

Proverbs-by Rick Stark

Chapter 1

Ascriptions (1) – David to Solomon... but also the circle of the “wise” (22:17; 24:23), including the men of Hezekiah (25:1), Augur (ch.30) and Lemuel (ch.31). Wisdom doesn’t just show up, but is cumulative. And though the more than 3,000 proverbial sayings of Solomon was a gift from God (1 Kgs.4:29-32), wisdom is discovered and proven in community. Now there’s an apologetic of the church! *To Give (4-5)*– What? Why? The “*art of living*” is the gift that keeps on giving in the lives of the less mature in order that they (we) might avoid the pitfalls and advance in godliness. *The Source (7)*– Proverbs is practical, but nonetheless theological: wisdom and godliness begins and ends with “*the fear of the Lord*”: living in loving reverence and submission to His Lordship, His Word, His purposes. Standing in awe of the Lord draws us and compels us rather than drives us away. The opposite only stand as fools. *Hear (8-9)*– This exhortation sets the theme of vv.10-33 (and the entire Book): there are all kinds of voices out there... but will you hear and respond (as a father to a son) to wisdom’s voice? *Personified Wisdom (20-33)*– How is it possible that wisdom would speak and/or could draw & compel? It is because the Proverbs are more than “word-art,” but *The Word*– Christ himself speaking, calling, teaching, guiding – “...*life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom...*” (1 Cor.1:30) and “*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom...*” (Col.2:3).

Chapter 2

My Son (vv.1).... but, but dad! A familiar echo to any parent. Remember how “wisdom cries aloud” (1:20-23) pleading against the dangers (1:29-32) of a spiritual deafness? Wisdom holds forth promise (1:33), but one almost gets the sense of a son’s skepticism (and ours!) with the opening of ch.2. But take heart; be drawn by the personal and tender address. *If/Then (2:1-8)*. So let’s rehearse this again. The key to the acquisition of wisdom is all about the pursuit. Note the verbs of “hot” pursuit. Does that describe my daily habits? Just how desperate am I? That all depends upon the value one places upon wisdom; more importantly, the ultimate value of the ultimate treasure – “the Lord” himself (6-8). Note the verbs of His promises! *Then/So (9-22)*). Next, note the “purse of pursuit,” wisdom’s fruit: the understanding of the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ and the ‘when’ of righteousness, justice, equity and direction, all which serve as an internal GPS. Further (“so”), in and by these (“*the expulsive power of a new affection,*” as the Puritans would say), we find our protection and deliverance from dangers and detours which only seek to “steak, kill and destroy” (Jn.10:10). So... what? A future and a hope!

Chapter 3

Wisdom’s Resolutions (1-12). Have you resolved yourself to what you will do, to certain values or mission statements... like a “northstar” for your life? The path of God’s wisdom begins with certain resolutions we must settle upon: truth & mercy must go together (1-4); submission must surround decisions (5-6); humility must destroy arrogance (7-8); generosity must adorn prosperity (9-10); repentance must receive its lessons (11-12). *Wisdom’s Blessings (13-18)*. God is no debtor to any man and wisdom’s resolutions offer incomparable benefits (15) and becomes for us “a tree of life” (18). Now that sounds familiar, doesn’t it? (Gen.2:9) We’ll see that “tree of life” again in the New Testament on a hill called Calvary. Along with way (and in

the end, Rev.22:14), we “*find*” true wisdom not so much in a resolution itself but in a Redeemer “whom God made our wisdom...” (1 Cor.1:30) and “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom...”(Col.2:3). *Wisdom’s Clothes* (21-35). Wisdom is never naked. So how, then, does wisdom dress for the day? What does that look like? Well, take a look in your home... and across the street with your neighbors... and the community in which you live. Now that sounds familiar, doesn’t it? (Col.3:12-17)

Chapter 4

What Do I Pursue? (1-9) Godly men, godly instruction. Recall how that one piece of sound advice from a father-figure affected you? Makes you long for more. Have you passed it on? Ch.1-8 opens with and/or uses 17 references to “my son,” as a father to a son(s)... but closer reading reveals that what is being passed on is actually grandfather to grandsons (3). Note to self: mentoring truth begins at home (Deut.6). One son remembers! (3-4) Even though he chose a different path earlier in his life, breaking all the commands of his father David, Solomon comes back to confessing the truth. *What Do I Flee?* (10-19) Evil men and evil temptations. There are always two paths, one choice. Reflect on the contrast between the metaphors – “light and darkness.” Holy Scripture is always a “lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” (Ps.119:105) And as you walk, remember: peace is never the criteria for a decision but rather the result of a decision. *What Do I Guard?* (20-27). The Heart! It is the power and rudder of life (thought, word, deed). We are warned against a double heart ([Ps. 12:2](#)), hard heart (Prov. 28:14), proud heart (Prov. 21:4), unbelieving heart (Heb. 3:12), cold heart (Matt. 24:12), and an unclean heart (Ps. 51:10). Like vigilant soldiers, we protect, stand over against any intruder; the king’s cupbearer, that no poison sprinkled; the diligent farmer, that no seeds and weeds are implanted.

Chapter 5

Attention! (1-2) The cell phone “Amber Alert!” is startling; seems to come just whenever, right in the middle of whatever. The less-mature believer (and all Christian men) desperately need a similar but divine “Alert,” but it requires antennae tuned to a divine frequency – the Word of Wisdom – implanted, memorized, and used by the Holy Spirit to break through, whenever and wherever, alerting us to the dangers of adultery and other sexual sins. *The Other Woman* (3-14). She always out there: around every corner, on the billboards and social media, the next page and the next channel surfed... at the office, the ballpark, even church. The perception is that she promises life, but delivers only regret, isolation and death. (This can be said of “the other man” as well.) *The Remedy* (15-23). First, be “intoxicated” (have one’s thirst satiated) with sexual love as designed by God as a liberating gift in marriage. Second, see as God sees and ponder as God ponders: fidelity to one wife of delight and to one God who discerns... this is wisdom and the blessing. Anything other is pure foolishness, like floating without a paddle toward the edge of a waterfall!

Chapter 6

Shortcuts (1-11). Whether it’s hasty commitments or half-hearted procrastination, the path of least resistance is paved with good, albeit painfully foolish, intentions. Wisdom says, “lead with your chin”: humility over the hasty commitments we cannot keep. Wisdom says, “you have not

because you work not”: laziness leaves one empty-handed and empty-hearted. *Deception (12-15)*. Rather than getting ahead, we get hit in the head! Wisdom says, “anything less than complete truthfulness is a boomerang and boobytrap.” *Hate (16-19)*. That’s right... all sin is not equal. Wisdom says, “some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God.” (WSC #83) God is love, even white-hot love, such that anything opposed gets burned. Note to self: Hebrew lists, especially the expression “six things... seven...,” not only underscores a peculiar gravity, but a perilous exclamation mark on the seventh. *Infidelity (24-35)*. Adultery and sexual immorality is like sexual “hypnosis,” leading one to burn down his own house. Wisdom says, “never underestimate the power of the eyes... yours and hers.” (Matt.6:22-23) *Holy Bridge (20-23)*. Like the repetitive refrain of a good hymn, the pursuit of holiness is the bridge over all these temptations, led across by the Sentinel’s torchlight of Truth.

Chapter 7

Wrong Time, Wrong Place (6-9). The first of two striking themes in this chapter is “wisdom’s immanency”: closer than your sister, wisdom sees what we don’t, going before us, always watching, interpreting, warning... now even wondering aloud, “Why would you flirt with disaster?” *Death of a Man (6-23)*. The second striking feature is this description, as if in slow motion... like waterfowl responding to the hunter’s call... circling, cuping its tilted wings, gliding in... so unaware! It says nothing about the temptress’s peril, only his (22-23). Why? Because she is already dead in sin and idolatry. Wisdom teaches, “men, you won’t pull her up, but she will pull you down.” This kind of sin (deception and darkness) is diagnosed as *Wrong Purposes (10-15)*, *Wrong Places (16-20)* and *Wrong Persuasions (5, 13-15, 16-20, 21)*... and leads only in one direction. But note the two bookends of strength and safety as opposed to this one sad story: *Focus (1-5)*. The pupil (“apple”) indicates intentional, treasured focus. The idea (Deut.32:10; Ps.17:8) can be traced back to the Garden. Wisdom says that If God does so to you, you then are to reciprocate. *Listen (24-27)*. It’s one thing to hear, another to really listen. Wisdom pleads: look, listen! Do not be lured by the smooth call and camouflage; the only thing real down the street is a recipe for duck gumbo!

Chapter 8

Contrast (1). As before, note how Solomon personifies wisdom – a noble, beautiful, helpful woman in contrast to the immoral woman described in ch. 7. “*The unchaste wife moves covertly at dusk and speaks falsely; Wisdom moves publicly and speaks direct and authoritative truth.*” (Waltke) *On Earth As It Is In Heaven (2-3, 22)*. The grandeur of wisdom soars beyond time and space, but also is “*as relevant to the shopping-center as to heaven itself.*” (Kidner) *To All (4-10)*. Nothing camouflaged here; wisdom is attractive and accessible to ordinary people... to all who will turn away from surface thinking and from the foolishness of repeating the same thing over and over, each time expecting different results. *Better Than Jewels (11-21)*. Note all the treasured companions of wisdom: prudence, knowledge, discretion, fear, counsel, insight, strength, justice, enduring wealth (better than gold or silver), righteousness and an inheritance. *Eternal Nature of Wisdom (22-31)*. Note the divine presence and actions of eternal wisdom, which carries real and practical application. If the whole created order is founded on God’s wisdom, then to go against His wisdom is to go against all creation. “*When we belong to*

Jesus Christ and walk in His wisdom, all of creation works for us; if we rebel against His wisdom and will, things start to work against us, as Jonah discovered when he tried to run away from the Lord.”(Wiersbe)

Chapter 9

The enjoyment of a well-planned dinner party or the pain and sadness of a funeral – there is a difference. Having held forth the “blessing” (ch.8), Solomon speaks now of the “way” of wisdom: wisdom’s feast or folly’s funeral (1-12 vs 13-18). *Sitting at Wisdom’s Table (1)*. In the Ancient Near East, “seven pillars” indicates architectural magnificence and creates a sense of anticipation and confidence to be served at this table. Further, “seven” always refers to completion, perfection... all that God is and all that one needs! *The Invitation (2-6)*. The “sentness” of wisdom’s invitation – revealing of the heart of God – is stunning. And note the double-action response required: “come... leave” (faith & repentance... this is the way of understanding – not where one is at any given moment but what direction are you leaning? Lk.14:15-24 – don’t let anything become more important). *The Way (7-12)*. Teachability is evidence that one has dined at wisdom’s table. True wisdom must correct, rebuke, instruct... but are we prepared for that? How do you offer criticism? How do you respond to criticism? Are you pressed toward greater humility (“*fear of the Lord*”) or away in pride and the “fear of man”? *The Other Invitation (13-16)*... there always is! Folly’s sensuality is its only trick in the bag; instant gratification only disguises the lack of substance or future. And note the contrast: while folly sits wisdom is sent; while folly walk thru the door of death, wisdom is the door of life!

Chapter 10

Today begins the eclectic collection of two-phrase single verse wisdom sayings. At times there’s *some* kind of arrangement of two, three, or four proverbs linked by a theme on how wisdom operates. Let’s meditate on a few. *Parents & Profits (1-3)*. What’s the possible connection? How about the 5th Commandment? There’s a blessing and “sending power,” one generation to another, that is forfeited by misguided, inordinate pursuits (Matt.6:21). *Feast or Famine (4-5, 15-17, 22-26)*. The cultural mandate in the context of creation makes clear a certain work ethic: that God made man in His image as industrious, ordering his world, bringing productivity out of chaos. Wisdom embraces and acts upon this calling; laziness only reaps the anxiety of poverty. *Reputation or Ruin (6-10)*. Character (“*integrity*”) – what you are when no one is looking – eventually surfaces when everyone is looking... and will be remembered. *Lips of Life or Death (11-32)*. Take the test: Do my words offer life and peace to others? Understanding and knowledge? Truth and proper restraint at the right time? Do others value and find profit in my words? Your speech matters! It’s not a personality issue (introvert/extrovert, task/people...) but a heart issue. Jesus says “*out of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Matt.12:33-37). Is my heart filled with the “*fear of the Lord*” (27), “*hope*”... “*joy*” (28) and the “*way of the Lord*” (29)? May we be driven to pray and pursue a heart re-formed by Christ’s righteousness, wisdom and life.

Chapter 11

Macro-ethics (1-14). The gift of “*righteousness*” carries ethical implications (Ja.2:14-26). Justice is not merely economic (Lev.19; Deut.25); it’s “*balances*” and “*weights*” shaping how we

interpret people, circumstances and systems – the transactions of our life. Injustice is rooted “*pride*” (superiority, self-love, entitlement...). Wisdom’s humility and integrity garners the pleasures of God: happiness, good decisions, and confidence midst the complications of life. The lack or rejection thereof is self-sabotaging, ending in shame, subjugation and forfeiture... in this life and the next! Note how the graces of wisdom (“fruit of righteousness,” 30) actually extends and influences a whole city (nation), bringing the blessings of God: peace and joy and a favorable vision (Jer.29:4-5,7; Matt.5:14-16; 1 Tim.2:1-4). *Micro-ethics (15-29)*. Righteousness continues, now up close and personal, and follows along the lines of “*reap what you sow*” (Gal.6:7-9). For example, securing others’ loans is poor stewardship and puts one’s own financial capacities at risk. “Honor” or “riches,” “benefit” or “hurt”... wisdom says there’s a real difference, and it reflects one’s practiced character; one reaps the pleasure of God, the other His displeasure. And note the principle of generosity; you cannot out-give God (24-26). *Promise of Righteousness (30-31)*. What might I hope or aim for? To what end is wisdom and righteousness? It is not some artificially attached ornaments but organic, lively and life-giving to all who would partake of its fruits.

Chapter 12

From Discipline to Knowledge (1). How does a Christian learn to love discipline (both teaching and/or correction)? Experience its fruit: “*knowledge*”... a clearer understanding, interpretation, evaluation and direction... where one is not circling in “*stupidity*” (remember the definition of insanity?). This seems to fit the conclusion of “the path” (28, way) – moving in the right direction. *From Obedience to Favor (3-12)*. There is a “goodness” (wisdom) that is both internal and external. But we do not earn “*favor from the Lord*,” however, we can “*obtain*” (experience personally) His favor (Jn.14:21). Note all the ways one (good, wise, righteous) may experience God’s favor: immovable (3), graced & exalted by his wife (4), clean conscience (5), powerful words (6), longevity (7)... This is the one who stands when others fall, who even is a kind steward of his dog (10). *From Lips to Life (13-23)*. There are “givers” and there are “takers”; listen to what comes from their mouth and it becomes obvious. Note all what the righteous and wise lips have to offer and do your own inventory: a bypass from trouble (13), satisfaction (14), welcoming counsel (15), timely restraint (16), confirmation of truth (17), healing (18), transcendent (19), faithful & delightful (21)...

Chapter 13

Parent vs Buddy (1). Maybe the most oft-repeated mistake is dad trying too hard to be relevant, cool... as if our children want this. But what children really remember and benefit from (evidence that they are growing in wisdom) is how you rescued them from themselves, the moments of tough love. *Eating Your Words (2-3)*. Maybe the old saying is true after all... so be careful what you serve up. Not only do we live the consequences of our words, but our words reflect something of our own heart (Lk.6:45). *Eating Your Work (4-11)*. While it’s true that our gifts, callings and capacities explain a lot, laziness and an aversion to integrity regarding hard work leads only to excuses, poverty and judgment. Wisdom energizes work, rejects excuses and knows what’s at stake... and rejoices! *Eating With Counselors (12-20)*. This section seems to continuing on with the metaphorical theme – “eating.” So what meal is served up by those whom you surround yourself? The “teaching of the wise” and “faithful envoy”

serves up a plate of exhortation and wisdom (20): trust the “commandment” even when hope is deferred; despise not lest the train to come off the tracks; don’t miss the good (sense) for the perfect (demand); let knowledge lead rather than folly; walk in the honor of the penitent. Along the way, the righteous will be satisfied (25) with the “*tree of life*.” (12)

Chapter 14

Foolishness’s Irony (1-2). “*I can see how my sin and foolishness has eaten up my soul; I’m not the same person... it has so damaged all I dreamed, what I sensed God called me to be and do... and I hate this!*” A heartbroken comment made to me from a woman recently. Solomon offers no hyperbole here, only a terrible irony – that a woman/mother, in spite of her very heart and divine calling, would and can deliberately destroy her own home and family. Wisdom’s voice has your attention now, I bet! That’s Solomon’s point. *Wisdom’s Rescue (3-5)*. Enter stage door left – the “*lips of the wise*” over the rod on the back. And wisdom gets dirty (4)... that’s the only way of productivity. If you’ve ever “been there/done that,” take a moment to give thanks to the Lord! *Expectations (6-15)*. If you are to play the “*faithful*” man or woman toward others, go with your eyes wide open: truth telling will be opposed, scoffers aren’t really interested in wisdom, be willing to walk away, trust your discernment, the idea of repentance will be mocked, alternatives will be plenty, and down deep there is usually pain and bitterness.

Chapter 15

The Power of Tongue (1-4, 7, 23, 26, 28). At others’ harshness I’m tempted to either ignore the person or return with equal harshness. Wisdom teaches a 3rd way – a *soft answer... gentle*, timely prepared with perspective. *Note the results*. “*Soft speech is like oil on bruised skin to soften and heal it (Judg. 8:1–3); painful speech has the effect of oil poured on fire (1 Kgs. 12:1–16)*.” (Waltke) “*Pride and passion on both sides strike together like two flints.*” (Bridges) *The Telling of Temper (5, 12-13, 15, 18, 20)*. It’s never about my ‘position’ but my ‘disposition’ – it often reveals the unspoken, alters the dynamic of the conversation, and makes all the difference between wisdom and foolishness, peace and strife, feast or famine. *The Terrible of Time Out (5, 10-12, 29, 31-32)*. “Time out” was one form of discipline when our children were young. Sometimes the Lord is tender in His discipline, sometimes tough; sometimes He pulls His hand away, delivering us to providential hardship and sometimes He puts His hand right down upon us. In either case and at all times, note the goal: instruction, rescue from death, uninterrupted fellowship, and life itself (*Refiner’s Fire*). *Truth of Treasure (6, 8, 16-17, 24, 27, 33)*. What it is that I’m really after, what I value most... in this wisdom continually searches me, reads me. “*You’ve never seen a hearse towing a haul,*” and so we note what is really important: the freedom of simplicity, confidence in prayer, peace & love, improvement... life.

Chapter 16

The Attending Sovereignty (1-5). To devise plans, evaluate steps, and work those plans and steps part of what it means to be created in the image of God. “Diligence” is to be commended; but this is not where our confidence and expectations lay. Wisdom teaches us that our confidence, and the very reason we are to “commit” everything to the Lord, is because His sovereignty (the right to do all things, and doing all things right) attends and amends, evaluates and establishes all our ways. To be of any other opinion or take any other posture is arrogance.

The Atoning Love (6-7). Wisdom teaches us not to despair when we become aware of our presumptions. God's sovereignty doesn't end at our arrogance of control and/or rejection of His plans and purposes. Thanks be to God's love and faithfulness, that He makes atonement (substitutionary sacrifice: forgives, covers, reconciles, justifies) for our sin in Christ and turns us toward obedience. *The Expression of the Justice (8-15)*. Wisdom is the reciprocation of God's atoning love, whereby the new heart is empowered toward righteous allegiance and duty, yes... but more so, to love what God loves: justice and her twin, humility. This applies to all, citizen and Kings alike: discernment in civic affairs, push for righteousness, and to live under authorities God has placed over us. *The Sweet Fruit of Wisdom (16-33)*. A litany of evidence of wisdom's new heart are described here – check them out!

Chapter 17

The Family (1-6). So how goes the gospel in your own family... during downtime, at mealtime... the kinds of conversations that take place? We must admit that surface appearance is one thing, but wisdom sees quite another: peace vs strife, discipline vs presumption, purity vs mixed motives, "garbage in, garbage out," compassion vs cynicism, covenant vs convenience. These are not circumstances of DNA or fate, but of gospel choices. *Being Counter-Cultural (7-10)* There are things that appear expedient and effective, but wisdom looks elsewhere, practicing clarity and honesty, refusal of short-cuts, discretion for loves' sake, and the value of accountability. *The Alternative (11-14)*? When will I ever learn the principle of "reap what you sow"? Whether it's pushback from the state or from general creation, both can be hard and the fool should never ask "What... Why me?" The consequences of foolishness and evil often linger; and once it starts it's hard to stop (e.g. anatomy & physiology). *Favorite Pairs (17-18, 21-22, 27-28)*. First, the enduring value of friendship (note a true friend doesn't rush to mitigate difficulty nor publicly shame). Second, the strains & pains of fatherhood go deep and dangerous, but moments of joy are healing. Third, restraint of tongue and coolness of emotions is always better. "Lord, give me what I have not and make me what I am not!"

Chapter 18

Wisdom's Marriage Counselor (22). Remember the big picture of Proverbs – it's primarily a relationship with the person who is the wisdom of God, the companion of God with us all the time – Jesus Christ. We are reminded that we need Him as our loving, faithful mentor, equipping us with wisdom in marriage. His word to us? "*Marriage is good; enjoy it... but you cannot get there without Christ.*" A wise marriage accepts Jesus as mentor... in every detail inviting Him in. Note the wisdom here: 1) "*the Lord*" – the "*fear of the Lord*" (1:7) is not the same as being "afraid" on one another. The focus is beyond one's spouse to the Lord who made us, who calls us to something more important than self. 2) "*He... a wife*" – one man, one woman. Contrary to Solomon's foolishness, the counsel of Scripture creates sacred boundaries of fidelity and against all forms of infidelity. 3) "*obtains favor*" – With Christ comes God's favorable design for marriage: friendship, franchise, physical. "Friendship" means the bond created by constancy, conflict and counsel... and a right context for necessary change. "Franchise" means these two (and children) can be more effective for Christ than one alone; there's a shared vision and partnership in the mission of God (i.e. the church, Eph.5:32). "Physical" means intimacy of mind, body and soul in context of giving and receiving sexual

pleasure. Many a marriage fails when emphasizing only franchise and physical, but rarely when friendship is a priority. So you don't have it yet... "try harder" is not the message; rather, trust deeper – we need something outside ourselves – the wisdom of Christ himself.

Chapter 19

Better (1). So the question is, do we really want something better and best? "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." (C.S. Lewis) *Getting On in the World (2ff)*. Wisdom has much to say about navigating this world. For example... to intervene hastily (2), meaning "to life the face" of another, without knowing both context and facts can be counter-productive and the fallout is that we blame God (3). And how can wealth be good? Money talks. Really – it means you have something to offer; your goal is generosity... and that's a good thing (4, 6-7, 17). Common sense (8, 11) is attractive because it affords others' good (6th, 10th Commandment). Spreading gossip and slander is like stepping into your own trap (5, 9; 9th Commandment). And why is deliberately 'poking the bear' (the state) a foolish thing to do (12)? If your work ethic were a book, what would others read and know about you (15-16, 24)? Lastly, reflect for a moment about the wisdom of accountability in this life (18-20, 25-29).

Chapter 20

To Become (1). I am immediately struck by the verb "is" (ESV), because actually it should read "becoming" ("is not becoming wise"). Wisdom is a process, a path, a disciplined direction in life, and there are things which circumvent ("led astray") the process – patterns like drunkenness being one of them. What is it for you? Proverbs certainly outlines many: the unbridled tongue, greed, anger (2-3), laziness (4, 13), etc... What helpful forms of spiritual discipline are you asking the Lord to establish in your life that will lead you in the development of wisdom? *To Counsel (5)*. Many would like to help others when they get stuck or that another might help you get unstuck... to discover what it is down deep that is an impediment or some key to moving forward in the purposes of God. So wisdom teaches it is not mere "behavior modification," but a "drawing out." Think of a well... what might it take for you, in terms of attaching a bucket to a rope, lowering it down, then pulling it up carefully (maybe strenuously). Such is a noble desire and actually imitating and working in concert with the Holy Spirit, who is called "the counselor." *To Repent (9-11)*. It begins with and goes the whole way when we not only confess our sins but confess our presumed righteousness!

Chapter 21

Political Hope (1). Nothing is more needed right now in America. So where should my hope be – the right candidate or the Right Hand? Wisdom speaks clearly. Help me, Lord! *Presumed Righteousness (2-4)*. This from the lips of my own mother (before she was converted): "Rick, if you actually believed that book (Bible), rather than taking your leisure in bed reading, you would be out helping your father mow the grass this morning." Ouch! Mirror, mirror on the wall... Have mercy on me, Lord! *Getting Ahead (5-8)*. There's wisdom (diligence, honesty, timing, purity) and there's foolishness (sloppy impatience, dishonesty, demand, shortcuts) ... which do

you choose? Guide me, Lord! *Inside Out (9-21)*. Often what is going on at home is reflected across the street; the private is made public... and the Righteous One sees everything. So wisdom prays: *“Lord, may peace overwhelm my spouse; may mercy hang on my fence; may a welcome mat to all be at my front door; may generosity be at my table; may the joy of justice fill every room; may the path of good lead down my street; may the pleasures of God be my priority; may life and righteousness and honor know my address.”*

Chapter 22

A Good Name (1). I know we're fond of saying “your character is more important than your reputation,” but wisdom says otherwise: *“your character is your reputation.”* What do people think when they hear your name? Is this not to be more valued than silver and gold? Why? It's not about “people-pleasing,” but that *“no man is an island”* ... there will be a need, and what when you call for a favor? And maybe wisdom teaches us that who you identify with (2), your prudence (3), your humility before the Lord (4), your discipline (5), diligence with your children (6)... all are part of a good name. *The Story Keeper (12)*. God is... but so is the Christian. But there are times when I realize I once knew the story, some biblical truth or gospel practice, and wish to recall it but cannot. Other godly men and women can. Jealousy first, then my awareness that what I once knew has not been “kept” (in me) by the Lord because I have not kept (in) Him. Hummm... note to self! *Inclinations (17-21)*. Now that's the solution – but it's not about innate DNA, but my intentional pursuit (a theme of Proverbs) of the Lord and of the Lord's wise people. The result is not necessarily for a deeper theological acumen, but rather a deeper trust in the Lord as He has revealed Himself in Word & deed... TODAY! What is He showing you today?

Chapter 23

Appetites (1-8). Does wisdom “carefully observe ‘what’ is before you” or ‘who’? Both are important! Translating the Hebrew either way boils down to the same: it's not about “food” but something else altogether; what you see is not always the entire reality. Wisdom remembers that unrestrained appetite (hidden agenda) can dress up or down (civil influential or local selfish), and to indulge them leads to a tragic end (Phil.3:19). *Ancient Landmarks (10-18)*. Like historic property stakes are God's boundary markers (commandments) regarding these special places in God's heart and vision for His people: the vulnerable and the valuable (children, both fatherless and fathered). Don't mess with them! Note that both have implications regarding their protection, for there lay our and their future. *Alcohol (19-21, 29-35)*. The stanzas may be considered ‘poetic’, but the misery of abusing alcohol are anything but... more like lampoon & lament. Wine can be pleasing on many levels, even supported in the Scriptures as a good gift from God, yet wisdom suggests *“‘lingering over’ alcohol (those deriving comfort and security in knowing that a glass of wine is at hand, ready to deaden the senses – Garrett)”* can turn hard to bite you like a venomous snake; worse are the degenerative effects, physical and mental, of the habitual drinker (alcoholic). Worse still, picture yourself aboard the Titanic!

Chapter 24

Forsake Evil (1). Mom used to scare me, saying *“well, birds of a feather flock together.”* The antidote to envy *“is the long view: the glory (23:18) or darkness (24:20) to come.”* (Kidner) Fort

Wisdom (2-6). Tree forts and childhood games like 'king of the hill' (where the others would try to knock you off the mound of dirt) was thrilling, but little did we know that strength to endure the onslaught of adult challenges would become absolutely critical. So wisdom teaches be careful how you build – the right materials matter – and that whoever said “*me and God make a majority*” lied. Lone rangers usually don't survive. *No Blood, No Foul (8-9)*. Wisdom says – NOT! When will we ever discard the notion that as long as you don't 'act out' the sin, it's not sin? (Matt.5:27-28) *Band of Brothers (10-12)*. Elsewhere Solomon will say, “*two are better than one...*” (Eccl.4:9-12) and the apostle Paul will exhort the strong to reach out to the weak (Gal.6:1-2). To know yet pretend not to notice... well, the Lord weighs the heart and motives. *Tastebuds (13-14)*. Take a moment to reflect, compare the aftertaste: several hours of television commercials vs the goodness of wisdom's deposits in your soul. Lick your lips and smile! *Humility (16-17)*. Note to self: remember the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt.18:21-35).

Chapter 25

Memorization (1). So why would the men of Hezekiah copy the proverbial wisdom of Solomon? Note to self: do what it takes never to forget! *Leadership (2-7)*. The glory of God-ness is His unfathomable distance and mystery; it's one of God's ways to say, “*you are amazed by what you see, yet what you can't see is even greater.*” But the glory of leadership is to search out the things of God and of His creation: theology, sociology, economics, science, math, geography, philosophy, art, etc... Nothing can make a leader more skillful and humble. However, wisdom reveals that leadership's ‘*Achilles' heel*’ is that they have trouble searching and knowing their own heart. So it would be dangerous for a leader to – one, surround himself with the dross of ‘yes-men’; two, fail to position others under him well. *A Public Tongue (8-15, 18)*. Wisdom once taught me in painful circumstances of the awful smell and shame of hastily hanging dirty laundry out to dry. Matt.18:15-20 and Eph.4:25-32 lay out a better way, although no guarantee it will all work to your favor. And loving one's enemy just might do what is needed (21-22). *Speaking to Pain (20)*. God's “*sovereignty,*” our “*divine physician,*” and songs of “*victory in Jesus*” have their place and time. But perhaps the number one mistake is to rush headlong into spiritual reasoning and fail to simply be in the moment with another... to “*weep with those who weep*” (Rom.12:15) is a powerful thing.

Chapter 26

The Fool (1-12). Think about it: snow in summer would signal the times and seasons are out of joint and would be catastrophic (1 Samuel 12:17), ruining the grain harvest by damaging and causing it to rot. (Waltke) So honoring a fool (or even trying to “*answer*” rationally, biblically in all his or her ridiculous behaviors) is actually harmful, ultimately prohibited any hope for a “*harvest*” of maturity into wisdom. The description is alarming: cursing in the wind, an untrained animal, unreliable, crippled, dull, hurtful, senseless, and arrogant. *The Sluggard (13-16)*. The lazy man will create any excuse to avoid work. A *lion in the road* was a virtual impossibility in Biblical times. The *lazy man* shows creative talent (imagining not only a lion, but a *fierce lion*) and a form of work, but it is dedicated to the effort of avoiding work. “The humor in this verse (14, “*on its hinges*”) is based on the analogy with a door—it moves but goes nowhere. Likewise, the sluggard is hinged to his bed.” (Ross) *The Angry (17-21)*. The Hebrew

verb “meddles” literally means ‘become excited’...someone who gets angry over the fight of another. So it is, unresolved anger festering below the surface, that some find it irresistible to get involved in the disputes of other people. Not so with Jesus (Lk.12:14). *The Whisperer (18-28)*. Seen at times a clever, funny, a source of “information,” but maybe Freud was on to something (the “Freudian slip”)... and underneath something smells like smoke (hate)!

Chapter 27

The “older” folk will recall Carol King’s 1971 hit – “*You’ve Got A Friend*.” We all need one; more so, the envious. *Envy’s Friend (1-10)*. Envy goes beyond mere coveting to an ugly jealousy: it is not just wanting something more or that which others may enjoy, but that you wish them not to have it or enjoy it. Envy always pines for tomorrow, eager to have, eager to be acknowledged. We’ve all been there, and that’s when and why we need two things: First, to meditate and believe Romans 8:31 – 39; Two, find a wise, godly friend who is not afraid to speak into our lives, even wound us, if necessary, for our own good. Want a friend like this? Be a friend like this and you will. (btw, you’ve got a friend in Jesus!) *Advice to Fathers (11-27)*. Fathers must know, as the head of the home (and the home being a primary building block of any community), that they often answer for their children’s behavior. A father’s goal is their children’s maturity: awareness and action regarding danger, financial prudence, respect for neighbors, vision for marriage, the necessity for manly friendships, commitment to the law of sowing & reaping, core issues of the heart, disciplined eyes, humility, and the importance of a godly legacy.

Chapter 28

But the Righteous (1-28). Let’s focus today on the blessings and courage of the righteous. But first, recall the passive righteousness of Christ (his obedience in death) imputed to the believer in justification; and the active righteousness of Christ (his obedience in life) which progressively becomes our experience in sanctification (growth to maturity, Phil.1:6). Both are gifts; both are blessings in this life and the next. So what does that look like in the maturing believer? A lion is bold just by its DNA. Likewise, one’s identity in Christ (active & passive righteousness for him and in him and thru him) leads not to the anxiety of guilt, but a *boldness* to stand firm... and long. The *courage* of the righteous propels them to oppose unrighteousness wherever they find it... and understand justice. *Integrity* is what he ‘banks on’ rather than the bottom line... and is content. *Generosity* is part of his philosophy of work... grounded in God’s Word. Opposition is *entrusted* to his Judge... discerning their (and his) end. *Humble transparency* (both wins and losses) is his reputation... and obtains mercy from others. *Compassion* is his compass in the community... and understands. *Steadfast* against temptations toward partiality... and cannot be bought. *A listening ear* makes him accessible in the streets... and finds favor. *Honor and respect* toward authority (especially father and mother) are given... and safety rests securely. Lastly, recall John the Baptist’s word – “*He must increase; I must decrease*” (Jn.3:30)... may we look to Him in faith that the wisdom of His righteousness might increasingly characterize our lives!

Chapter 29

Note the many phrases in this chapter of the broader corporate: “*the people, the land, a king, a city...*” The last of Solomon’s Proverbs (30 we hear from *Augur*, 31 from *Lemuel*) seem to focus

upon *leadership, upon employers and employees, citizens...* and ultimately, back to the overall theme of the “*fear of the Lord,*” which is the bedrock of wisdom. As to leadership (rulers, kings, employers), what might wisdom look like? Is there more joy and confidence and productivity among your employees and in the city? (2, 4, 7) Choose your battles carefully, righteously; frequent (possibly unnecessary) correction, discipline and degrading of employees or constituents can either become burdensome beyond repair or like the “boy who cried wolf.” (1) On the flip side, flattery by a leader in order to soften or manipulate eventually becomes a trap, and what song is sung then? A dirge. Three additional character qualities and skills that leaders need to possess: First, conflict resolution. Conflict is inevitable, so it matters how a leader deals with criticism, arguments, and anger toward him/her and their policies (8-12). Second, casting vision. Clarity is critical. (18) Third, pampering is poison. Maturity is a must. (19-21). Maybe these kinds of proverbs help one know who to work for and who to vote for come election day.

Chapter 30

Who is Agur? Other than the noted son of Jakeh, the Bible mentions him nowhere else. But what can we learn from this attribution? We are not alone; Solomon wasn't the only wise man in history... and wise, heart-felt religion wasn't born when the pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Rock. No, God has His people everywhere, even the no-named, and so it is that we stand on the tall shoulders of godly men throughout history. Be careful of the trendy and soundbites of our day. A Robust Theology (1-9). Almost Job-like, note how Agur lays exasperated in humility of finite man and extols the majesty of the infinite God. Also, note the prayer of the wise and righteous: let me experience greater sanctification unto holiness; and let me experience a godly contentment. May we make this our prayer too! Agur then uses a poetic emphasis (“two daughters, three things, yea four”) to explicate what sanctification and contentment might look like... things that wisdom (God) loves and things that wisdom (God) hates.

Chapter 31

Who is Lemuel? As with Agur (30), we know nothing about Lemuel, as he is not recorded among the kings of Judah or Israel. Very likely he was a pagan foreign king who put his trust in Yahweh, covenant God of Israel. *Perhaps more important, who is Lemuel's mother,* from whom Lemuel learned the wisdom of the fear of the LORD. (1) And maybe that is as an important lesson as the proverbs themselves; namely, God is unrestrained in His reach even into the laundry rooms and kitchens, into the homes and hearts of no-name mothers, who throughout history quietly shape the world. Note how her love that dares all supposed titles to call into question her son's actions (2-9). Then note his description of the “*excellent wife*” (most likely a reflection of what his mother demonstrated by her own life) and what is to most valued (10-31): a husband's trust, a profitable vision and work ethic (not for greedy gain but for the blessing of her family), a beautiful dignity (inside and out), a generosity that fears not for her own, a reputation in the city, a sense of humor and kindness, and children who admire and praise her. Jesus said “*righteousness is known by her deeds.*” Praise God for godly, faithful and wise mothers! I was so blessed, and though sinfully I didn't know it till she was gone, many of her wise sayings to me continue their shaping influence.

Reflecting on Proverbs –

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Proverbs. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Proverbs before we move forward?

"Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." John 15.3