins through Christ because He wants relationship with us. That's rather amazing; in fact, it's beyond amazing to know that the Creator of All, not only notices us but wants to have a relationship with us. What a friend we have in Jesus!

We, too, want relationship with our friend MORE than we want revenge for their offense. That is the path of Christ.

And just WHO are these people that repeat a matter, thus separating close friends? Gossips! It's not necessarily that they repeat something over and over, ad nauseum. The word translated "repeats" means to mention the offense a second time. Just one repeat. If the person who offended you admitted it and asked for forgiveness, then just drop the matter. Don't give it a second thought. Words are important. We need to think carefully about what we say; impetuous words can seriously damage a close relationship that has taken years to build.

Prov 11:12 Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.

Here's a case of some know-it-all yakking on and on, putting somebody else down. (Is it I, Lord?) But the wise man doesn't rebut every insult. We are to humble ourselves with restraint. Silence is not only golden – it can preserve friendships, partnerships, marriages and churches.

"Tho' I've belted you and flayed you,  
By the livin' Gawd that made you,  
You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!"  
– Rudyard Kipling in the Kiplinger Newsletter

Prov 25:17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.

“Do not follow a person who is running away.” – Kalenjin proverb

Put simply: don't overstay your welcome. Don't be a pest. Sure, friends need time together but they also need time NOT together. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. You know what they say about fish and visitors.

In our modern world, a similar thing happens with social media. Some people post very often about the most quotidian things in their lives. And, honestly, if you are posting 15 times a day, every day, people will stop reading your posts. If it continues, they will probably stop following you. It reminds me of the Monty Python sketch of the Spanish Inquisition, where an older woman is showing an endless stack of photos to a younger woman:

Dear Old Lady: This is Uncle Ted in front of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) This is Uncle Ted at the back of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) And this is Uncle Ted at the side of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) This is Uncle Ted, back again at the front of the house, but you can see the side of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) And this is Uncle Ted even nearer the side of the house, but you can still see the front. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) This is the back of the house, with Uncle Ted coming round the side to the front. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) And this is the Spanish Inquisition hiding behind the coal shed. (Friend takes it with the first sign of real interest.)

Young Lady: Oh! I didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition.

Prov 18:19 A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

Prov 17:14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.

Prov 22:10 Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease.

Quarreling is difficult to end after it begins. Maybe you each go into a period of silence where you don't talk to one another and slam doors to make sure the other knows you are still angry. And indignant. And righteous. Anyway, neither of you feels understood but you do feel hurt and don't want to be hurt anymore. So you retreat into your protective inner fortress, behind the bars of your castle where nobody but God can get in.

How can we avoid getting into this predicament?

Paul suggested an answer in his letter to the Corinthian Christians when they were suing one another:

1 Cor 6:7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

Unfortunately, this doesn't always work because some people are not amenable to finding a compromise. They will not bend and they must be right. For them, facts don't matter, the truth is inconsequential, and fairness? – Phhfffft! These people are intractable and cannot ever be satisfied.

So now what?

Drive out a scoffer. But, again, who is a scoffer?

Prov 21:24 "Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

A scoffer is in the highest position – in his mind. (Is it I, Lord?) He will not listen or compromise. He will not grow nor does he encourage you to grow. We all need to grow in Christ and change with the support of godly brethren but an unregenerate scoffer hinders our progress.

So, within a church, what should be done about scoffers?

Titus 3:10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

The elders are to take scoffers down the aisle and out the door. One bad apple spoils the bunch. So don't leave it in the barrel, hoping that it will turn good again. Perhaps you don't agree with this method; I've never heard of it being done but then I'm new to the church. How would you handle such a situation in view of the verse in Titus?

Prov 20:22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.

Prov 28:13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Prov 25:21-22 If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,  
22 for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

God is telling us that the best "revenge" is love. If somebody is mad at you, by treating them well, you will stimulate their conscience. And surprise them! And possibly get them thinking about what it means to be in Christ.

As Paul says:

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We sometimes act like the enemy of Christ but look how He treats us. Does He take revenge on us? An eye for an eye? By no means. Through Him we are delivered, through Him we obtain mercy, through Him we find sustenance and through Him we find eternal glory.

Prov 18:24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

When Paul was put on trial before Caesar, his friends didn't stick very close, did they?

2 Tim 1:15 You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

Was Paul dismayed? No, because he knew he had a wonderful friend in the Lord.

2 Tim 4:17 But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

We may have a lot of friends but real friends are those of quality.

“Could we bear from one another what He daily bears from us? Yet this glorious Friend and Brother loves us, though we treat Him thus. Though for good we render ill, He accounts us brethren still.” – John Newton

It's no good avoiding friendships altogether so that you are neither hurt by others nor are you contributing to others. Don't be like the church in Laodicea, neither hot nor cold.

Rev 3:15-16 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

One of the life skills that we sometimes have to exercise is pruning our friendships to improve the harvest. It really isn't fun but often is necessary so that we may move forward.

John 15:2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

This week's assignment: look at the people in your life. Sift them like wheat to see if they add or detract from your life. And, while you are at it, put yourself in the sifter to see if you are an emotional black hole for the energy of your friends, always needing to talk about your woes but never taking real action, or if you add meaning and value to the lives of others.

Life lesson: You are NOT responsible for the feelings of others.

Next week, we will begin to explore what makes the world go around: Money!

I've just come across Roscoe Holcomb singing “I'm a Man of Constant Sorrow,” a cappella, and it points to the pain, sorrow and heaviness of those who are friendless, the bluegrass music whose roots stemmed from watching the WW I veterans walking along the railroad

tracks, sometimes hollering in their pain and freedom upon returning home. Let us be watchful for those who are in such pain.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cJRRc8FToQ>

I am a man of constant sorrow  
I have seen trouble all my days

I bid farewell to old Kentucky  
The place where I was born and raised

For six long years I've been in trouble  
No pleasure here on Earth I found

For in this world I'm bound to ramble  
I have no friends to help me now

I fare you well my own true lover  
I never expect to see you no more

For I'm bound to ride that Northern Railroad  
Perhaps I'll die upon that train

You may bury me in some deep valley  
For many years there I may lay

Then you can learn to love another  
While I am sleeping in my grave

Maybe your friends think I'm a stranger  
My face you'll never see no more

But there is one promise that I'm giving  
I'll meet you on God's golden shore

### **Comment:**

Craig Hensley:  
Good thoughts. Roscoe could use vocal lessons but it is a decent song.

### **Comment:**

Steven Wright:  
Craig, that's the real old mountain sound bro!

### **Comment:**

Steven Wright:  
Thank you for your sound assessment of this so valuable topic brother Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

## Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

You can check out Bill Monroe's "I'm Blue, I'm Lonesome." Bill is known as the father of bluegrass music.

## Replies:

Craig Hensley:

I'm partial to Ralph Stanley, but Bill Monroe is great.

Charles Fry:

For some reason Bill Monroe never was a favorite of mine. Flat & Scruggs, Ricky Scaggs, various others had more appeal.

Kevin Crittenden:

Craig Hensley - Thought Ralph was more an automobile man rather than a gandy dancer. Stanley Steamer and all.

## Comment:

Craig Hensley:

On the idea of people in you life and whether they add or detract - there is a related and important issue; what do other bring out in you? I have notice that there are people that bring out good things in me. But there are also others that bring out parts of me that I'd rather suppress. I've decided that I need to extra cautious with those people and in some cases stay away.

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Why do you feel the need to maintain bonds with such people? Of course, if they are co-workers, you don't have much choice. I think it is part of our human nature to be social creatures and so we tend to adapt our behavior to the mores of the groups that we associate with. If all your co-workers think it's a good idea to congregate after work at the nearest watering hole, you'll be "peer-pressured" to join them to maintain the pretext of being a "team player." By refusing to drink with them, you come across as judgemental and holier-than-thou. And you won't get invited to their birthday parties. Your friends, as you say, will bring out the best in you. Better yet, they will see the potential in you and challenge you to grow in ways that you can meet your potential. Hint: If you want to really form strong and lasting bonds of friendship, challenge others to realize their potential. And be there with them when they take their first hesitant steps.

## Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Happy birthday, Kevin Crittenden! 🎉 I'm so glad we are friends.

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Me tooooooooooo!!!!

## September 21: Proverbs 25 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 38

Poetry Reading for 9/21/17

Proverbs 25

Good morning, All, and welcome to the part of this study that makes Scrooge McDuck the happiest:

### MONEY (PART I)

Prov 10:22 The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.

What do we already (think we) know about money?

Money can't buy happiness but it can buy a Cadillac to go look for it.  
I'm waiting for my ship to come in. (It came in but I was at the airport.)  
Money makes the world go 'round.  
Money talks.

A fool and his money are soon parted. (A friend learned this the hard way. Yeah, a friend. I'm talking about a friend.)

Money is a good servant but a bad master.

He's filthy rich. (interesting juxtaposition of words)

Pennies from heaven (Should be upgraded to Dollars from heaven. Inflation, you know. God wants us to be rich, you see.)

And what does God say about money?

Matt 6:24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

1 Tim 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Psalms 49 . . . People who have wealth but lack understanding are like the beasts that perish.

And the wildly popular:

Matt 19:24 Again I tell you, 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.

Those fat cats, the 1%ers, won't fit through the narrow gate. That sentiment seems to be popular in this country currently: very rich = bad. And that is an unfortunate attitude. God wants ALL His sheep.

Getting back to Proverbs - which is what I'm supposed to be talking about - we find there some Godly wisdom about wealth. Wisdom, of course, is skill for living well in the sight of God and man. It is God-given, as Solomon knew when he prayed for it:

1 Kings 3:9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

A discerning mind helps us with the myriad decisions that we face on a daily basis. Like what to do with our money.

Does God think that money is bad? After all, it can be an idol for some people who worship in the temples on Wall Street or in the boardrooms at Wells Fargo.

But no, God made money a blessing and made it available.

Prov 10:22 The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.

If you are having frequent hours-of-need because of no money, then the answer isn't a wad of cash that would choke a horse. The answer is the Lord. Your employer doesn't provide for you. God does. If the blessing of the Lord makes rich, then He is the one with whom we should conduct our business.

John Calvin wrote "The Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he has to deal throughout his life."

And God is always at hand to be in relationship with. He is always in His office.

Prov 15:3 The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

"He adds no sorrow with it." When you earn money through the blessing of the Lord, you can do it with a clear conscience – no bending of rules, no working yourself into the ground, no guilt. No sorrow.

Is wealth bad? No. God provided ample opportunities for amassing wealth in His Creation. And His Creation is good. Very good, in fact.

Gen 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Having wealth gives us an opportunity to grow in the area of sharing with one another. Wealthy people can support widows and orphans, the poor, the brethren, the author of these notes. Of course this attitude of sharing isn't limited to just money.

Acts 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Peter gave something much more valuable than silver and gold. And we see how much more wealth is in Him as we look at His Creation.

Savonarola once mused, "What must not he possess who possesses the Possessor of all things?"

If you are in Christ, then your emptiness has found its fullness, regardless of the amount of money you have. Or don't have.

1 Cor 3:21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,

And how does God bless us with money? Through the dignity of our own hard work.

Prov 10:4 A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Certainly, poverty caused by unjust social conditions is NOT a disgrace but laziness IS. Our work, done well, brings a sense of satisfaction of a job well done. Our work enriches not only our own lives but the lives of others. And when we have enough laid by in store to share with others, our joy is multiplied. That is true wealth.

Prov 12:11 Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

“Following worthless pursuits” can be read as “chasing dreams.” Is your career dream realistic? Is it productive? I know a woman who is supporting a son. The son has started a couple of failed businesses and now “just needs a little more money” to start another venture. Perhaps, especially here in Silicon Valley, the dream of being the next Steve Jobs affects Many Young People. If only some venture capitalist (they’re called “angel investors”) would listen and fund their idea . . . Their career path amounts to this:

Step 1: Come up with an idea

Step 2: Get funding

Step 3: Become an overnight bazillionaire

Step 4: Finally, move out of mom and dad’s house.

Not really a workable plan, is it? Although mom and dad fervently hope that Step 4 materializes soon. It’s a worldly plan centered around money. But God’s plan gives us a worthy purpose and allows us to build something lasting and successful, not for our own self-aggrandizement but for the glory of God and others. Love one another. This kind of work is not a get-rich-quick scheme but involves a lifetime of effort. We work our land, plowing one furrow at a time, carefully, to assure a bountiful harvest later in life.

Ask yourself, “How will the world be enhanced by what I’ve done this week?” Time is the land that God gives us and He invites (expects) us to make something of it. How are we working our own tract? What are we sowing and what will we reap?

Prov 13:11 Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

It’s no good praying to win the lottery or praying that a rich relative dies and leaves you money. “Little by little” is God’s plan – by the diligent, patient efforts over your lifetime and invested wisely. Don’t just bury your talent in the ground waiting for the master’s return.

This “little by little” process of increasing our wealth also has the concomitant feature of building our character up, little by little. A character of strength that will not dwindle. This is the real purpose behind our financial vicissitudes, the sharpening of our mettle through the love of God for you and me.

Truthfully, would having a great deal of money be a good thing for you? Could you handle it wisely? They say money corrupts. And certainly there are good people out there who have much in the way of worldly wealth. And they handle it beautifully.

But for the rest of us, we have this wisdom:

Prov 15:16-17 Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.  
17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

Think of these verses when envy and desire for wealth creep into your thinking. Rather than thinking about keeping up with the Joneses, (or the Kardashians), consider what your life would be like without God’s watchful care and think, “This is better than what I would have had.”

Next week, (little by little), we will continue on with the lingua franca of our society. Your homework this week is to amass \$10 M and see what changes this makes in your life and your outlook.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:  
Good thoughts, Kevin! Thank U! Philippians 4:12.

## **September 28: Proverbs 26-27 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 39  
Poetry Reading for 9/28/17  
Proverbs 26-27

Good morning, All. Today we will continue on with a subject that is near and dear to my heart:

### **MONEY (PART II)**

1 Tim 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain,

So - God made money as part of His good Creation but we, being creative and all, can manage to turn money into a destructive curse through four avenues: control, conflict, confusion, and corruption.

Prov 11:26 The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

This is an example of the curse of control. The one holding back the grain, or any resource, is driving up the price. But grain, in particular, was a resource necessary to life back then. People had to have it for their daily diet.

A central insight of Proverbs can be found in the words of Bruce Waltke:  
"The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves."

I think that we can agree that this happens today. ". . .But a blessing is on the head of him who sells it."

How much blessing, therefore, is on the head of Jesus who disadvantaged Himself to advantage us with a love, freely given.

Prov 28:25 A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched.

This is an example of the curse of conflict. The word translated as "greedy" is literally "wide of appetite." Nothing can satisfy the greedy person – he has removed his boundaries and limits.

So, being unsatisfied with what the Lord has provided for him, he looks at what YOU have. And reaches for it. Which triggers conflict. This is echoed in James:

James 4:2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

The one who takes his neighbor's belongings will still be unsatisfied, but he who trusts in the Lord as the Provider will be fulfilled.

Prov 11:18 The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.

This is an example of the curse of confusion. "Deceptive wages" can be translated as "wages that are a lie." A selfish person believes that happiness consists of getting what he wants, mainly possessions. Things, then, become the wages that are a lie. Most of us, myself included, are, au fond, a bit selfish. This is the crack in the door that advertisers use to create their vision of a materialistic utopia within us. But this vision is a lie, meant to confuse us and open wide our wallets in the pursuit of happiness.

But what does God say about sowing righteousness?

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

This wisdom may be counterintuitive, but we are emphatically assured that it bears much fruit.

Prov 20:23 Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord, and false scales are not good.

This is an example of the curse of corruption. The "unequal weights" are expressed as dishonesty, cheating, cutting corners, false advertising, bait and switch, bilking pensioners, Ponzi schemes, identity theft and the like which are legion in our society, forming a wall of anxiety within us. How many of us don't like using debit cards because of the fear of skimmers?

These detestable practices are an abomination to the Lord. They constitute moral corruption, as bad as sexual sin. If you are involved in this kind of activity, then God says "Stop it!" Seems pretty clear. Don't mess with God.

Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Prov 11:24-25 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

Again, counterintuitive. You want to be rich? Then be generous. You want to be poor? Then hoard what you have.

The Hebrew word translated "one gives freely" can be more literally translated as "one who scatters." You scatter seed freely and widely without noting where every little seed might fall. Jesus freely scatters the gospel upon billions of people and takes pleasure in the love for Him that grows in us. His generosity is wisdom for us. Selfishness is poverty. Generosity is wealth.

Prov 30:7-9 Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:

8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,  
9 lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?"  
or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

This is the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. But what a model for a good way to live! Never going broke but never getting rich – because both are fraught with temptation. Rather, live in a manner where you trust in the Lord and are dependent on Him. Use your money to do good. The widow with the two mites was doing what good she could; trusting in Him.

Paul wrote:

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Paul, at the time, was raising money for the poor. And how did he motivate people's generosity? He didn't show pictures of distressed children or tell stories of malnourishment and abuse. Nor did he say "Give 'til it hurts!" No, instead Paul held up Jesus who, being rich in Heaven, became poor for our sakes so that we might be everlastingly rich in Him.

Have a great week! Next time, the subject will be a matter of life and death.

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:  
You are welcome!

### **Comment:**

Steven Wright:  
Amen!

## **October 5: Proverbs 28 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 40  
Poetry Reading for 10/05/17  
Proverbs 28

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen! Hang on to your hats because we are going to discuss a matter of:

LIFE AND DEATH (PART I)

Prov 12:28 In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

When we say that something is a matter of life or death, we are stressing how urgent and important that matter is. Lives may literally hang in the balance and we can't afford to cavalierly toss the matter into our IN basket for later consideration.

Proverbs treats Life and Death seriously and invites us to, as well. Actually “invites” is too feeble a word here; I should say “urges us to.” Life and Death are a major theme in the book of Proverbs and are given dimension beyond whether or not you have a pulse.

We all agree that we have a birthday. All of us were born, some of us further back in time than others. But we know that day and celebrate it. Or not. Just as certain is that we have ANOTHER day on the calendar which is our LAST day. We are not given to know that day. Beyond that last day, according to the Old Testament, lies the realm of death, called Sheol. Proverbs treats death as both an event and a state beyond that event.

Many of us, as we age, increasingly live in the shadow of fear of that future event because the precursors of death, reminding us of our mortality, affect our lives even now. They affect us in the form of sickness, aging, suffering, fear, guilt, anxiety, confusion, boredom, and sin. Anything that weakens our vitality is a step towards the grave.

Huston Smith writes: “ The unwise life is one long struggle with death the intruder, an uneven contest in which age is obsessively delayed through artifice and the denial of time's erosions. When the fever of desire slackens, the unwise seek to refuel it with more potent aphrodisiacs. When they are forced to let go, it is grudgingly and with self-pity, for they cannot see the inevitable as natural, and good as well. They have no comprehension of Tagore's insight that truth comes as conqueror to those who have lost the art of receiving it as friend.”

The book of Proverbs advises us as to where death lurks in the shadows. For example, in the house of the adulterous woman.

Prov 9:18 But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

But God brings vitality into our lives, dispensing it freely through the finished work of His son on the Cross.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 14:19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

What does God offer us and hope for us? That we die less and live more through Christ.

Prov 12:28 In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

Prov 14:12, 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Prov 10:2 Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.

Prov 19:16 Whoever keeps the commandment keeps his life; he who despises his ways will die.

Prov 10:16 The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.

We see the words “path”, “pathway”, “way”, “end”. Life is a journey from birth to death and we are on a path. We cannot just somehow make time stand still but must daily choose which path to follow. There are myriad paths, some more traveled and wider than others. But how can we choose unless we have a clear understanding of our destination?

Joseph Campbell had something to say about paths:

"If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path."

This aligns in my mind with Phil 2:12 "therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,"

And, yes, I see you shifting a bit in your seat because you are remembering:

Prov 20:24 A person's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand their own way?

We are instructed to work out our own salvation, forge our own path, but always with the Cross in view. That is the direction provided by the Lord. We need to know where we are going.

Many of us feel like we have little choice in the way our life flows, that we are like a dry leaf caught in the middle of a stream and carried along by the current. But we always have choices. Where are we going with our lives? We can choose how we live our life but we don't get to choose the consequences of our actions.

Prov 12:28 In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

So we ask: What is righteousness? And: Is this righteousness legalism? The proverb (10:16) says that "The wage of the righteous leads to life." Is this a legalistic pay-as-you-go plan? Wages are something you receive for the work you do.

Let's look at righteousness as described in Deuteronomy. In the marketplace, people used weights to measure the goods they were selling. This could be used to advantage by an unscrupulous merchant using faulty weights.

Deut 25:15 A full and fair weight you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

The word translated "fair" is our word "righteous."

So the unscrupulous merchant makes up his own personal standard of weight. Which benefits him. The righteous merchant uses an external standard, the true standard of weight.

A righteous man understands that there is a standard OUTSIDE of himself, and acknowledges that the standard for what a person should be is Christ who, although fully God, is the true standard of humanity.

In our society, we use external standards all the time to tell us how to look, how to dress, what to buy . . . how to fit in to our society. We all have a horror of being an outsider, of being shunned by the group. So, since we readily accept an external standard for how we look, then is it so far-fetched to accept an external moral standard for how we live? The Bible says that Christ is the standard to which we should adjust. Not just an abstract ideal but a real person. Right, Thomas?

In a study, blogged about by Dr. Tim Keller on the Gospel Coalition website, a group of young adults (ages 18 – 23 ) were asked "if their moral convictions (some of which were very strong) were mainly subjective feelings or really true to reality. He [the researcher] found that most had difficulty even understanding what he was asking."

And we will continue this theme next time.

Have a great week!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:  
You are welcome, Butch!

## **October 12: Proverbs 29-30 (Kevin Crittenden)**

Week 41  
Poetry Reading for 10/12/17  
Proverbs 29-30

Good morning! This morning we will continue the theme of:

LIFE AND DEATH (PART II)

So . . .

Last week, we ended with:

In a study, blogged about by Dr. Tim Keller on the Gospel Coalition website, a group of young adults (ages 18 – 23 ) were asked “if their moral convictions (some of which were very strong) were mainly subjective feelings or really true to reality. He [the researcher] found that most had difficulty even understanding what he was asking.”

In an age of increasing entitlement and self-centeredness, we see a natural trend of becoming OUR OWN moral authority, encountering life events as we go and making decisions on the fly, based on personal cost-benefit. But, without an EXTERNAL standard of moral order, we are forging a pathway leading to death. Without a common guide, if everybody just does their own thing, how can you know how your spouse will behave or how your boss will behave or even how YOU will behave? What can you place your trust in?

Righteousness, then, is growing closer to and walking with Christ, because in His path is life.

And now for the legal fine print, with all its terms, provisions, statutes, conditions, amendments, addendums of syntax, and assorted frippery. Sign here. And here. Almost done. Just initial there – and there - and then put today’s date right here. That’s legalism and, as much as our society loves it, it has no place in righteousness.

Legalism is the attitude that God has a score card and we had better do enough good things and go to the right kind of church for the required number of times in order to get on His good side. Does going to a one-cup church fill you with anxiety? Or if you are on a trip, attending a church that has a paid minister? Or musical instruments? Where are the areas of your own legalism?

The gospel is clear:

Rom 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

And the natural follow-on for this thought is:

Rom 6:15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Paul reminds them that, yes, sin is still a big deal. So don't do it.

Rom 6:20-22 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Prov 14:27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Prov 13:14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

We have two things here described as "a fountain of life." One is internal and private; the other external and public. Both are needful to satisfy our thirst. Both a loving personal relationship with Christ and a vibrant church family. Both turn us away "from the snares of death."

We may say "I've heard all this before" and shut down because we know intellectually the theology. But Christ is not just an intellectual concept, He is a person and we need to treat Him as such. He seeks relationship. With us.

We may think, "My church isn't vibrant and doesn't nourish me anymore. I wish the elders would do this, that and the other." But don't we, as members of the congregation, have a responsibility to share our love for Christ within the congregation and thereby be an uplifting example? BE part of that vibrancy that you may feel is missing by staying focused on the gospel. Put aside gossip. Put aside wishful thinking. Put aside judgment of your church officials. Instead, trust in your elders and take responsibility where you can.

The singular fountain of life is Christ; the plural snares of death are legion. And Christ flows forth whenever humility and wise teaching converge. Let us drink deeply.

Prov 15:4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

Prov 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise.

We remember the tree of life from Genesis, right? And Proverbs is telling us that we can experience that tree, even today! It can happen through words – a gentle tongue. This can also be translated as "a healing tongue." Perverse words break the spirit but wise words soothe and heal.

Our spirits may be broken by the thoughtless words of others but see how healing these gospel words are:

Matt 9:2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And Christ wants others to hear these words, through us, so that they may experience healing. It's not His will that we go around merely telling others how sinful they are but rather how life-giving Christ is.

The "fruit of the righteous" is their influence. The tree of life is attractive to us. Righteousness is attractive to us. We naturally gravitate towards it. And Christ uses us, as believers, to spread His influence. It's our job to say

"Hey, do you see that tree of life over there?"

"Oh, yeah, I see it now. How did I not notice it before?"

As Jeff Yost reminds us: Think souls!

Have a great week, everyone!

### **Comment:**

Kimra Grantham Robinson:

Good thoughts....and I especially appreciate your "can do" attitude and encouragement to others of the same. Maybe you should be a deacon....oh wait...you are!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

Since I'm hunting big game (gophers) in the church lawn, Lori has named me a d-CON.



Kevin Crittenden:

And not to brag or anything, but ever since Ken and I became deacons, the roof hasn't fallen in once! Nor have we been stampeded by herds of Cape Buffalo, Wildebeests, carpetbaggers or any other form of horned ungulates.

Charles Fry:

For the uninitiated, that would be since Sunday, October 8. 😊

Steven Wright:

Wonderful news!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:

You are welcome!

## Comment:

Steven Wright:  
Thank you brother Kevin!

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:  
You are welcome! Drop in some time and I'll take you gopher hunting.

Steven Wright:  
Plastic explosives? Exploding golf courses?

Kevin Crittenden:  
I use a Ruger Mini-14

## Comment:

Ginger Hermon:  
Thanks, Kevin! You have 52 inspirational lessons you could give from the pulpit in 2018 from this bible study! 😊 you're so easy to read. You should consider a blog.

## Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:  
Thank you, Ginger! Lessee, if I gave 1 lesson per two months, that would be 104 months or almost 9 years of lessons, all on the Wisdom literature. I really should branch out.  
Actually, I do have a blog which I created for my ESL students. I haven't done anything with it for a long while but I may get back to it. You can see it at [https://  
eslfilesforsharing.blogspot \(.com\)](https://eslfilesforsharing.blogspot(.com))

## October 19: Proverbs 31 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 42  
Poetry Reading for 10/19/17  
Proverbs 31

Good morning, All!

As we come to the final Chapter of Proverbs, I want to express my thanks for your readership and my hope that you will have gained something by re-reading the wisdom that is contained in the book of Proverbs. Let us be mindful of its teachings as we live our daily lives, all to His glory.

Before we begin, although technically we HAVE begun, I'd like to suggest that you make a pan of this delicious banana bread, recipe from the kitchen of Debbie Bolinger. I think this would be a perfect accompaniment to this study. I also think there is an idea for a book here: "Recipes For Bible Studies."

BANANA BREAD  
Debbie Bolinger

Oven 350°

3 LARGE MASHED RIPE BANANAS  
2 T MELTED BUTTER  
1 TSP VANILLA  
1 TSP BAKING SODA, DISSOLVED IN A LITTLE WATER  
½ C NUT(Opt.)  
1 EGG, BEATEN  
1-1/4 C SUGAR  
2 C FLOUR  
MIX ALL TOGETHER. POUR INTO GREASED LOAF PAN. BAKE AT 350 FOR 1 HR. THEN ENJOY!!!!

Prov 24:13-14 My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.

14 Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

This is the delight of wisdom – as sweet as banana bread or honey. Your body has senses and takes delight in good food. So too, your soul finds God’s wisdom to be deeply pleasing to it.

But just reading it here in Proverbs (like merely looking at freshly-baked banana bread, cooling on the windowsill) won’t do the trick. We need to partake of this wisdom, chew on it and swallow it. With coffee! Savor it!

Christ offers us a feast. He wants us to come and partake, not just look longingly from a distance. There’s a chair waiting for us at the table. If we accept his gracious offer, “there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.”

Let us not be like the invited guests in Luke 14 who found more important things to do than to attend the banquet. This is exactly what I did – essentially telling Jesus “Thanks, but I really don’t know what I believe yet so I’ll get back to you on this.” At some point, it behooves us (and by that I mean it’s vitally important, a matter of life or death) to stop being busy (and therefore making excuses), to sit our fallen selves down and ask ourselves the hard questions:

Why do I continue to procrastinate in self-examination? What am I afraid of?

What, exactly do I believe? And what does it mean to believe something? What resonates within me?

What do I have faith in? And how is faith different than belief?

Do I stand for something? Enough to defend it? Or am I wishy-washy, conforming to the group of people that I happen to be with at the moment?

Why do I believe something? Because somebody told me to? Because I’ll be acceptable to my friends if I adopt their attitudes?

What evidence do I have to support my beliefs? What constitutes evidence?

Who am I pleasing by professing this belief? Is that my main motivation?

Suppose, we turn down Christ's invitation, or even become a scoffer (one who delights in throwing stones at the belief structures of others while having no structure of his own.) Then what?

Prov 29:1 He who is often reprov'd, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing.

When God rebukes us, he is guiding us back onto the path of righteousness. Most of us are busy gawking at other things along the way and don't watch where we are going. So He keeps an eye on us and gives us course corrections as needed.

But – if we willingly and knowingly refuse his correction and chase our own butterflies, following our own will, then God may run out of patience with us as happened with Sodom and Gomorrah. Do we think that we can wander around as we please, that God is somehow obligated to wait for US to decide when to come back to Him?

The door stands open now.

Rev 1:17-18 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus didn't say "There is a way." He said "I AM the way."

Again, let us use His wisdom as revealed to us in the book of Proverbs, to glorify Him.

Prov 9:10-12 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Soli Deo gloria!

### **Comment:**

Butch O'Neal:  
Thank you, Kevin!

### **Replies:**

Kevin Crittenden:  
You are welcome!

### **Comment:**

Jack Dyer:  
Great!

### **Comment:**

Ginger Hermon:  
Yes, thank you, Kevin! In today's reading verse 26 we are given the example, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." A spirit-led person gathers wisdom. Coupled with wisdom, words are always spoken in kindness. This virtuous woman

glorified the Lord in all areas of her life. We see that the God-ordained role of wife and mother is highly esteemed in the Bible. As well as ministering to the needs of her family she becomes a servant of all. She was not one who sought her own recognition but was awarded it because of her virtue. Fearing the Lord in day to day living brings permanent blessings in this life and in the life to come.

**Replies:**

Joanne Caffie:  
Very well said Ginger!