

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
PROVERBS

35 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
PROVERBS

35 Day Devotional

foundations
daily devotional

In this devotional our approach will be different than most other devotionals. Rather than going chapter-by-chapter, we'll move topic-by-topic. Our suggestion is to simply read the passages given in the devotional and then when complete, read through the entire book of Proverbs.

DAY 1

Wisdom & Its Value



READ: Proverbs Chapter 8

In the book of Proverbs wisdom is often “personified”, or given the qualities of a living being. As verse 1 of chapter 8 declares, “*does not wisdom call out?*”. Why is wisdom calling out? It’s because this life of wisdom is one that is SO desirable that it’s trying to get our attention! Think of how loud a fire alarm is, in an attempt to alert us to something very important. Wisdom is also trying to alert us, letting us know that we need to yield to it.

Wisdom is priceless, more precious than rubies (8:11). Throughout the book of Proverbs, this is emphasized, the limitless value of wisdom. It’s also what leaders are to rule by as they govern the earth (8:15-16). How can a person handle all the responsibilities that come with leadership without wisdom? Finally, in a sense, the world was created with the presence of wisdom – that’s how important wisdom is! Being a “wise” person then is a vital goal! As we continue our journey through Proverbs we’ll discover much more about “wisdom” and a wise life. May our hearts be ready to gain *prudence* and *understanding* (8:5) brothers and sisters, such words being close cousins of wisdom.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time in prayer and reflection. Ask God – are you a wise person? Do you hunger for wisdom and growth in your life? What would others say? Spend some time in both confession for any lack of hunger AND praise for where you’ve grown.
2. Make a commitment to the Lord, to seek to submit to the wisdom that you’ll find in the book of Proverbs. Ask Him to give you a word, thought or picture as a promise for what He’ll do in your life as you commit to growing in wisdom.

DAY 2

Wisdom Is From God



READ: Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, 8:22, 9:10

Where does wisdom come from? If one were to take a trip to a bookstore, whether a physical location or online, they would discover many self-help books. If a person were then to read all the books on one topic, they would be overwhelmed by both the quantity of material and the clear contradictions between various authors. Certainly some wisdom could be found – without a doubt! However, even this wisdom would be from the same source of all wisdom, the source that the book of Proverbs suggests is the best place to go. Where does wisdom come from then? From God.

Wisdom herself declares, “the LORD possessed me at the beginning of His work . . .” (8:22). Elsewhere in Proverbs we’re told – “for the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (2:6).” We must recognize that all truth and wisdom come from God. As our Creator, God knows how things operate! It’s why in the book of

Proverbs we'll find incredibly practical advice on how to approach the very real things of life that we face. To the extent that we walk in His ways, we'll do well, in spite of difficult circumstances.

Of course, many have simply tried to take some of the wisdom found in the Bible, apply it, yet actually ignore the Author of the wisdom. They may experience some blessing due to this, but the truly wise person will have a relationship with this God, or using the language of Proverbs, they'll have a relationship with wisdom. In God's eyes these two things are equal! To know some truth or wise thoughts, but not know God, is not wisdom. Listen to what Proverbs says, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . . (1:7)" and, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (9:10)." Life is full of twists and turns, trials and temptations. We need much more than some truth. We need Someone who can continue to teach us AND give us the power to live according to His Word, including the words found in Proverbs.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time thinking about how much knowledge the world has . . . Write down where all this knowledge is found – i.e. libraries. Then spend some time writing down some of the evil and troubles in the world. Through this, we see a great divide between the presence of knowledge and how people actually live.
2. Ask God – how well do You know me? Since wisdom flows from knowing Him and His Word, allow Him to speak about your relationship. Just as a husband and wife need to regularly evaluate their relationship, we are wise when we do the same in our relationship with God.

DAY 3

The Opposite Of Wisdom



READ: Proverbs 3:21-22, 5:23, 9:13, 14:24, 15:14, 24:9, 26:11, 28:13

In seeking to be a wise person, half of the battle is avoiding that which is counter to wisdom. According to the book of Proverbs "folly" is what we must steer clear of. Just as wisdom cries out for our attention, so too does folly! "The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge (9:13). We are often left with a choice, to give in to wisdom or folly. A person who does well in life (not perfectly, but prospers in spite of difficult circumstances) more often than not chooses to follow wisdom. That's why we're told to, "preserve sound judgment and discernment" (3:21-22). To "preserve" something is to guard it, to be intentional about this "thing". Put another way, we must be intentionally wise!

Of course, we'll make mistakes in life. This is inevitable! Even on this, Proverbs speaks! "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly" (26:11). Proverbs uses a very gross picture to emphasize that while we'll make errors, the true fool is the one who continues to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. The alternative to this foolishness is also highlighted in Proverbs . . . "he who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (28:13).

As we consider both wisdom and folly, we're reminded of the life of Solomon. Solomon is acknowledged as the author of the majority of the sayings in the book of Proverbs. We know from elsewhere in the Bible that God gave him great wisdom upon his request. However, Solomon began to compromise as his life moved on and though he increased in age, he didn't necessarily increase in wisdom. This reminds us once again that to be a wise

person has little to do with how much we know, but more with what we do. There is a lot of pressure in this world to choose that which is foolish. May we be stronger than Solomon was throughout his life, with God's help!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time reviewing some of the foolish things you've done over the years and the consequences that resulted. Thank God for His mercy, as you've sought to move on from such choices. Also listen in prayer – God, is there anything else that I still need to make right?
2. Ask God to show you if there are any decisions you're about to make, or actions you're about to take, that would be unwise. If He reveals anything, ask Him to begin to show you an alternative plan.

DAY 4

The Importance of Our Hearts



READ: Proverbs 4:23, 12:20, 17:20, 19:3, 23:17

When we take a look at our lives we sometimes wonder – "why do I do what I do? Why do I say what I say?" The book of Proverbs clearly teaches that all of the fruit of our life flows directly from what's in our hearts. This is why we're told, "keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (4:23). If we are to change what we do and say, we must allow the Lord to work on our hearts then! Probably every person has said something they've regretted and declared, "I didn't mean that!", and vowed to never say it again. But we do, don't we? Again, it's because we need heart changes!

"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil . . ." (12:20). Our hearts have many compartments, some places where Jesus is Lord, and others where He doesn't reign. If we're to move towards wisdom, we'll need to seek to submit it all. If we have hearts that are "crooked" in any way we may end up a path that leads to problems. God doesn't want this for us! He wants us to rise up in the midst of life, for His glory and for our sakes! Unfortunately, there are even times when we go off the "straight path" and then blame God for the consequences! Proverbs speaks of this, "when a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord" (19:3). How ironic and rebellious! While we may not always understand why things happen, our choices do have much power. Let's not blame God for our poor choices then! Let's take responsibility for much of what results in our lives and seek to pray this prayer – "Lord, I know that my heart isn't fully submitted, but please work in it so that I might bear even more wonderful fruit in and through my life. Amen."



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time in prayer, asking God if you've ever blamed Him for challenges that arose from your own poor choices. Confess your pride in this and ask for His forgiveness.
2. We're to guard our hearts with *all* vigilance. Ask God to show you any parts of your heart that aren't submitted to Him. Are there any areas of your life that you don't want to hear from Him on? If yes, open this part up to Him and let Him speak and minister.

DAY 5**Being Emotional Is Normal**

 **READ:** Proverbs 14:10, 14:13, 15:13, 30

One of the most powerful aspects of Proverbs is that it clearly acknowledges the real *stuff* of life! Throughout the book, the whole range of human emotions is noted and discussed. In fact, every type of emotion is actually validated. Sometimes we view certain emotions as “bad” and other ones as “good”. However, we see in Proverbs that we can expect to experience every one. The key, of course, is what we do with them! Further, by living a life of wisdom, we can decrease the chance of too many negative experiences that lead to difficult emotions.

Without a doubt we should seek to have the emotions that are more generally seen as positive, as they lead to better fruit. For example, we can consider the words of Proverbs 15:13, “a glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.” Of course, a crushed spirit will not thrive in life, while a cheerful face will face better prospects. It is on us then to *monitor* what’s going on in our hearts and emotions and to regularly bring this to God. Through His mighty Hand and spoken words, He can bring much healing. Listen to what Proverbs says, “a cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones” (15:30). Brothers and sisters, God can give us this cheerful look and good news! He can!

It is here we must be careful about our expectations. While God can and does bring restoration to our souls, therefore impacting our emotions, we still expect some challenges and difficult emotions in life. Until Christ returns, there is much that we will face. Or as Proverbs 14:13 puts it, “even in laughter the heart may ache and the end of joy may be grief.” This isn’t pessimistic, but realistic!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What difficult emotions have you been struggling with lately? Ask God to speak to these. What are the roots? Does He have some good news for you?
2. Praise God that one day He’ll return and rid this world of all that causes us great grief, pain and suffering. Read Revelation 21:4 and praise Him for what it says!

DAY 6**Letting God Test Our Hearts**

 **READ:** Proverbs 11:2, 17:3, 18:12, 27:21

We’ve seen in the past two days that what happens in our hearts and emotions (our inner lives!) can greatly impact us. Here’s the question though – because we’re sometimes SO complex, or in chaos, how can we even know what’s going on in our hearts? Praise God, He is the one who knows us AND can show us. Or in the words of Proverbs, “the crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts” (17:3). One of the most significant prayers we can pray revolves around the request for God to test our hearts. Of course, this requires us to trust His goodness! To bare ourselves before Him means that we’ll trust Him to be as gentle AND firm as He needs to be. We also will need to trust Him for help in dealing with all that is “unclean”.

When God does this “testing” upon our invitation, or by His own initiative, what is He looking for? One of the most common roots to our problems is pride. This is something He

desires to point out and deal with for our own sake. After all, “when pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom” (11:2). Is it enjoyable to discover that we still have pride? No. Is it freedom when realize that such pride does us no good in life? Yes. To have pride dealt with firmly is one of the most wonderful gifts God can give us.

This verse is used above for a different thought. Do you want to do that?

Another way that God tests us for pride is by directing praise our way. Or as Proverbs 27:21 says, “the crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives.” For sure, we all need affirmation and praise! However, this same affirmation can also show us where we think that we’re a bit *too special*. Oh, how our hearts can wander and go astray! Thank God that He has a variety of ways to test us. Amen!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time inviting God to search your heart for any pride that exists. Confess any fear you have, about what He might reveal. Remember that He is Good! Then, confess any pride that you have and ask God to help you walk in humility.
2. Ask God in listening prayer where He desires to affirm you. Often when we don’t let God affirm us, we seek to get this affirmation from others in unhealthy ways. Also ask Him to show you where the praise of others has led to pride. If possible, plan some steps to make sure others know that anything that you have succeeded in has come from the hand of God.

DAY 7**The Need For Diligence & Planning**

 **READ:** Proverbs 19:15, 20:4, 20:13, 21:5

If we had the opportunity to survey thousands of people and ask them – “what makes a successful person?” – we would get many answers. It’s very likely that if were to compare this list with what *actually* leads to success, certain traits would be overemphasized and others would be largely ignored. One such trait that may be undernoted is “planning”. We live in a society that adores spontaneity and idolizes speed. God’s Word, and Proverbs especially, highlights something called, “diligence”, which “planning” flows from.

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty” (21:5). We must ask ourselves, if we desire to be wise, do we spend enough time planning? Put another way, are we intentional about every area of life? One great leader, when asked about his success, declared that, “greatness is determined by what a person does in his spare time. In his spare time, he thinks and prays.” This is diligence!

This diligence and planning is contrasted with laziness and oversleeping in the book of Proverbs. “Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger” (19:15). Slothfulness is really a condition of the heart. It resides within the person who has few goals, who takes no time to consider that one day they will be held to account by God for their life. Often God will bring considerable challenges into their life to try to “awaken” them to reality. Of course, we never have to get to this point if we are diligent.

What kind of planning should we do? What must we be diligent in? Areas include: our devotional lives, our relationships (marriage, parenting), our jobs, our spare time, our purity, how we treat our bodies (sleep and nutrition), the use of our spiritual gifts and much more. It’s a lot of work, yes, but this will lead to much fruit in our lives.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Consider in prayer whether you are a diligent person, or “slothful”? Be honest with yourself and before God. Thank Him for the strength to remain diligent where you are. Also ask Him for the power to overcome any laziness you may have.
2. Take a look at the list of areas in the final paragraph of today’s devotional. Reflect on this question – are you diligent in each of these areas? The rest of this *Foundations* devotional will provide you with the opportunity to consider many of these areas as we consider what God has to say about them.

DAY 8**Seeking The Counsel Of Others****READ:** Proverbs 11:14, 12:15, 13:10, 20:18

In the previous day we considered the importance of planning and diligence. Today, we need to emphasize that our planning is never meant to be a “solo” job. God has created us in a way where we’ll need the counsel of others. Others will, at times, provide significant counsel because of their life experience or expertise in a specific area, or simply because God has revealed something very significant to them.

As Proverbs makes very clear, “the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice” (12:15). Again, we return to the topic of wisdom and we see that a life of wisdom can be partially built on the advice of others. Of course, it takes humility to listen to what others have to say. It also takes the commitment of time to gather the opinion of others. If we struggle with impatience, this will be difficult! However, we need to realize that *in the end* the time spent seeking the counsel of others will be well worth it! For, “where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (11:14). Ah yes, safety! This is what we want! To have it, we need an abundance of counselors.

What does this mean to have “an abundance of counselors”? Certainly we cannot consult lots of people EVERY time we make a decision. Instead, it’s best to have a list of people, perhaps 8-10, that we can seek on a regular basis when we are making decisions or considering certain aspects of our lives. At different times we may ask only a few, but it’s vital that we don’t always ask the same person. Variety can help immensely! In this, as in all things, Jesus the Shepherd can direct our path to the right people at the right time. He is really good at this, when we ask!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Are you a person that asks others for advice? There’s a balance here – we must not let people replace the wisdom we can get from God. However, He often speaks through others. Check your life – do you *humbly* ask enough questions?
2. Write down the list of people that you seek counsel from. Now bring this list before God. Ask Him if anyone should be added or deleted. Then ask Him – is there any area of your life that you need counsel in right now. Ask Him who to talk to . . .

DAY 9**Sexual Purity****READ:** Proverbs 2:16, 5:15-17, 6:26-35, 7:4-5

Sexual purity is of incredible importance to God, for our relationships and for our own personal well-being. The book of Proverbs uses some striking words to describe both the temptation of sexual sin and the destruction that it reaps in our lives. We do well to consider what God is saying through His Word. We can save ourselves much hardship!

One of the most significant parts of sexual sin that’s noted in Proverbs is the reality that it can seem harmless. The adulteress (or the pornographic website) has “smooth words” (2:16, 7:5), but she (or he) will lead us to something that we’ll later regret with great pain. What wisdom is telling us is clear, so why would we play with fire? Or in the exact words of Proverbs, “can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?” (6:27-28) The purity that God is calling us to is for our own good, not just for the proper functioning of society.

A powerful aspect of what we read about sexual impurity in Proverbs is the *aggressiveness* with which it goes after us. All forms of sexual impurity are like this! God created us with sexual desires and due to sin, we are often tempted at this point. However, God is bigger than our sin and our desires. Perhaps as much in this area, as any other, we will need His help to stay strong.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend a few moments asking God to show you where sexual purity AND any impurity has led you in the past. Also ask Him to show you what sexual impurity does for our society. If there is unconfessed sin, bring it to God and seek to actually repent.
2. Spend some time praising God for His power to help you overcome any temptations to sexual impurity. Also spend some time interceding for your church and for a godly view of sexuality to be re-established in our country.

DAY 10**Seeking Absolute Purity****READ:** Proverbs 16:2, 20:9, 20:11

In the previous day we looked at the need to stay sexually pure and how tempting it is to be otherwise. It would be easy to move on and exclaim – “now I’m all good in this area!” However, we would do well to pause and wrestle with some additional piece of wisdom we find in Proverbs. Sometimes we can fool ourselves into thinking everything is good! Or as Proverbs 20:9 declares, “who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?’” It is very difficult to do so, so let’s dig into to this idea of purity even more!

Sexual purity requires that we consider what we’re doing with both our eyes, the rest of our bodies and *our spirits*. A person can be pure with their body, but sin by what is going on internally. We often use the word “lust” in relation to sexual sin and rightfully so. At times a person can be doing the right things with their body (i.e. keeping the physical act of sex within marriage), but “lust” or “long” for another in their spirit. This sin can be triggered by so many things, including an unhappy marriage, improper media choices or even books. It takes much awareness and watchfulness to move our lives towards absolute, God-honoring purity.

Does this goal seem impossible? In our own efforts, it is. However, even here Proverbs gives us hope. It says that, “all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit” (16:2). We must allow God to shine His light on any dark areas in our inner beings, showing us where we lust and long for that which is not to be ours.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. If married, ask God to show you any unhealthiness in your marriage. Such “lack” can lead to impurity. Ask Him for a strategy on how to grow. If single, ask Him to give you the strength to stay pure in every way. Ask Him to give you any strategies that you specifically need.
2. Spend some time asking God if there are people that you need to share these truths about purity with – someone in your cell group, ministry, family or workplace? If He says yes, ask Him how to go about this in a clear, but gentle manner.

DAY 11

God Is Passionate About Justice

 **READ:** Proverbs 2:21; 11:11, 17:23, 18:5, 21:15

The word “passion” is a strong one. It can mean to be filled with emotion for something or someone. What is God passionate about? Have you ever asked that question? If we read Proverbs, alongside the prophets, we see that He’s VERY passionate about justice. He cares deeply about the situation of those who are being oppressed and who are being treated poorly. On the flipside He can be angered by those who cause others to unnecessarily suffer.

Proverbs doesn’t simply speak of *God’s* desire for justice. As His *servants*, we’re called to commit to living as people who demonstrate justice and who seek to bring relief to those who are oppressed. And can say with complete confidence that justice makes a difference! First, God promises that, “. . . the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it” (2:21). Does it always work out this way? No. There’s a lot of desire for wickedness in the world. However, we’d be very surprised to discover that in spite of the appetite for sin in our world, those with a consistent walk of being just, often rise to the top.

Second, we’re told that, “by the blessing of the upright a city is exalted” (11:11). Again, while there’ll be *much* wickedness in the world, God can and will establish “pockets of grace” as leaders and His people commit to being upright. And brothers and sisters, because God sees all, this call to acting justly extends to our private lives. Wickedness can be done in secret, but this too God sees and resists. We must choose wisely in secret. Even what we do online or how we treat our families can bring or release people from oppression.

Justice is of great value to God! And justice makes a difference. These are things Proverbs would have us keep in mind.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Praise God that He is passionate about those who have been oppressed and taken advantage of in their lives. Praise Him for caring about the pain that has been inflicted upon you/them. Ask Him to speak to any of the pain that you still carry.

2. Ask God – are any of your current actions or attitudes causing others oppression, or tearing them down? If yes, repent and seek His wisdom on how to make things right. Also ask Him – “God, who in my life could use some support and/or justice? Are there any steps that I need to take?”

DAY 12

How We Treat The Poor Really Matters

 **READ:** Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 21:13, 22:22-23, 29:7, 29:14

In the last devotional, we looked at God’s passion for justice. A huge aspect of this justice is how we personally treat those who are poor. Proverbs has many statements, commands and warnings about this matter. Who are the poor? We often think of those who lack food, health, clothing or shelter. However, the poor can also include the lonely. Mother Teresa, after years of ministering to the sick and poor, called loneliness the greatest disease.

Will we help the poor? Proverbs declares, “whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered” (21:13). Sometimes we don’t see (or hear) the poor because we don’t want to be bothered. This won’t be a valid excuse when we stand before God one day. We must wrestle with our obligations, out of love for God and others. Even those who are “across the world” are our concern. The early church helped those who lived on the other side of the known world and we too must prayerfully consider what we can do as well.

On the other side of helping the poor are two behaviours that we must steer clear of intentionally. One is to not enjoy or look down on the struggles of the poor. If we’re honest, it can be easy to do this . . . If we can always blame their poverty on their actions, then we can release ourselves responsibility. Proverbs addresses this sinful attitude with very direct words, “whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished” (17:5).

Second, we must seek to, “. . . not rob the poor because he is poor . . .” (22:22) Business owners, land owners, salespeople – these groups have to be especially careful that their practices do not heap additional oppression on the poor. It is the job of all of us to very deliberately check our lives for such behaviour. Why? Because how we treat the poor really matters!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time in prayer and reflection, asking God if you’ve ever mocked or blamed the poor OR taken advantage of them in any way. Repent of these actions and ask if there are any steps to take in making things right.
2. Ask God to show you how in your sin, you were destitute and without hope. Ask God to also show you the riches of what God has done for you.

DAY 13**We Must Measure Things Carefully**

 **READ:** Proverbs 11:1, 16:11, 20:23; 31:9

Life is full of opportunities to either choose to be truthful or not. One form of truthfulness is being accurate with how we weigh things! Accuracy can include: reporting stories or facts with the right details, how we charge people if we are involved in business or sales or customer service, reporting all of our income on our tax forms. People of this world would laugh, even scoff at such accuracy, but we're to be part of another kingdom, the kingdom of light.

Proverbs tells us that, "a false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight" (11:1). Listen to those words – "abomination" or "delight". This is our choice. We must resolve to do what is right, and being accurate is always the best choice. If we'll keep soft hearts before God, He will direct us clearly in these matters. This is our job – making sure we'll be responsive to God! Let's take a look at our lives and see if we have been inaccurate in any way.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask God – have I reported things inaccurately? Have I been charging people improperly at work? Have I reported all of my income on my taxes? Let Him direct you to any required changes.
2. Having a soft heart ensures that we'll be responsive to God's promptings on matters of obedience. Spend some time praising God for where He's used discipline/suffering in the past to bring an increased softness.

DAY 14**Final Justice Comes From God**

 **READ:** Proverbs 20:22, 21:15, 24:12, 29:26

We've looked at God's passion for justice and the need for us to care for the poor, and practice of measuring things carefully. But what about when WE are treated poorly, or are oppressed? What should we do? Our human nature is to take matters into our own hands. We may want to fight back, directly or indirectly. Constant complaining, self-pity, even despair can become our friends. This is the easy path, BUT we are called to the narrow road.

Proverbs directs us clearly - "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you" (20:22). One of the key words in this verse is, "wait". How hard this is! We're not a patient people, are we? To wait for God to work is difficult but we must realize that as One who is All-Wise and Good, He has reasons for waiting. This is worth repeating – He has reasons for waiting! Of course, this waiting does not mean we passively sit around and do nothing.

As we wait, we pray. As we wait, we pray for strategies on any steps we can take (including loving people who have hurt us, or setting boundaries). As we wait, we cry out to God for deliverance. As we wait, we pray for promises. There is much we can do while we wait. And above all, we praise Him *in faith* for the justice He will bring. It will bring us great joy when we see His justice, wisdom and love lifted up high! And we'll be glad in the waiting.

God knows ALL! "If you say, 'behold, we did not know this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?" (24:12). He knows even the motive our hearts and so we can entrust all things to Him, even as we follow any specific steps He provides.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time writing down any injustices you've experienced or are currently experiencing. Imagine placing them before Jesus. Thank Him and praise Him for having a plan, and for His desire to bring justice.
2. Ask God to help you to grow in being patient. If you're facing a difficult situation right now, ask Him for: 1) any strategies He wants to give you 2) any promises He wants to provide.

DAY 15**The Power of Humility**

 **READ:** Proverbs 3:34, 11:2, 15:33, 16:18-19, 22:4

Humility has the power to bring God's blessing in our lives. Who wouldn't want this? When we think of words such as "blessing", "favour", "honour", our hearts jump and we think – "sign me up!" Humility is the direct pathway to these things, according to Proverbs. For example, Proverbs 15:33 proclaims, "The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor." *However*, our flesh, the world and the devil all promote the opposite – pride!

We must choose humility. Indeed, humility is far from automatic. It is an attitude, a heart posture. It's reminding ourselves that we are human, but God is God. It's also a choice to look for the good in others and to be aware of our own tendency towards evil. When we choose this thing called humility, we become wise. That's what Proverbs emphasizes and human history would echo this loud and clear.

Proverbs also says, "Towards the scorers he his scornful, but to the humble he gives favor" (3:34). Scorning and humility are placed in opposition to each other. When we are prideful we lower the value of others – this is scorning. A big part of this is disengaging from others is not submitting. One of the biggest signs of pride is never being able to submit to anyone or anything. Humility, on the other hand, relates to support and engagement.

God is just waiting to bless the humble! He loves to shower favour upon those who demonstrate the same character and life as His Son, Jesus. Will we choose this path?

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to search your heart for pride and/or humility. We need His help in this, as such things often are hidden deep in us. Do any necessary confession or praising. Ask Him to *cultivate* a humble heart within you.
2. Spend some time in journaling in reflection – do you treat anyone as having little or no value? Are there people that you are willingly submitting to? Humility will mean submission and treating people with great value.

DAY 16**The Call to Integrity**

 **READ:** Proverbs 10:9, 11:3, 19:1, 20:7, 28:18

The book of Proverbs calls us to a high standard and there are a few characteristics that stand tall. One such “stand-out” is summed up in the word, “integrity”. If we are people of integrity, we’ll be consistent, steady, unwavering. To be a person of integrity means what we SAY, what we DESIRE and what WE do in private and public will be the same. To have this kind of life brings GREAT pleasure to God!

Proverbs says that, “whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out” (10:9). We see here that there is peace in being consistent! When our ways get crooked, when we start wavering in our integrity, we invite worry into our lives. What will happen if I get found out? What will happen if that wrong word or action brings me negative consequences? Those who do not walk in integrity can suddenly fall. Proverbs makes this clear. People who consistently walk in integrity have no such worries. What an abundant life that is! Let’s commit to integrity then!

Another benefit of integrity is that, “the integrity of the upright guides them . . .” (11:3). Put simply, we will know what to do and when to do it! People who have integrity have incredible confidence. They often know *without confusion*, what to do. Those who struggle to be consistent will find that confusion reigns in their life. Who would want this? A further benefit of integrity is that future generations will be blessed by the integrity of their parents. It is incredibly rare to find a wayward teenager or young adult who has come from a home that is filled with integrity.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Praise God that He is consistent, that He never changes. Thank Him that He is a Rock to stand on. Maybe even picture a massive rock as you pray, with you standing on it. This is who He is and wants to be for us!
2. “To be a person of integrity means what we SAY, what we DESIRE and what WE do in private and public will be the same.” Spend some time meditating on this definition of integrity and ask God to examine your life. Receive His affirmation for where you’re doing well, but also correction for anywhere you are “crooked” in your ways, words or desires.

DAY 17**The Beauty Of Self-Control And Kindness**

 **READ:** Proverbs 11:16-17, 12:10, 14:29-30, 15:18, 16:32, 17:27, 25:28, 28:8

Our world often loves *stories* of kindness, but individuals rarely value it as a way to approach life. It’s kind of ironic – we can cry over a YouTube video showing unusual kindness, but disregard such an approach in relating to others – especially to those who we feel don’t deserve it. However, Proverbs causes us to consider the reality that kindness is our wisest choice.

Why is kindness wise? Because kindness has a way of returning to us. “A man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself” (11:17). Proverbs goes even as far to command us to treat animals with kindness. Kindness, we can say, bounces back to us. Even someone who desires to harm us can experience strong conviction when we refuse to return insult with insult. Many times people doubt this reality because they haven’t tried it!

Of course, kindness tends not to reign when we lose control over our emotions and thought life. In fact, the opposite happens. We start to destroy people. As Proverbs states, “a hot-tempered man sirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention” (15:18). Look at the choice we can make! Relational conflicts, even war, often hinge on the choice between kindness or losing control.

It is up to us to remain under control and to ask the Holy Spirit for help. We do have a measure of choice in this, as Proverbs speaks of the one, “who rules his spirit”. Let’s commit to lives that are beautiful and story-worthy, rather than the way of the world.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time asking God to give you words, thoughts, pictures and stories that demonstrate His kindness. Praise Him for His everlasting kindness!
2. Examine the different areas of your life – marriage, parenting, work, extended family, ministry, friendships. What do you demonstrate – kindness or a lack of self-control? Ask God to reveal truth to you. And ask Him to fill you with His Spirit, as the fruit of His Work includes kindness and self-control.

DAY 18**Reaping Will Happen**

 **READ:** Proverbs 25:28

As we continue our journey in the book of Proverbs, we do well to pause for a moment and consider an underlying truth that supports much of what it says. What is this truth? It’s simply that we truly reap what we sow. Indeed, there are certain circumstances that we cannot control. However, to a large extent, in the consequences or “reaping” of life, we can.

At times, people’s lives descend into chaos. Why? For many, it is a simple reaping. Or as Proverbs says, “a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls” (25:28). Of course, from our limited perspective, we may not always view things as being so neat and tidy. Sometimes lots of “sowing” happens, but seemingly no “reaping”. However, this is where we trust God. Our “business” is simply to continue to sow good things.

Sowing good things means making good choice after good choice, day-by-day, hour-by-hour. At times it may seem hard, but the FRUIT will be wonderful. This is the powerful message of much of what Proverbs says.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time reflecting on your past. Where have you reaped what you’ve sown? Thank God for teaching you many lessons over the years, for the discipline AND for the mercy.
2. Ask God to show you any “sowing” you’re doing that will result in a poor harvest. Commit to make any necessary changes. Also spend some time interceding for others who are “sowing” negative seeds. Cry out to God for them!

DAY 19**God Really Matters**

 **READ:** Proverbs 3:11-12, 3:25-26, 14:26-27, 16:3, 18:10

As we continue to look at wisdom principles, we must not forget that God really matters in all this. He is the author of wisdom. He is Truth! Or as Proverbs declares, “the fear of the LORD is a foundation of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death” (14:27). A proper fear of the Lord requires a regular consideration of our ways and our choices. Sometimes we need to turn off the noise in our lives and really spend some time thinking about the path we’re on. While distractions can sometimes drown out guilt, it doesn’t change the fact that we’ll stand before Him one day and give account.

Thankfully, He is our strength in carrying out His Word and Ways. He is a strong tower. He can be our confidence. God doesn’t just call us to the high standards of Proverbs. He’s also willing to empower us to live them, IF we walk humbly with Him. And when we stray? OUT OF LOVE, He will discipline us.

When we’re disciplined by God, we have a vital choice on how we’ll respond. As Proverbs suggests, “my son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (3:11-12). As we’re disciplined, we can thank Him for loving us enough to get us back on the wonderful path that He has for those who love Him. Praise God!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time praising God. Lift up His Name! He deserves it. All that is good and true and right is from Him. As You praise Him, commit to spending time each day to praising Him. Don’t let hesitation stop you from cultivating a habit of praise.
2. Do you have a fear of the Lord? Ask God to give you words, thoughts and pictures that would help you understand what this looks like.

DAY 20**God Really Matters, So We Must Trust Him**

 **READ:** Proverbs 3:5-6, 16:20, 29:26

In the previous devotional, we considered how central God is in everything. As a result, our call is to fear Him. But what is a proper fear of the Lord? Certainly it has to do with making godly choices. However, it is much bigger than this, really. There is something that supports a fear of the Lord. What is it? Trust. To *be able to fear God*, we must trust Him. We must BELIEVE that He is worthy to be followed and submitted to.

Probably the most famous verse in Proverbs is, “trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (3:5). We’re invited here to stop *leaning* on our own thinking and “figuring out of things”. This is trusting in self! We are to bring ALL of our hearts to God (this means every topic of concern, all our dreams, etc.) and say, “I trust you.” If we develop a simple, childlike faith, we’ll find immediate growth in our fear of the Lord.

While we’re always tempted to trust self, over God (which is so foolish, really!), we can also be aggressively wooed by the temptation to trust or seek to please others. Be warned – this gives God competition! Or as Proverbs so powerfully notes, “the fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe” (29:25). Our safety lies in trusting God, and fearing His Name. Trust in anything else will leave us feeling empty in the end, possibly frustrated, or even worse, spiritually bankrupt. This is one of the primary messages of Proverbs.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Read over Proverbs 3:5-6 again. Spend some time meditating and journaling on many of the words. In many ways, the Christian life could be summed up somewhat by these two verse.
2. Ask God where in your life right now is there an opportunity to trust Him at a deeper level than you ever have in the past. Ask Him to strengthen you for this journey.

DAY 21**Hard Work Honors God!**

READ: Proverbs 10:4-5, 12:24, 14:23, 16:26, 18:9, 22:29

Certainly there is an apparent randomness to life and wealth. This can be frustrating at times, but in the New Testament we’re encouraged to be content with the basic things of life (food, clothing, shelter). *However*, we must not swing to an extreme where we begin to think that hard work doesn’t matter! Generally, there are blessings that flow from being a person who “works unto God.”

As Proverbs says, “the hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24). We can find exceptions to this principle in our corrupt world (the book of Proverbs contains *general* principles). Nevertheless, many end up surprised by raises or promotions if they are a faithful employee or employer. And if things don’t work out this way? Well, we’ll be content if we work for God first, not prosperity.

Another advantage of working hard is that it serves as a shining light to our boss, to our co-workers and to any children we have. Not everyone will enjoy this light, but many will. In a sense, we’ll be making a positive contribution to our society and this too is important to God. Finally, our motivation for hard work can be the food we’re to eat. Brothers and sisters, we may be closer sometimes to poverty than we realize. Rather than panic at this potential, we simply should commit to hard work. Or as Proverbs states, “a worker’s appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on” (16:26).

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Are you a hard worker? Are you obedient to God’s Word on this? What about at your job? At home? In serving at church? Ask God to give you incredible strength to be one of the hardest workers around.
2. Spend some time thanking God for providing you with skills and abilities. Even if health has limited you, have you been able to eat? Do you have shelter and clothing? These are blessings from God! Let’s be grateful for these necessary things.

DAY 22**Be Careful What You Pursue**

READ: Proverbs 12:11, 13:4, 21:25

In our culture, we are bombarded with the relentless message that we need more stuff, better stuff, newer stuff. Since we also are encouraged to live in the moment, we can forget that there will be consequences for chasing after things that we don’t need. Many people have ruined their marriages, their health and their witness for God by being unwise about what they pursue.

Proverbs has a stark reminder of what happens when we chase after what the world promotes, “whoever works his land will have plenty of bread but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense” (12:11). How many times pastors have had to sit with people who are in complete despair and financial ruin because of their ungodly pursuits! Let’s exhibit good “sense” as followers of Christ and never allow ourselves to get to this point.

Proverbs has another related warning, declaring that, “the desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor” (21:25). This refusal to labor can relate to work, but also in our homes. It’s the “desire” of the sluggard that causes great problems. Many boys and girls are growing up without emotional bonds with their fathers and/or mothers due to the desire to chase after many things. They may be home, but they can be absent because of the desire for video games, excessive sports, incredible amounts of time on Facebook. These may seem like trivial matters, but Proverbs is suggesting that we must weigh carefully what we’re pursuing. We are wise if we take this warning seriously. Any changes we make now will be worth it in the present AND for eternity.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to show you a time where you: i) pursued something which ended up in an unwise decision AND, ii) when you decided to let go of a pursuit and was blessed as a result. Ask Him to alert you to things that you may be chasing which are unwise.
2. If you have children, ask God to give you an honest assessment on whether or not you are emotionally available to them. Then, ask THEM if they feel that you’re regularly distracted by something. If anything negative is revealed through this assessment, ask God to give you wisdom on how to make necessary adjustments.

DAY 23

Let’s Honor God With The Wealth We Have

 **READ:** Proverbs 3:9-10, 11:4, 11:24, 11:28, 15:16, 19:6, 19:17

We all have different amounts of wealth, as there is certainly a randomness to what we have. Rather than concern ourselves with the exact number, Proverbs invites us to honor God with whatever we have. This is a consistent command throughout God’s Word and might be best illustrated when Jesus affirms the widow who gave even out of her poverty. “Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the first fruits of your produce” (3:9), Proverbs challenges us.

How can we honor God with what we have? Practice generosity – this is the starting point! When we’re generous we imitate God. In doing so, we often gain the favour of others. Or as Proverbs declares, “many seek the favor of a generous man and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts” (19:6). Of course, when we gain influence because of our generosity, the purpose is to then use this influence for God’s glory as well. It’s all about God, but certainly we attain incredible fulfillment in drawing people to His kingdom through our actions.

We also honor God with our wealth by not trusting in what we have. There’s a warning in Proverbs about this, stating that, “whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf” (11:28). At times, God may bless us with certain advantages that we can be tempted to trust in. This is a very slippery slope to find ourselves on! We must realize that, “even little is good, when we combine it with a fear of God.” It’s not wealth that we need, but God. This is a simple truth, but life-transforming if we walk it out.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time in prayer and ask God – do you honor Him with your wealth? (this can include savings, your paychecks, and the material items you have) Also ask Him if adjustments need to be made.
2. Spend some time praising God for His provision in your life. Also praise Him that He is trustworthy. Confess any lack of trust that you have shown, which is often exhibited in worry and stress.

DAY 24

Be Careful With Whom You Make Financial Arrangements

 **READ:** Proverbs 6:1-3, 11:15, 17:18, 22:26-27

There are many ways that money can lead us into a trap. Today, we’ll look at two specific ways. First, out of greed or a desire to get ahead in life really fast (even with good motives – “to give more”), we can try to take shortcuts. One such shortcut is to enter into financial partnerships with people who have not chosen to live out consistent godliness. Proverbs warns of this and the amount of stress this can create in our lives is massive. Such unwise financial partnerships can involve entrusting ourselves to the wrong employer, starting a business with the wrong people, or seeking assistance from people without clearly agreeing on the cost of labor, etc. So often a good deal ends up being a bad deal!

A second trap is to continue to provide financial support or security for someone who has an unrepentant heart. Or as Proverbs says, “do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you” (22:26-27). Why would we get ourselves in such trouble? At times, we can commit to *false compassion*. We feel guilty about a person’s situation and don’t want to be accused of not caring. However, in reality, our false compassion is actually an act of selfishness and not out of love. It’s about how WE feel, not what’s best for the person.

There are other traps we can fall into with money. Our awareness of this should cause us to carefully consider our use of almost every dollar or things we have. Proverbs encourages us to be wise in this way.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Have you ever taken shortcuts in attempt to get ahead really fast? Have you ever made poor financial decisions that caused you stress? If yes, try to reflect on what went wrong at this time.
2. Ask God if there are people that you’re showing *false compassion* towards. Are there people that you are helping because you feel guilty? Are there people who need to experience the consequences of their choices? Since there’s no formula on what we should and shouldn’t do, make sure that you diligently pursue God for His heart.

DAY 25**How We Obtain Money Really Matters**

 **READ:** Proverbs 11:18, 16:8, 21:17

Since money creates many possibilities for us, Proverbs warns of using improper and ungodly means to obtain more money and stuff. It's another trap we can fall into, or in the words of Proverbs, "the wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward" (11:18). What do we want? Money that comes from wickedness, which is fleeting, or the SURE reward that God promises? We may cringe a bit at the use of the word, "wickedness", but to obtain money in improper ways is wickedness in God's eyes. This should humble us all.

The starting point in steering clear of this trap is to make sure that we have right motives about money. What is our goal for money? Proverbs warns that personal pleasure cannot be our goal, "whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man . . ." (21:17). When we seek personal pleasure through money and stuff we're saying loud and clear – "God is lacking." Greed, is idolatry, the Bible declares. We must ask God to forgive us if we've fallen into this, an easy thing to do in our culture.

Once our motive is right, much is taken care of. But we still must guard our hearts and watch for the temptations to gain money through deceit, stealing, or other forms of ungodliness. One day God will reward us *greatly* if we remain faithful to doing things His way.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Take some time to consider this question – is my hope in stuff and money, or in God? What do your emotions, your desires, your bank account say about this? What would those who are close to you say?
2. Have you ever stolen from a workplace, or not reported all of your income on your taxes? Have you ever not paid someone what they deserved for work they did? These are ungodly ways of obtaining money. Spend time in confession and repentance, asking God to show you if there are any steps to make things right.

DAY 26**Guarding Our Speech As A Part Of Wisdom**

 **READ:** Proverbs 4:24, 10:11, 13:3, 15:1

One of the wisest things we can do, according to Proverbs, is guard our speech. This is SO hard to do, isn't it? Yet we have to intentionally and diligently seek to move in this direction. We're clearly told, after all, to, "put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you" (4:24). Improper speech should be put away from us and devious talk should be far from us. These are strong words. It means we should double our efforts to change our speech if we're struggling in this area.

Of course, as in all things that are wise, guarding our speech benefits both others and us. We'll discuss this more in a later day, but it's important to note that, "the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life . . ." (10:11). Think of the imagery that's being used here! A fountain would serve as such a relief and blessing to a thirsty body! Our words can accomplish the same for a thirsty soul. What a wonderful invitation then to use our words in a way that brings life to others. An exciting goal to have! Something powerful to live for!

On the flipside, much chaos can flow from what people say, or as Proverbs notes, ". . . he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin" (13:3). Because of this, the next four devotionals will go into greater detail about our speech. The time spent is worth it, because of the power of the tongue to do great good or cause great harm.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time in prayer taking stock of where you feel you use your words in a godly manner, and where you need to grow. Thank God that He's willing to go on this journey with you. Praise Him for any growth that has taken place in the past.
2. Read James 3:1-12 and take notes on what it says about the tongue and our use of words.

DAY 27**Words That Destroy Others**

 **READ:** Proverbs 10:18-19, 11:12-13, 20:19

There are many ways to destroy others with our words. Maybe all of us have felt the sting of what others have said to us, whether serious or "in jest". As we consider our own words, let's not forget the pain of what we've received. Such pain can cause us to more seriously consider our ways.

According to Proverbs, it's foolish to slander. It's sinful. It's taking our words, and destroying that which God has created in His image. What is slander? Slander includes intentional efforts to degrade another person, or even careless words that serve to lower them in the eyes of others. Slander often happens when our words are too many, and because of this silence can be VERY good. As Proverbs declares, "when words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent" (10:19).

Another way is to destroy others is to belittle them. This is making a person smaller than they are. How dare we do this, as God made them! Proverbs reminds us that, "whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent" (11:12). Again, silence is valued! Slander and belittling are so vile that we need to walk away from such things, even being willing to *not* associate with those who engage in this behaviour. It's that important to God!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Obviously it's important that we seek to note where we slander or belittle others. Ask God to help you be honest on where you fail in this way. It also may be important to seek to apologize to anyone who has been hurt by your words or to others who have heard such words.
2. Ask God to show you any pain you're still carrying from the words of others. Are there things that your parents, in-laws, teachers, spouse, friends or "enemies" have said that have caused pain? Ask God to speak to this pain. Also forgive these people in prayer.

DAY 28**Words That Lift Up Others**

 **READ:** Proverbs 10:31, 12:18, 16:24, 25:11-12

Just as words can be used to destroy, they can be used to lift others up! Oh what a joy this is as a ministry! This is intentional, not something we simply hope will happen once in a while. Our motivation to be consistent with this is twofold. First, there's the unconditional love of God serving as a fuel! He rejoices over us with singing and so why wouldn't we bless others with specific words that uplift?

Second, as God's love motivates us, so too does our knowledge of what this can do for others. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (25:11), Proverbs declares. Apples of gold in a setting of silver? That would've cost a fortune back then AND today. Proverbs is saying that a fitly spoken word is priceless. This is motivating!

At times our words need to be directed to a hurting soul. As people take the brunt of the difficulties of life, we can provide words that make a massive difference. We must be specific, *as lead by the Spirit*. Sometimes simple words such as, "I'm praying for you" mean much, but at other times, we need to ask God for something that's way more detailed. Let's remember that, ". . . the tongue of the wise brings healing . . ." (12:18). Even where people are hurting because of their own sin or temptations, we must be gracious. We too can identify with their weaknesses, if we're humble.

Finally, lifting up others can include passing on wisdom, or as Proverbs affirms, "the mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom . . ." (10:31). Of course, our wisdom should be well-timed, and given at a point where it will be received. Nor should we ever assume that we're meant to pass on ALL our wisdom!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Think of those times when the words of others have built you up. Reflect on how they made you feel. Praise God for these people, whether family, friends or strangers.
2. Ask God to show you specific people that you could lift up with your words in the near future. Ask God to show you any specific words, thoughts, pictures or verses that you can use.

DAY 29**Honesty Must Reign**

 **READ:** Proverbs 6:16-17, 12:19, 12:22, 17:20, 21:6

The book of Proverbs speaks most harshly about lying, or deception. Lying is actually something God hates, or in the words of Proverbs, "lying lips are an abomination to the LORD . . ." (12:22). This is probably convicting to all of us. As followers of Christ, we must commit to truthfulness in every matter. Every human being has fallen into lying and we must face the challenge of rising up to God's standard. Perhaps it's useful for us to ask - why do we lie?

Sometimes *we think* we can gain advantages by lying. Maybe we can improve what people think of us, or pry open a door where others will want to be our friends, or give us material items. But no advantage is gained long-term! Instead, "truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (12:19). It's only for a moment that we gain any advantage! Truthfulness has great value long-term and it's imitating the Truth Himself!

Truthfulness includes the avoidance of exaggeration. For sure, in a joking manner, where people know that we're not serious, exaggeration has its place - "I feel like I could eat a cow right now!" However, if exaggeration is used to impress or deceive, we have fallen into sin. Thankfully God is SO good at revealing the motives of our hearts! In assessing what lying is we can ask - what is going on in our hearts? Are we trying to manipulate a person's response?

Truthfulness also involves following through on our promises, or not making promises that we have no intention of keeping. As servants of the ultimate Promise Keeper, we're called to carefully consider what we commit to AND pay the price of following through.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Are you a truthful person and do you keep your promises? Not only is our own name on the line, but also God's reputation. Spend some time confessing any dishonesty and make a commitment to truthfulness, no matter how hard it'll be.
2. Spend some time interceding for an increase in truthfulness in Canada, in all spheres of society. Also pray that more and more people would come to know Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

DAY 30**Cautiousness In Speech**

 **READ:** Proverbs 16:23, 18:2, 25:15

In the last number of devotionals, we've been looking at a variety of aspects of speech. In this final one on the topic, an overarching key will be highlighted. We should be *regularly* weighing what we say. Throughout Proverbs, cautiousness is emphasized. Proverbs 16:23 says, "the heart of the wise makes his speech judicious . . ." (16:23). To be "judicious" means to be careful or thoughtful. We should take time to think before we speak. Ever heard that before? There's a reason it's a popular saying because it's at the core of godly speech.

Our goal must not be to simply state what we think! "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion" (18:2). Oh, the wisdom of listening. Some have transformed their speech by having seasons where they "fast" from words. Some spouses have turned around their communication by deciding to ask what their significant other thinks, rather than simply pouring out their own thoughts.

Even where we want or need to persuade others, careful speech is the way to go! Or as Proverbs says, "with patience a ruler may be persuaded . . ." (25:15). Cautiousness in speech is a habit to be developed, but we can be encouraged that the goal is possible. Many have done it, with Christ's help!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Take some time to think about your speech - are your words too little or too many? Ask God to show you if you need to make any specific adjustments, in any specific setting.
2. Is there someone that you need to influence right now, or get a message across to? This can be a good thing, but HOW we do it really matters. Ask God to give you wisdom on the HOW. What words? When? What should you NOT say? (this can be very wise to figure out ahead of time)

DAY 31**The Joy Of Godly Children**

 **READ:** Proverbs 13:1, 13:24, 15:20, 19:18, 22:6, 29:15

The Bible is clear that children are gift from God. So many blessings flow from having children. Some of the blessings include: they are cute(!), they have an innocence that can be a shining example of the type of faith we're to have as followers of Christ, they can bring much joy through their enthusiasm, they allow us to multiply ourselves in our goal to further God's Kingdom, they can help us when we get older (seriously!), they can show us an example of Christ's love when we make mistakes (very forgiving when they're young), they can help us become more like Jesus through the need for personal growth and they cause us to rely on Christ's strength and wisdom.

However, this gift and its blessings are harder to receive with joy if our children end up foolish. Or as Proverbs notes, "a wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother" (15:20). The pain that is felt when children go astray is very wide and deep. While they do have free will, Proverbs also emphasizes that HOW we parent can really impact how they develop and mature. When we invest the time as parents (and as churches) to raise godly children, we benefit many times over.

"Train up a child in the way he should go . . .", Proverbs 22:6 challenges. Training has many elements. It involves *being intentional*, hard work, prayer, having a plan and regularly re-evaluating the plan. Effective training is done through both teaching AND modelling. Finally, such training should include discipline. "Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death" (19:18). All of this can seem overwhelming, but OUR Father can lead us as we seek to shepherd our children. Praise His Name, as He grants us such precious gifts!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Reflect on the qualities of young children. What is it about young children that God wants us to imitate? Ask God to develop these qualities in you.
2. If you have children, ask God to show you how you can grow as a parent (even if your children are adults already). Ask Him to grant you both the wisdom and grace for this huge responsibility. Thank Him for how being a parent has shaped you. If you don't have children, pray for the parents that you know – that God may give them everything they need. Also ask God – is there any way that I can encourage specific parents or children?

DAY 32**The Joy Of A Godly Spouse**

 **READ:** Proverbs 12:4, 18:22, 31:10-11, 31:30

Marriage is an incredible blessing from God! There's a consistent testimony throughout God's Word that, "he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD" (18:22). One of the most significant blessings that come from the marriage relationship is the joy of partnership, of a shared life. It's good for those who are married to ask – is this my experience of marriage? Is it truly something I thank God for?

Of course, a couple of key things will *dramatically* impact whether or not we experience the potential of marriage. First, the choice we make in choosing a spouse can greatly

impact our enjoyment. Many have discovered this reality. If we chase or chased after only physical attraction or lust, or popularity or matched interests, difficulties can result later on. Proverbs is clear - a godly spouse is ultimately what brings happiness within marriage. Or as Proverbs puts it, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (31:30). Now some who are reading this may say – "well, it's too late now." To this, Proverbs would say "no" and that takes us to a second key.

The second key is that living out the wisdom of the book of Proverbs, is supported by the rest of the Word, prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. Fulfilling the potential of what God intended for marriage is tied to our obedience to wisdom. Even a difficult marriage, or a difficult partner, can be navigated by OUR choice to pursue righteousness. There's always hope for more in our marriage, if only we'll seek to live by God's prescription for relationships.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. If married, think back to the pursuit of your spouse and the decision to get married. What was the decision to marry based on? If needed, confess where you walked this path independent of the Lord. If, on the other hand, if you walked with God in that time, thank Him for what He's graciously done. Also spend some time thanking God for your spouse. If single, ask God to give you His heart for marriage and YOUR specific situation.
2. Reflect on this question, if married, – are you living according to God's prescription for marriage? Do you have a commitment of regular time in His Word, so that He can speak to you clearly?

DAY 33**A Blessed Marriage Requires Work**

 **READ:** Proverbs 5:15-20, 21:9, 31:12, 31:25, 31:28

In the previous devotional, we noted that reaching the potential for marriage that God intended involves following His prescription for marriage. It's important at this point to note *what hard work this is!* However, it's hard work that's MORE than worth it. Do we believe this? Whether or not we actually can affirm this truth will greatly impact whether we'll persevere through the ups and downs that come with any close relationship.

What kind of hard work does Proverbs emphasize? First, this work includes staying pure and being attentive to each other sexually. Purity in marriage is far more than not having sexual relationships with others. It includes not giving our hearts or eyes over to another *in any way*. You see, there's the world's standard, the standard of our flesh and THEN there's God standard. God's standard includes serving our spouses sexually. It's not just what to avoid, but also what TO DO!

Second, we're called to do the hard work of working against conflict. Proverbs says, "it is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife" (21:9). Some men love quoting this, but in all seriousness, God is asking men and women to eliminate behaviours that cause unnecessary conflict. This does not mean suppressing our feelings, but with God's help, expressing them in a godly, gentle and generous spirit.

Third, not only should we seek to eliminate unnecessary conflict, we should also desire to be *good* to each other! The women in Proverbs 31 is commended with these words, "she does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life" (31:12). This is the CALL that God has for both husband and wife. Are both of them intentionally taking steps to DO good to

their spouse? This includes praising each other, before others and to one another. We must speak highly of our spouses!

Finally, the hard work of marriage includes using the strength of our marriages to bless others. Put another way, a blessed marriage will also bless others. Again, we look to the woman of Proverbs 31 as an example, “she opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy” (31:20).

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. If married, ask God to affirm where YOU have worked hard to contribute to your marriage. Look at the various things noted in this devotional as a guide. Then ask Him, where have you been lazy or shown a lack of diligence? Ask Him for some immediate steps to correct this.
2. If single, pray that God would work in your life so that if He grants you the gift of marriage, you'll be prepared. Also spend some time lifting up in prayer those who are married, that God may give them the strength to obey His Word.

DAY 34

Friendship Can Help Or Hinder

 **READ:** Proverbs 13:20, 17:17, 18:24 27:6, 27:17

Ask any pastor of young people what one of the most important factors in spiritual growth is and you'll find that they emphasize friendship. Of course, the significance of friendship doesn't end at a certain age and Proverbs teaches that our friendships can play a huge role in who we become. Put simply, friendships can help OR hinder. What is some specific advice that Proverbs offers?

First, who we spend time with can greatly impact who we become. Or in the words of Proverbs, “whoever walks with the wise becomes wise but the companion of fools suffer harm” (13:20). When we spend time with those who are mature or maturing, we gain much. On the other hand, when we invest lots of time with the foolish we'll struggle to stay strong. Instead, we place ourselves in the position of ALWAYS having to fight against the tide. Very few can do this successfully.

Second, our friendship time should involve support and spurring on of each other. These are the valuable friendships! We do need those who will stick by us when troubles come. And who will speak truth into our lives when lukewarmness is setting in, or compromise? Listen to Proverbs - “faithful are the wounds of a friend . . .” (27:6) And truly, “one man sharpens another.”

Finally, Proverbs encourages us against having TOO many friends. When we spread ourselves too thin, the impact of the best ones can be diluted. Certainly, “a man of many companions may come to ruin . . .” (18:24). It is good to *regularly* evaluate our friendships, for quantity and quality.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time reflecting on how specific friendships have both helped and hindered your spiritual growth. Praise God for the positive impact you've received and ask Him to forgive you for letting others negatively influence you.

2. Take stock of your current group of friends. How is the quality? What about the quantity? If you're struggling to find friends, ask God where He wants you to step out in finding friends. Perhaps it'll involve getting involved more in serving, or cell groups, OR being more open and friendly in the groups you're in right now. It's vital that we don't chase after friends, or demand friendship, but seek to be friends and leave the rest up to God.

DAY 35

Love Is Found

 **READ:** Proverbs 3:3, 8:17, 10:12, 16:6, 17:9, 25:21-22

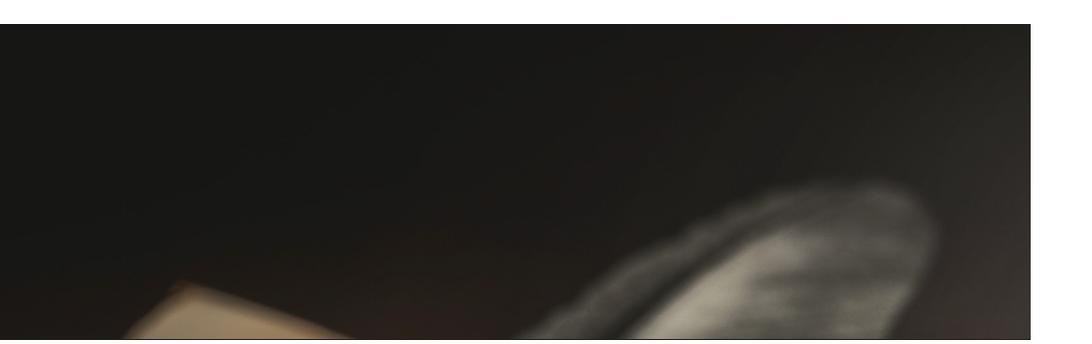
The Bible is a book of love. God's love for us is declared almost chapter-by-chapter. Our call to love Him in response is highlighted. Then there's our duty to love others extravagantly. Finally, we are told to avoid a “love of the world”, those things that are counter to the spirit of Christ.

Proverbs does not speak much of love, but *it is in there*. And we can say with complete confidence that love is behind much that is shared because love is wise! In fact, early in the book we're told to, “let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart” (3:3). Love is to be a constant companion in our life. How much we would gain if we kept God's love for us and our call to love others before us? The love we're spurred on to in Proverbs is to extend wide and deep, even to our enemies.

We're also told in Proverbs to actually *love* wisdom. To love wisdom *is* to love God. This is a profound truth if we'll meditate on it! Wisdom cries out in the book of Proverbs, “I love those who love me and those who seek me will find me” (8:17). Doesn't this sound like God? Really, it's God saying to *us* – be wise!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time thanking God for the book of Proverbs. Praise Him for not leaving us without a testimony of who He is, and His Ways. Praise Him for leading you throughout this book.
2. Spend some time in God's presence, asking to reveal His love to you in a deeper way, whether through thoughts, words, pictures, verses or even feelings. Ask Him to reveal His heart for others as well. Pray for the power to love!



The Book of Proverbs

As followers of Jesus our lives are to display a quality called, “wisdom”. However, the “wisdom” that the book of Proverbs describes is much different than what our world would call knowledge or intellect. Instead, it revolves around a relationship with and proper fear of the Lord. Put another way, a right relationship with wisdom is the same as right relationship with God. From the overflow of this relationship we’ll then demonstrate lives that are full of choices and behaviours that allow us to shine in a wicked world. This is the goal as we read the book of Proverbs!

Proverbs 1:7 (NIV)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”



SOUTHLAND CHURCH
190 PTH 52W Steinbach MB R5G 1M2
204.326.9020 | info@mysouthland.com
Get Foundations delivered to your e-mail daily!
Subscribe at www.mysouthland.com