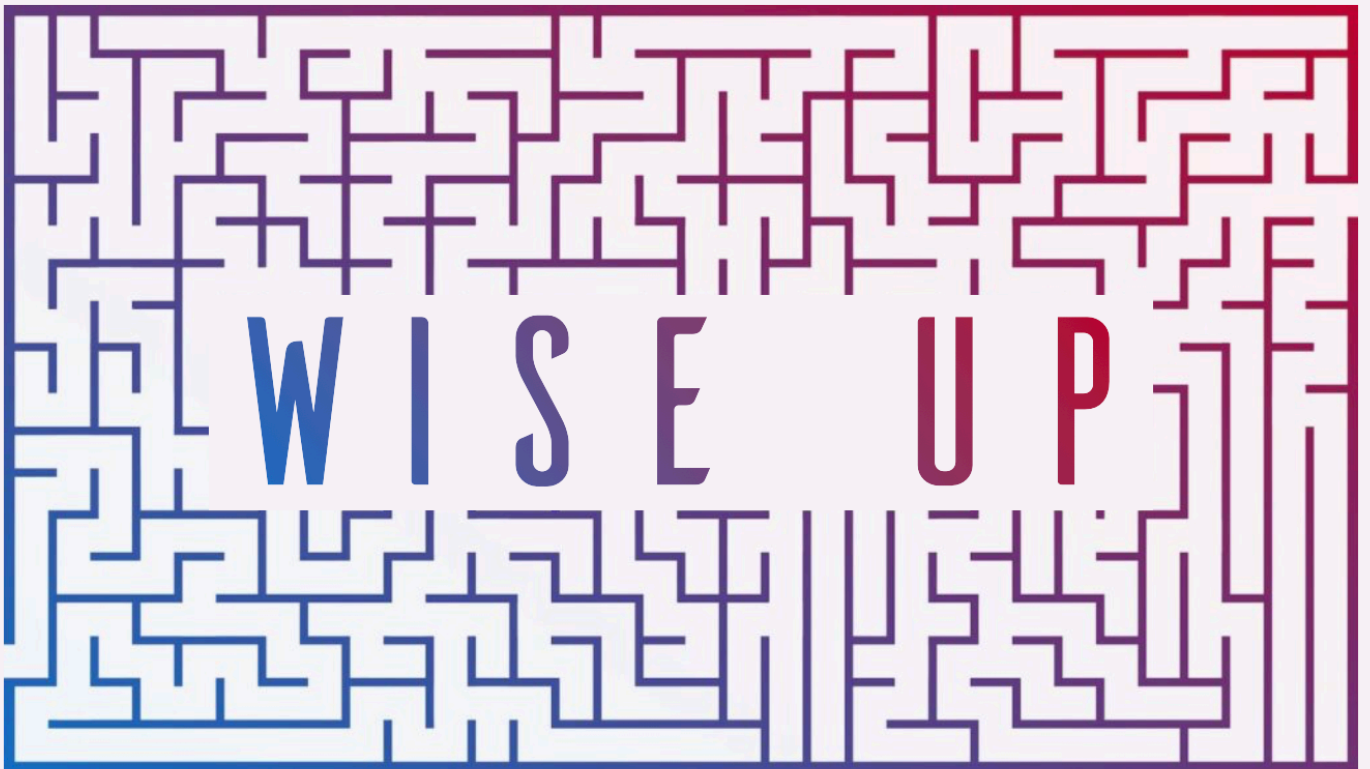


SKILL FOR LIVING A GODLY LIFE



FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

DAILY
DEVOTIONS

GROWING & GOING

/AS FAMILY
/AS FOLLOWERS
/IN PRAYER

/WITH THE
/GOOD NEWS
/OF JESUS

W I S E U P

As we study the book of Proverbs, our Sunday teaching will focus on chapters 1-9 and 30-31 as they describe and explore wisdom...or skill for godly living. As well as Sunday sermons we want to provide you with further resources **so that we can continue to GROW together as the family of God, as followers of Jesus, and in prayer and GO with the good news of Jesus to the world around us.**

R E A D

Each week there are five daily readings to do on your own or with others. These will explore some of the individual proverbs that make up chapters 10-28. So read the TEXT, work through the THOUGHT and then put the THEREFORE into action.

R E M E M B E R

Each week there is a memory verse so that we can store up God's word in our heart (Psalm 119:11)

R E J O I C E

Each week there is a song that helps us rejoice in a truth about God, who he is and what he has done.

WEEK 1

SERMON / PROVERBS 1:1-7

R E M E M B E R

THE FEAR OF THE LORD
IS THE
BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE,
BUT FOOLS
DESPISE
WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION.

PROVERBS 1:7

R E J O I C E

Here's our song for the week

DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11
ANDREW PETERSON

WEEK 1 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 10:1

A wise son brings joy to his father,
but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.

Thought

The first of the Proverbs starts with the key contrast in the whole book...the one who is wise and the one who is foolish.

And it's a reminder that our choices, wise or foolish, don't just impact us, but impact those around us, and they don't simply impact those around us consequentially, but emotionally.

So even though my mum or dad might not benefit or suffer directly from a wise or foolish decision I make, they will benefit or suffer emotionally....joy or grief.

So it speaks to the responsibility we have to those around us, not tomato decisions to keep others happy, that's foolish, but to make wise decisions that bring joy into the hearts of those who love us and not the grief of ruptured relationships because of being a fool.

The proverb I guess, also speaks to the responsibility of parents to try and teach wisdom to their children so they might make wise choices and not foolish ones...which means prayerfully helping them come to and grow in the fear of the Lord.

Therefore

Ultimately it's God our Father who will teach us wisdom through his Son and Spirit, so that we might delight in our lives. Ask him to help you choose wisely this week, so that he delights in your walk, and those around you find joy and not grief.

WEEK 1 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 10:6

The wise in heart accept commands,
but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

Thought

Some of you, maybe many of you will step on a plane over the summer...up the steps, baggage stowed, seat reclined, phone switched off...ready to jet off to somewhere sunnier and warmer. But before the plane takes off, there is the safety announcement...

"In the event of an emergency, take hold of the oxygen mask, stop screaming, and place it over your head." I genuinely heard that one time on a plane!

And everyone on the plane will be one of the two people in today's proverb...my guess is that 99% of people will be "chattering fools"...no offence to anyone! They will talk through the safety briefing and so if anything was to happen, they might be in trouble..

But the wise in heart accepts commands...this has the broader understanding of instruction, guidance, direction....like the safety briefing.

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, then the wise in heart will listen to the Lord and his commands, instruction, guidance and direction. But the chattering fool, thinks that they know best, and so they drown out the commands of the Lord with their own opinions...and ultimately will come to ruin, because they will not and have not listened to the Lord who "founded the world by his wisdom" (Jeremiah 10:12) and who saves the world through the "foolishness" of the Christ crucified, "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Therefore

So choose wisdom today and listen to the command and instruction of the Lord, so that you might follow him and not come to ruin.

WEEK 1 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 10:7

The memory of the righteous is a blessing,
but the name of the wicked will rot.

Thought

There's a painful and punchy comedy skit where a time capsule from the 1970/80s is being opened, but every item that is brought out has to be quickly pushed to the side, because it is connected to a celebrity whose past has been revealed to be marred with appalling acts, and so sparks horror and pain when remembered.

Jesus said in Luke 8, For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. And whilst it is hugely painful to think of what these people got away with, the eventual revealing and rotting of their name, that brings us a sense of revulsion when they come to mind, points forward to the fact that everything is revealed before God and he is a God of justice who brings retribution to bear on evil.

It's an extreme example but our aim in life should instead be to live a life that brings blessing when it is remembered. That blessing should be both for the good that was done in our lives and the good that has been patterned by our lives. And so blessing flows both from what people remember of us and what people replicate about us... our righteous living...life where we are in right relationship with others, loving and honouring them, and in right relationship with God...skilled in godly living.

Therefore

Wise living, or righteous living leaves a legacy of blessing, people who have been blessed, and a pattern to follow. While wicked living brings pain and curse. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you choose wisdom over wickedness in every decision you make day to day.

WEEK 1 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 10:11

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Thought

There's lots of really interesting contrasts in the social media world... flick through it and there's lots of people concerned about what you put in your mouth...whether it's high protein for getting ripped, or low calorie for losing weight, or clean or vegan or paleo or whatever...lots of influencers care about what goes in your mouth. The irony is that there seems to be an utter vacuum for concern for what comes out of your mouth. Comments sections are the wild west, where anything goes and there's no sheriff to keep the rule of law.

Yet this Proverb has lots to say to us in a social media world. Because the mouth (and by mouth the writer is speaking about what comes out of it...our words) has the ability to bring life or do violence.

John Piper, in a sermon from the 90s says that our words can feed and heal and protect...or they can do the opposite...and he asks these challenging questions:

"Does your mouth usually feed people with the truth and substance of what you say, or does it starve people through silence or empty speech? Does your mouth usually heal people with words of grace and love and kindness, or does it wound people with insensitive, harsh, critical, unhelpful words? And does your mouth usually deliver and protect people with advocacy and partnership, or does it join the attack?"

If we're in right relationship with God and with people, then our desire will be to feed and heal and protect with our words and our ways, and build people up, rather than tear them down

Therefore

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you reflect on what comes out of your mouth. Is violence concealed under sharp, insensitive and selfish words...or is there a vitality that flows, a fountain of life that washes over those who hear you? And as you reflect, repent of the violence done by your words and request the Holy Spirit to work righteousness in you that flows from your mouth.

WEEK 1 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 10:27

The fear of the Lord prolongs life,
but the years of the wicked will be short.

Thought

I've mentioned him before, but Bryan Johnston, a tech entrepreneur is a fascinating character. Here's a quote from a newspaper article about him...

"He rises at 4.30am, eats all his meals before 11am, and goes to bed - alone - at 8.30pm, without exception. In the intervening hours, he ingests more than 100 pills, bathes his body in LED light, and sits on a high-intensity electromagnetic device that he believes will strengthen his pelvic floor."

Someone described his daily routine as "exhaustive and exhausting!" and so the question is "Why?" This is all part of his Project Blueprint where he is looking to slow down his ageing to the point that he doesn't die.

I wonder what he would make of Proverbs 10:27...The fear of the Lord prolongs life!

Of course, our experience is this life will give us plenty of examples where this hasn't been the case...stories of the loss of brothers and sisters in Christ, friends, family. And so this Proverb is a good example of how Proverbs are to be read in this life...as general principles and not as guaranteed promises.

There is a design to the universe, God's design, and a good way of living in it, God's design again...making good and healthy choices about our bodies and activities, pursuing harmonious relationships, practicing contentment and thankfulness, depending on the Lord in prayer. And so living this way, is conducive to longer life.

But the universe is also infected with and scarred by sin, and so we have to be aware that sin and suffering can come crashing in to our worlds and cut life short.

But in the plans and purposes of God and in the power of the resurrection, the life of the one who fears the Lord, the one who is in right relationship with him through Jesus, even though it may be cut short, will never end. It will be prolonged through resurrection into an eternal life where they will never die.

Jesus spoke to Martha in John 11, as she grieved for the life of her brother cut short by illness...“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Therefore

The general principle of the Proverb is true, so fear the Lord, live according to his design. And make the most of the days he gives you to serve him. But whether your life is long, or it is cut short, the guaranteed promise of Jesus is true. Believe this!

WEEK 2

SERMON / PROVERBS 1:8-19

REMEMBER

HEAR, MY SON,
YOUR FATHER'S INSTRUCTION,
AND FORSAKE NOT
YOUR MOTHER'S TEACHING,
FOR THEY ARE
A GRACEFUL GARLAND
FOR YOUR HEAD
AND PENDANTS
FOR YOUR NECK.

PROVERBS 1:8-9

REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

PROVERBS 1:10 / **ADAM ANGLIN**

DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 2 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 11:1

The Lord detests dishonest scales,
but accurate weights find favour with him.

Thought

We're all used to Scan and Shop or the self service bit of Tesco (over supermarket chains are available). It's dead handy...until you get picked for the self service check and then find you've accidentally (and yes it was an accident!) missed one thing and then the whole trolley has to be scanned again.

But imagine that the scales at the checkout...where you weigh your bananas and onions...was loaded. Imagine Tesco had programmed it in order to register a higher weight than was actually sitting on your scales...so you ended up paying more for your bananas and onions than when you're supposed to.

You'd detest it...and you'd find another shop where the weights found favour with you.

Dishonest scales rob from others and make them poorer while you get richer, and they also reveal a heart that is selfish, concerned for yourself and willing to sacrifice others in order to get what you want.

We might not be greengrocers but we have opportunities to cheat others everyday by taking more than we should...money, time, heart...treating others unfairly so that they lose out and we gain.

Whereas the wise way of living, the godly way of living is one of fairness and honesty. And to do otherwise, is to not listen to the instruction, and to forsake the teaching of God who tells us (Micah 6:8

The Lord has told you what is good.
He has told you what he wants from you:

Do what is right to other people.

Love being kind to others.

And live humbly, trusting your God.

Therefore

First off, give thanks to Jesus that he endured human injustice and dishonesty at the cross and turned it on its head so that it saved us from the justice of God for our dishonesty and unjust living. And then ask the Holy Spirit to see areas of life where the scales are dishonest...including not weighing things properly at Tesco so you save a bit of money!...and confess and repent...and then ask for more wisdom so you can skilfully live a godly life of justice and doing what is right

WEEK 2 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 11:4

Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath,
but righteousness delivers from death.

Thought

If you've money, you can really have anything you want!

Want a hippopotamus sofa (I think that's made of hippo hide rather than shaped like one)...just £75000...or how about a dinosaur skull...you can get a T-rex one for a cool quarter of a million...or maybe a diamond encrusted pair of toenail clippers...only one million quid!

If you've money you can really go anywhere you want!

Jump on plane...or better buy a plane. Run into visa issues, a little bribe might help resolve it.

We can read this through the lens of life outside the garden and so while there is lots that wealth can do in this life, it has no power to stop disaster and suffering and death. And read through the lens of the good news of Jesus, it can't be used to buy us out of the consequences of our sin ultimately.

Righteousness however, being in right relationship with God through Jesus, the only one who could pay the price of our sin, not with money but with his life, delivers us from death...not that we avoid death, but it takes us through death and into eternal life.

So certainly, go for the hippo sofa if you want, so you can sit and admire your T-Rex skull hanging from the ceiling while you clip your nails, but remember, the one thing you need is priceless...and it has already been bought for you by Jesus

Therefore

Be wise about money. Don't let it convince you that is more powerful than it is. But rather be in right relationship who is more powerful than we can imagine.

WEEK 2 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 11:17

Those who are kind benefit themselves,
but the cruel bring ruin on themselves.

Thought

Solomon, for all his wisdom, ended up essentially enslaving many of his own people and so the people asked Rehoboam (1 Kings 12), his son, after Solomon's death,

"Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."

Rehoboam doesn't answer immediately but asks the elders, the wise leaders, "How would you advise me to answer these people?"

Maybe these elders remembered this Proverb...Those who are kind benefit themselves...as they answered...

"If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favourable answer, they will always be your servants."

But Rehoboam did not listen to the wisdom of the elders. Instead he listened to the foolishness of his peer group, and so he said to the people...

"My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."

And you'll see if you read the rest of his story, Rehoboam faces rebellion and the nation splits in two, and he found that his father's words were true and wise...the cruel bring ruin on themselves.

None of us are kings, but we all have the choice to be kind or be cruel. The wise way to live is to be kind. We don't be kind in order to benefit, but as we live kind lives, we will benefit. As one commentator

said, "In watering others with our mercy, our own souls will become a watered garden."

Therefore

There's a quote that appears from time to time that goes like this... "In a world where you can be anything be kind." It comes across like a bit of a cliché, but it echoes biblical truth. We can be anything, and so we have to make the choice as to what we will be...and that choice will be wise or foolish. But God calls us to the path of wisdom, and says...

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

WEEK 2 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 12:1

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
but whoever hates correction is stupid.

Thought

When I was in primary school I got selected for the County Down Select Primary School team...round of applause for me! I'll not tell you about my goal line clearance (oops, just have) or the sheer terror of the county competition being a residential! After that, my dad took me to a tailing session with one of the local football teams...but the session had been cancelled that night and he couldn't convince me to go back. But I still spent my early teen years playing football in the garden convinced that if a football scout drove past I'd get noticed!

If I'd actually gone to the football training, I would have built up knowledge and skill and got better, but I missed that opportunity for discipline and correction. For me it was nerves and the fear of something new, but looking back, it was stupid to miss out on that opportunity.

The Proverb isn't about anxious 11 year old Dave, but it is about whether 46 year old Dave will wisely embrace the things that shape him in good ways, even if they are difficult, or stupidity have animosity towards the things that look to correct him.

It's not saying discipline and correction are pleasant, they often are far from it, but it is about wisely looking in faith behind the discipline and correction and seeing the gracious and loving hand of our Father in heaven who wants us grow more and more in wisdom and stature like Jesus into the fullness of life he promises us, and in favour with God and man.

Therefore

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a desire for more wisdom, and a humility to embrace and accept discipline and correction in place of prideful stupidity that hates it.

WEEK 2 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 12:15

The way of fools seems right to them,
but the wise listen to advice.

Thought

This little Proverb looks ahead to tomorrow's sermon a bit and the fools who "hate knowledge" (Proverbs 1:22) and ignore the call of wisdom.

You've seen it I'm sure in those comedy moments either in Epic Fail videos or You've Been Framed videos depending on what generation you are.

They are the people who jump into the river despite the signs warning of crocodiles. They don't look for or listen to anyone else's advice with this crazy mix of obliviousness, arrogance and defiance that ultimately ends in disaster. The way that seems right to them will go wrong eventually.

And so Proverbs warns us about being a fool and encourages us to be wise and listen to advice. Do you see that? Part of being wise is knowing you don't know it all.

Which is a good encouragement to pick up your bible and come to church, and hear the God who "by wisdom...laid the earth's foundations" and who "by understanding...set the heavens in place" offer words of loving life and advice to help us follow Jesus into the fullness of life he offers us.

Therefore

So we'll see you at church.

WEEK 3

SERMON / PROVERBS 1:20-33

REMEMBER

FOR THE WAYWARDNESS
OF THE SIMPLE
WILL KILL THEM,
AND THE COMPLACENCY
OF FOOLS
WILL DESTROY THEM;
BUT WHOEVER LISTENS TO ME
WILL LIVE IN SAFETY
AND BE AT EASE,
WITHOUT FEAR OF HARM.

PROVERBS 1:32-33

REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

LADY WISDOM / **BROTHER ISAIAH**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 3 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 13:3

Those who guard their lips preserve their lives,
but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.

Thought

.Gary Lineker has been in the news today over his role as a BBC employee and his personal opinions expressed on social media. You can argue about the rights and wrongs of BBC policy on the impartiality of it's presenters...but it is what it is, and so Gary's "rash" speaking in relation to that policy, ie publicly expressing political opinions, has led to the ruin of his BBC career. Now none of us are Match of the Day presenters on multi million pound contracts, but today's proverb is relevant to us as well.

Proverbs has lots to say about our words and their effect on others , but this proverb reminds us that the wise use of our words is important and beneficial to us. Guarding our lips, that is choosing what to say and what not to say, when to speak and when not to speak, helps us win favour with others, and helps us avoid losing friends. So how do we guard our lips and so avoid speaking rashly?

We realise how dangerous our mouth is...

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire...James 3:5-6

We recognise how powerful our words are...

The tongue has the power of life and death...Proverbs 18:21

And we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to help us be "quick to listen, slow to speak" (James 1:19) and when we do speak, cause our conversations to "be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6)

Therefore

Reflect on times when speaking rashly has caused harm to yourself.
Ask the Holy Spirit to help you guard your lips today.

WEEK 3 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 13:10

Where there is strife, there is pride,
but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

Thought

How good are you at taking advice? Or maybe a better question is this...how good are you at listening to advice. Or maybe an even better question is this...how good are you at asking for advice?

You might have met, or at times you might be the person who thinks that know best and so plough ahead with an idea or a plan. If someone isn't on the bus with you, then you'll just drive over them, screaming out the window at them on the way.

Pride causes us to plough on, without asking for, listening to or taking up the advice of others...which is unwise, because other people often can contribute helpfully with critique or suggestions, but also because it causes strife amongst a family, a group of friends, a business, a church.

Wisdom is found in those who take advice...and therefore have listened to advice...and therefore have asked for advice.

Part of the skill of godly living, is humbly realising that there are others around you, who love you and want the best for you, who might have greater, knowledge, understanding, experience and insight, and then humbly taking their advice, for your good, and the good of those around you.

Therefore

In what areas of your life might strife be caused by your pride. Ask the Holy Spirit to grow humility in you so that you can take advice from him, either through the scriptures or a fellow follower of Jesus.

WEEK 3 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 13:20

Walk with the wise and become wise,
for a companion of fools suffers harm.

Thought

This week the BBC reported that Kenton Cool (a great name!!!) had broken the record for the most climbs up Mount Everest as he made his 19th summit. Yep, he's climbed Everest nineteen time! Somedays I find it exhausting climbing the stairs to go to bed!

Kenton Cool, I'm sure, didn't start off climbing mountains all by himself. Rather he would have gone with more experienced climbers...wiser climbers...and would have learned climbing wisdom from them. In fact, there's a qualification to his record...it's the record for the most climbs up Mount Everest by a non-Sherpa. Alongside him had Nepali sherpa Dorji Gyalen who was on his 23rd ascent... more wisdom for Mr Cool.

Maybe some of us might fancy doing Donard or Binion during the summer, but if we went up following the example of someone wearing flip flops and a vest top, with no water, layers or food, we might suffer harm.

The proverb translates this into the journey of life...we need wise people who can help us become wiser, and we need to be careful around fools who might cause us harm. Of course, there's the chance that we're the wise one who might need to accompany someone else, and so we need to have a generosity and openness to help them.

Therefore

A church family is a great place to walk with the wise, and to invite the wise to walk with you, to learn from people further on in the journey of faith and who have been in the valley you find yourselves in. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see who the wise people are that you

might learn from...and what wisdom you have that others could learn from you.

WEEK 3 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 14:15

The simple believe anything,
but the prudent give thought to their steps.

Thought

There's a famous kids book called "I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato" where a little boy Charile convinces his sister Lola to eat her dinner by convincing her that her carrots are orange twiglets from Jupiter, peas are green drops from Greenland and tomatoes are moon-squirters! She believed him because she was simple...not stupid, but naive and unformed in her thinking and understanding of the world.

That obviously was for her own good, but in a fallen world we have nefarious forces at work, the enemy of God, seeking to steal and kill and destroy who will look to lie and convince people to believe things that are untrue about God and damaging and destructive for themselves. And the simpler we are, the more chance there is that we believe anything and walk down the road of foolishness.

Whereas, being prudent...well advised and wise...enables to give thought to our steps and to make good and wise decisions about our steps. The challenge for us is to get wisdom, but the promise of Scripture is that if any of us lack wisdom, then we can ask God who gives generously (James 1:5)

Therefore

Next Sunday we'll be reading Proverbs 2 which starts like this...

My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,

and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Moving from simple to wise is a gift from God but it also something we pursue and seek and call out for. So make a commitment to do that, so that you can walk in wisdom, and not be taken in by the enemy.

WEEK 3 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 14:26-27

Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress,
and for their children it will be a refuge.
The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life,
turning a person from the snares of death.

Thought

I'll start you singing today...

"The wise man built his house upon the rock,
The wise man built his house upon the rock,
"The wise man built his house upon the rock,
And the rain come tumbling down

The rains came down and the floods came up,
The rains came down and the floods came up,
The rains came down and the floods came up,
But the house on the Rock stood firm."

To fear the Lord is to know him as Creator and Saviour and Lord...or the song puts it another way, building our life on the Lord Jesus Christ...and in the fear of the Lord we have a secure fortress no matter what storms come. That's good news!

But I love the next line of the proverb, that reminds us that our faith leaves a legacy for our children...biological or spiritual,,,it's a refuge for them among the storms of life where they can come to know the fear of the Lord and find their own fortress of faith...

Or if you read the next Proverb in light of the first one, it's a fountain of life that will pour the waters of life into the lives of our children.

We just pray that they will drink and build!

Therefore

Ask yourself this question...What legacy do you want to leave for the children and young people around you, whether they are your children or nieces and nephews or part of your church family...faith that is a secure fortress as a refuge and a fountain of life is a pretty good ambition. So ask the Holy Spirit to help you build that wise faith, both for your own blessing, and the blessing of those around you.

WEEK 4

SERMON / PROVERBS 2:1-22

R E M E M B E R

THUS YOU WILL
WALK IN THE WAYS
OF THE GOOD
AND KEEP
TO THE PATHS
OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

PROVERBS 2:20

R E J O I C E

Here's our song for the week

I NEED THEE EVERY HOUR / **WORSHIP INITIATIVE**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 4 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 15:1, 18

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict,
but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.

Thought

.There are people who are great at stirring...not in the cooking, baking or making a cup of tea sense, but in the annoying other people sense. You know them...maybe you are one of them... accomplished at being a wind up merchant.

But we can all be good at stirring...stirring up anger or conflict by losing our temper or letting harsh words come off our tongue. We can make excuses for it...we're tired, stressed, pressured...and if that person hadn't done that thing they weren't supposed to...or better still, had done the thing they were supposed to...or if they hadn't said that to me...then I wouldn't have lost it...said that.

Yet the proverbs today remind us that gentleness and patience are a wise approach when things aren't going well. They're the things that pour oil on troubled waters. There's no making excuses for someone having said something or having done something wrong, but losing control of our temper or our tongue only makes things worse.

Maybe you've felt that today already. We see and experience the ideal in Jesus, whose gentleness and patience are ours even when we say and do things that rebel against him and reject him, and so we need him to transform our character to be patient and gentle, and to transform our hearts to want to be patient and gentle.

Therefore

Maybe you need to say sorry to someone (as well as God) for a lack of patience or for some harsh words. Do it, and ask the Holy Spirit to transform you when it comes to patience and gentleness.

WEEK 4 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 16:33

The lot is cast into the lap,
but its every decision is from the Lord.

Thought

One of my favourite games as a kid was Yahtzee...you know the one with the five dice (or should it be "die"?). And you had you roll the dice in order to get certain sequences and collections of numbers to score points...The big one was a Yahtzee where you got five of a kind. And you were willing the dice to come come up with the number you needed...but ultimately it was all about chance!

Or was it? Is this proverb telling us that the Lord controls who wins Yahtzee? Well, yes, it does, in the sense that there is no such thing as chance when it comes to God, because of his sovereignty, his authority and control over all things.

But it also is in the context of his purposes as he works them out, and so lots (a similar thing to dice), a thing of chance were used to determine the Lord's will in dividing the promised land, and choosing a replacement for Judas among the apostles.

And so we are reminded of and assured by the truth that God is in control...and we are to depend on and trust in his decisions and direction as he accomplishes his purposes in us and through us.

Therefore

You don't need to go and find Yahtzee to work out God's will for you today. His word and the wisdom he gives us helps us make decisions in line with his purposes, but we do need to ask for a deeper trust in his control over all things...even if you lose Yahtzee next time you play.

WEEK 4 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 15:8

The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked,
but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

Thought

This proverb paints a contrast...

Detests versus pleases

Wicked versus upright

Saricifice versus prayer...actually no, there is no contrast between these two. Step back into Solomon's time and sacrifices would have been acceptable forms of worship as well as prayer. So the contrast isn't between the particular practices, as if one was better than the other, it's between the heart behind them.

It's the religious acts that are done by the wicked that the Lord detests...because the heart behind it is empty of integrity. To quote Proverbs 2(:13-14) from this weeks teaching, the wicked are those...

who have left the straight paths
to walk in dark ways,
who delight in doing wrong
and rejoice in the perverseness of evil

And so this act of worship is a sham, a pretence...it is worthless and offensive...

But what pleases the Lord is worship from an upright person, someone who is growing in wisdom, who fears him, knows him, and is being transformed by him, both in what they do and in the heart behind why they do it. Worship is a wise thing to practice...and so a heart that delights in it is pleasing to God.

Therefore

So the state of our hearts are important when it comes to worship. If our hearts are rebellious and pursuing wickedness, no amount of sacrificing covers over it or fools or pays off God. But a heart that is upright, a heart that humbly and heartily loves and lives wisdom is a heart whose worship God delights in. How can you prepare yourself for Sunday?

WEEK 4 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 15:29

How much better to get wisdom than gold,
to get insight rather than silver!

Thought

Solomon, the author or collator of this proverb, knew what it was to get gold. If you were to have a read at 2 Chronicles 9 you'd read about the fact that he pulled in 23 tonnes of gold each year, "not counting what the merchants and traders brought him. The kings of Arabia and the leaders of Israel also gave him gold and silver."

He had so much gold his plates and knives and forks were made of the stuff. He was the richest king in the world...

But here's his assessment of this extravagant wealth from Ecclesiastes (2:8-11)...

I amassed silver and gold for myself...
Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.

In financial terms he was incredibly wealthy, yet having gold and silver was ultimately meaningless...What was meaningful was this as he concludes Ecclesiastes (12:13)...

Fear God and keep his commandments

To know God for who he is and to live for him is where real wealth lies, and so to get wisdom, this skill in godly living, is so much more valuable than gold!

Therefore

So in a world that tries to convince us that anything and everything is valuable, how much value do you put on wisdom and getting it?

WEEK 4 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 16:6

Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;
through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided.

Thought

It would take just over three years to cover every proverb in Proverbs with a Monday-Friday pattern of daily devotions, which is why each week I'm just taking a selection of five out of a couple of chapters. I'm trying to get a selection that cover different areas of life...temptation, our words, money, work, relationships, self control etc.

But today's Proverb jumped out, not because it gave good advice on a particular areas of life, because it sums up good news for all of life. Even though Solomon wrote this many years before Jesus was born, he does a pretty good job of summing up the good news of Jesus... the offer of forgiveness and the invitation to follow him.

The good news of Jesus is that our sins can be atoned for and that happens because in the love and faithfulness of God our Father and Jesus his Son our sin was nailed to the cross...and then as we are called to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit transforms us, so in fearing God, we endeavour and are equipped to follow Jesus, avoiding evil and doing what is just and right and fair.

Therefore

So over the weekend, thank God for his love and faithfulness in Jesus and the cross, and ask God to continue to transform you by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, so that more and more you avoid evil and do what is just and right and fair by the power of the Holy Spirit

WEEK 5

SERMON / PROVERBS 3:1-35

REMEMBER

TRUST IN THE LORD
WITH ALL YOUR HEART,
AND DO NOT LEAN
ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING.
IN ALL YOUR WAYS
ACKNOWLEDGE HIM,
AND HE WILL MAKE STRAIGHT
YOUR PATHS.

PROVERBS 3:5-6

REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

PROVERBS 3:5-7 / **THE VERSES PROJECT**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 5 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 3:1-8

My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments,
for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you.
Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them round your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favour and good success
in the sight of God and man.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.

Thought

I'm still taken with the picture of trust in the Lord with all your heart as doing "a belly-flop on God with all our sin and all our failure and all our fears." I got the crash mat for the service from the BB store but I got the belly-flop idea from Ray Ortlund.

And I just want to share a little bit more of his sermon as the week begins, as he calls us to belly-flop on God...

"I am calling you today to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ with everything that shames you and terrifies you and holds you back. Let your full weight down on him. He will never fail anyone who trusts him radically. No pseudo-faith, because he's no pseudo-Saviour! He is real. He is all he claims to be. He is right now all he has ever been to anyone anywhere. And he offers his total Self to you today on terms of total grace. What he deserves and demands is your total trust in the love and mercy and wisdom of God in Christ alone."

I'd love to have been there in person as he preached that, but how much greater is it that the person he preaches about is there with you now, waiting on you to trust in him with all your heart?

Therefore

What does it look like to let your full weight down on Jesus? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you trust in the one who will never fail us, with water shames you or terrifies you and holds you back.

WEEK 5 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 3:9-12

Honour the Lord with your wealth
and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.
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.

Thought

These verse feel a little bit like teasing out some of the real life realities of the second half of our memory verse this week...

In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

It's not the last time Proverbs or the Bible will speak about money, but it's a good reminder that the wisdom God wants us to seek and find and have and use isn't some out there airy fairy mysticism, but it is grounded in and vital for the day to day realities of life...like our money...our earning and saving and spending. Now you might or might not consider yourself wealthy, but a wise life is one that honours God as the giver of whatever you have...and ultimate trusts him to give us what we need.

It's not the last time Proverbs or the Bible will speak about discipline, but it's a good reminder that although wisdom is easy gained...James tells us to just ask for it and God gives it...it is not easy learned or easy lived...and so God making straightening out our paths also requires him at times to straighten us out so we walk on them...and so we have to trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding when he uses discipline and reproof to straighten us up

Therefore

It might be your wealth, or it might be another area of life, that God is asking you to wisely honour him in, acknowledging him for who he is and what he deserves. Or maybe it's being trusting enough in a difficult circumstance to ask what God is wanting to teach you. Take some time to ask the Holy Spirit to help you see those areas or ask that question.

WEEK 5 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 3:13-18

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver
and her profit better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honour.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called blessed.

Thought

This little section is topped and tailed by the word blessed, and so we find in here the blessings of wisdom...and because of the blessings, then the value of finding wisdom and getting understanding.

You could easily read the blessings as some promise of a good life hear and now, long life, riches and honour, pleasant ways and peace...it sounds like living out your days in a villa overlooking a tropical beach. We've mentioned before that proverbs are probabilities rather than promises in this life, so to wisely live God's way can give us long life and blessings in this life...but there is a promise hear which we can lay hold of...by laying hold of this tree of life.

The tree of life is found in the garden, it's the tree that would allow Adam and Eve to live forever...but of course they're banished form it by God...which is actually part of his mercy, because he protects them from a forever life mired in sin and shame. But the story of the bible ends with the tree of life central to the new creation God brings about...a place of healing for the nations, peace, a place where there

is no longer any curse, long life that never ends, where we will enjoy the riches of God's grace and the honour of being his children.

And the way there is Jesus, the one who was nailed to a tree death, which became a tree of life...the wisdom of the cross is what we lay hold of and hold fast to.

And the gain from the cross is better than gain from silver
and its profit better than gold.

The cross is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with it.

Therefore

Simple question...have you laid hold of the cross...and are you holding fast to it?

WEEK 5

/ READING 4

Text - Proverbs 3:19-24

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.
My son, do not lose sight of these—
keep sound wisdom and discretion,
and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
Then you will walk on your way securely,
and your foot will not stumble.
If you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Thought

The other night I had quite a vivid dream which I can't remember most of the detail of, but I know I was in a bit of a conflict situation and someone tried to do something and so I threw a punch and "gubbed" them. And at the same time I woke up with the sense that I'd just swung a punch. Which I had apparently, as Heather had been woken up by someone punching her...not in the face thankfully.

My sleep...and Heather's...was less than sleep. Maybe you know that experience of lying in bed with a thousand things running through your mind keeping you awake, or sleep is so fitful because of anxieties or fears that keep waking you up.

And so that last line sounds a delight...

If you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

A good sleep is the blessing of gaining wisdom, not because you can think through and rationalise all your problems and park them until

the next morning, because wisdom comes from knowing the Lord, the one who by his wisdom founded the earth and established the heavens. And so the God who knows and the God who can, is the God who is with us when we lay down to sleep. He's the God who has saved us by his Son, and sealed us with his Spirit and the God whose sovereignty means he has everything in hand...and so that can settle our fears and sweeten our sleep.

Therefore

So tonight, if anxieties and fears, are keeping you awake, ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of Jesus' salvation of you, the Holy Spirit's seal on you and the Father's sovereignty for you...so you can lay down and sleep.

WEEK 5 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 3:25-35

Do not be afraid of sudden terror
or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes,
for the Lord will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being caught.
Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
when it is in your power to do it.
Do not say to your neighbour, "Go, and come again,
tomorrow I will give it"—when you have it with you.
Do not plan evil against your neighbour,
who dwells trustingly beside you.
Do not contend with a man for no reason,
when he has done you no harm.
Do not envy a man of violence
and do not choose any of his ways,
for the devious person is an abomination to the Lord,
but the upright are in his confidence.
The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked,
but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous.
Towards the scorners he is scornful,
but to the humble he gives favour.
The wise will inherit honour,
but fools get disgrace.

Thought

So far this week, we've thought about the blessings we get from wisdom...including a decent nights sleep without somebody punching you while you're lying in your bed.

But there's a really important reminder that in the same way the skill of an artist or a creator blesses other people, so too the skill of godly living should be a blessing to others.

Like doing good to those who need it, when it's within your power...

Or providing your neighbour with what they need there and then, if you have it in your possession there and then.

Or not plotting evil...or going looking for a fight...but rather plotting good, and being peaceable and loving with the people who live, work and play in your orbit.

Faith is personal, but it should never be private...kept away and hidden from the world...because personal faith in Jesus is the thing that will change the world...as you grow in your skill for godly living!

Therefore

What ways have you held back the blessings of wisdom from others. How can you share those blessings with those around you this weekend?

WEEK 6

SERMON / PROVERBS 4:1-9

R E M E M B E R

THE BEGINNING
OF WISDOM
IS THIS:
GET WISDOM.
THOUGH IT COST
ALL YOU HAVE,
GET UNDERSTANDING.

PROVERBS 4:7

R E J O I C E

Here's our song for the week

GARLAND OF GRACE / **SMALLTOWN POETS**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 6 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 17:1

Better a dry crust with peace and quiet
than a house full of feasting, with strife.

Thought

If you can remember back to Christmas you might remember the Waitrose Christmas advert. It had a house full of feasting and a house full of strife. Amongst all the food that made up the feast, someone had stolen the Red Velvet Bauble dessert from the fridge...and so suspicion was cast on everyone by everyone...leading to strife. So despite the incredible feast, the table was not a happy one to be at.

And so this proverb gifts us wisdom, telling us that a house with peace and quiet...which means healthy and harmonious relationships and not just everyone shutting up so you can watch the Strictly Christmas special...is so much better, even if the food on the table isn't exactly Michelin starred or even very much.

One writer put's it like this...'the people you eat with are more important than what's on the menu.'

And we could apply this to other areas of life...the people you holiday with are more important than the location...the people you go to church with are more important than the state of the building...

So don't pursue more feasting, a nicer foreign holidays, a fancier church building, rather fix strife in your relationships, form right relationships of peace and quiet with those you feast and holiday and worship...and be thankful for those people, because their more important than those other things

Therefore

What strife do you need to fix? What relationships need formed. Who can you be thankful to God for, even if your fridge isn't full, your holiday isn't far and your church building needs a good bit of fixing itself.

WEEK 6 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 17:12

Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs
than a fool bent on folly.

Thought

Not that many of you are planning a career in the world of Mixed Martial Arts or Bare Knuckle Boxing...but if you were, you'd end facing opponent within your own weight class...which means that you would be unlikely to face an opponent standing 7 feet tall and weighing at over 25 stone. If you did, it'd be a pretty dangerous situation.

Now take that 7 foot, 25 stone opponent and cover them in fur, give them teeth and huge claws...and also kidnap their kids, and your life is in peril!

It's a pretty unlikely situation...but the writer of Proverbs uses it to show just how dangerous and perilous it is to meet a "fool bent of folly." An angry mother bear will tear you to shreds...but a fool bent on folly has the potential to do even worse if you get dragged into that folly.

Proverbs is all about us gaining wisdom and not being foolish, which influences who we let influence us. Of course, followers of Jesus aren't just to lock themselves in a safe little Christian bubble and wait it out until Jesus comes back. We're supposed to be in the world... but we aren't supposed to be of the world and it's foolishness...and we need to recognise the danger the fools pose to us and others in dragged them down the path of foolishness which leads to destruction and death.

Therefore

Take some time today to think about whether you are in any danger in terms of who you let influence you. And pray for those you care about that they wouldn't be led towards destruction and death by fools but would have wise godly people around them. Oh, and watch out for bears!

WEEK 6 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 17:22

A cheerful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Thought

We know this to be true don't we on an emotional level?

First, because we've experienced it...that person whose joy is infectious...and that person whose bad mood sucks the life out of a room. And second because we've been that person full of joy or grumpy as sin.

But in the bigger story of the Bible, this is true on a deeper spiritual level. A cheerful heart "means a heart rejoicing in God, and serving him with gladness, and then taking the comfort of outward enjoyments. That is, it's a heart that has found joy because it has found Jesus, has found purpose in Jesus and can find joy even in troubles because it has Jesus.

A crushed spirit is one that is struggling under the weight of the endless and exhausting pursuit of joy in anything and everything without Jesus.

The cheerful heart brings healing to those around them because it brings Jesus. The crushed spirit dries up the bones because it ultimately robs life from those around them.

Therefore

Aim to bring joy into a room today instead of grumpiness...but more importantly, bring joy because you bring Jesus.

WEEK 6 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 18:10-11

The name of the Lord is a fortified tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe.

The wealth of the rich is their fortified city;
they imagine it a wall too high to scale.

Thought

Just think of all the stuff that has been circulating in the news cycle even over the past few days...sexual assault, plane crash, bombs and drones, riots, conflict...and it's tempting to not feel safe. Think of those who are victims in the midst of all of these things...and it's a reality to not feel safe.

Yet here the author is offering safety...in the name of the Lord!

We've talked before about how Proverbs are probabilities and not promises...that they're generally true but in a broken world they're not always guaranteed. But here we have a promise, a guarantee that is true in a broken world.

The Lord is a safe place to run to, a fortified tower. The rich rely on their own resources, and can be convinced that they are perfectly protected, but the implication of the proverbs here is that that is just in their imagination. At some point they will find that reality scales their walls in devastating ways.

Whereas those who run to and trust in the Lord don't have a fortified city, but a forever kingdom that will triumph over evil eventually and completely. And so even in the midst of everything, we find ultimate and eternal safety by running to the Lord.

Therefore

So today, the encouragement is to run to the Lord, trusting in his name, who he was, is and always will be, what he has done, is doing and will do! And then pray for those caught up in all we mentioned at the start, that they would know the Lord and run to him in trust!

WEEK 6 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 18:21

The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Thought

On Sunday night we played a two stage game at Sunday Youth. the first stage was to squeeze toothpaste out of a tube as fast as possible...easy...the second stage was to put as much back in as possible...not easy...and really messy!

The focus of Sunday Youth was our words...and so the game was to illustrate how quickly our words can come out...which is grand if those words are full of joy and peace and encouragement...but we all know that our words tend to spill out when we're tired, grumpy, annoyed and angry. And those words are really hard to put back in the tube (pun intended...we can behave like tubes!) and create a huge amount of mess...relationally and emotionally!

This proverb reminds us that our words can either be life giving or life taking...and so we need to be slow to speak on many occasions, especially when our mood could open up the floodgates of words that are destructive to others.

As followers of Jesus, we want our words to be his words, especially when we're angry, upset and tired. We want to speak life to the world and the people around us...we want to speak Jesus and not death.

Therefore

As you reflect on your week, what words would you love to put back in the tube. Start doing that by saying sorry to those who felt the sting of your words...and asking God by his Spirit to bring healing where you've caused damage.

WEEK 7

SERMON / PROVERBS 4:10-6:35

REMEMBER

LET YOUR EYES
LOOK STRAIGHT AHEAD;
FIX YOUR GAZE
DIRECTLY BEFORE YOU.
GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT
TO THE PATHS FOR YOUR FEET
AND BE STEADFAST
IN ALL YOUR WAYS.
DO NOT TURN
TO THE RIGHT OR THE LEFT;
KEEP YOUR FOOT FROM EVIL.

PROVERBS 4:25-27

REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

KEEP YOUR EYES / **GRAHAM KENDRICK**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 7 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 4:18-27

The path of the righteous is like the morning sun,
shining ever brighter till the full light of day.

But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know what makes them stumble.

My son, pay attention to what I say;
turn your ear to my words.

Do not let them out of your sight,
keep them within your heart;

for they are life to those who find them
and health to one's whole body.

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

Keep your mouth free of perversity;
keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

Let your eyes look straight ahead;
fix your gaze directly before you.

Give careful thought to the paths for your feet
and be steadfast in all your ways.

Do not turn to the right or the left;
keep your foot from evil.

Thought

It was our wedding anniversary the other week...and on our wedding day, we had a few extra music pieces as well as the congregational ones...the first was the piece Heather walked up the aisle to... composed and recorded by her...and the second was a medley piece by the band Third Day played by Heather's brother and a few friends which included the chorus of Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus...

Turn Your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of Earth
Will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

As we read on into chapters five and six and seven, we'll read of the way we can be seduced off the path of wisdom...and how that seduction that promises much, actually takes the most...because it will take our lives.

Those things can appear attractive, shiny and bright, yet when considered on the path of the righteous, like a path under the rising sun, they pail in significance! Why, because the path of the rising morning sun, is the path of the risen Son.

And so we are to let our eyes look straight ahead and to fix our gaze directly before us...to turn our eyes upon Jesus, who leads us and lights the way for us by his love and life.

Therefore

You could give Third Day a listen this week, (search up Third Day Medley) and let the words of Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus, cause you to turn your eyes upon Jesus...so that whatever is seducing doesn't succeed, but rather you see the light and love of the Son who died to save you and lives to lead you into the fullness of of life he promises.

WEEK 7 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 5:1-14,21-23

My son, pay attention to my wisdom,
turn your ear to my words of insight,
that you may maintain discretion
and your lips may preserve knowledge.
For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil;
but in the end she is bitter as gall,
sharp as a double-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death;
her steps lead straight to the grave.
She gives no thought to the way of life;
her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it.
Now then, my sons, listen to me;
do not turn aside from what I say.
Keep to a path far from her,
do not go near the door of her house,
lest you lose your honor to others
and your dignity to one who is cruel,
lest strangers feast on your wealth
and your toil enrich the house of another.
At the end of your life you will groan,
when your flesh and body are spent.
You will say, "How I hated discipline!
How my heart spurned correction!
I would not obey my teachers
or turn my ear to my instructors.
And I was soon in serious trouble
in the assembly of God's people."

For your ways are in full view of the Lord,
and he examines all your paths.
The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them;
the cords of their sins hold them fast.
For lack of discipline they will die,
led astray by their own great folly.

Thought

There's a fun little game you can pick up in Home Bargains or B&M called the Double Dare Jelly Bean game. There's a selection of coloured jelly beans in different pots and you spin the wheel to see what colour you pick. The twist is that you don't know the flavour of the jellybeans...

Are the brown ones cola or dog food...are the green ones apple or cabbage...are the pink ones birthday cake or soap...are the red ones strawberry or chilli...you get the point...

It's a fun (kinda) game of chance...but Proverbs here is reminding us that life is not a game but a war, where seduction is a key weapon of the enemy, and in this war, every jelly bean looks good and tastes good at the start, but ultimately is bitter and poisonous...ending with groaning and the grave.

The warning here is that we are led astray not just by the seduction, but by our own great folly...in choosing those paths over the good and godly life the Lord invites us into...a life of forgiveness and freedom from the cords of our sins that hold us fast.

So as the first verse of today's passage tells us, we pay attention to wisdom...which we know is paying attention to Jesus, listening to him, following him into life in all its fullness.

Therefore

I'm not on commission for them, but you should try the jellybean game! But just not with your real life decisions this week. In all you face, especially in temptation...keep your eyes on Jesus and listen to his wisdom, and follow his way.

WEEK 7 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 6:6-11

Go to the ant, you sluggard;
 consider its ways and be wise!
It has no commander,
 no overseer or ruler,
yet it stores its provisions in summer
 and gathers its food at harvest.
How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
 When will you get up from your sleep?
A little sleep, a little slumber,
 a little folding of the hands to rest—
and poverty will come on you like a thief
 and scarcity like an armed man.

Thought

It would be ironic, if I simply said there was no devotion today because I needed a doze...

But I'll try and be like the ant, rather than the sluggard in the passage...working hard rather than slacking off. The contrast is stark...the little ant who is motivated and hard working, doing what needs to be done for itself and its fellow ants...and then there's the sluggard who needs five more minutes in bed and then a bit more and even when they're up, they're sitting down with their arms folded...and poverty and scarcity will be their reward.

It's a reminder that work is a necessary part of life, and actually it can be a good and purposeful and satisfying part of life. Work was there before the fall... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it (Genesis 2:15).

And so we can learn from the ant if we're open to it!

But the ant also reminds us that we need to "work" to be wise. It doesn't just passively arrive in our head and hearts...we pursue it,

search for it, gather it, read it, listen for it, consider it, apply it and practice it in the power of the Holy Spirit. If we're sleepy and lazy and simply sit back as a flower of Jesus with arms folded, we won't learn...and so we won't live as he wants us to.

Therefore

So whatever you're doing today, be more ant than sluggard...and when it comes to wisdom, be at work, becoming wise in order to live the life God has called us to.

WEEK 7 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 6:12-15

A troublemaker and a villain,
who goes about with a corrupt mouth,
who winks maliciously with his eye,
signals with his feet
and motions with his fingers,
who plots evil with deceit in his heart—
he always stirs up conflict.

Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant;
he will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy.

Thought

When I read this passage, the image that came to mind was the Joker...the Jack Nicholson versions the one in my head. Chaos, carnage, conflict is what he brings...even with a smile on his face...literally a corrupt mouth. Of course, the character of these verses isn't quite so comic book in our lives...less chalk white skin and green hair and an obsession with killing Batman...but still the character traits are there...character that brings the consequence of conflict in his or her circles.

The wisdom of Proverbs also carries warnings. Here we have the warning about the people we allow to influence our lives. Don't let a troublemaker and villain bring conflict into your world. But it's also a warning if we have a tendency to be that person...the one who brings conflict. Disaster will eventually overtake us.

So be wise about the characters you let influence your life...and become wise so your character is more godly Jesus follower and less Gotham city supervillain.

Therefore

Jesus is the exact opposite of this character, one who brings reconciliation and not conflict, reconciling us to God and to each other as his Spirit shapes our character. So ask Jesus to bring reconciliation where you have brought conflict, and ask the Spirit to shape your character in godliness.

WEEK 7 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 6:20-23

My son, keep your father's command
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
Bind them always on your heart;
fasten them around your neck.
When you walk, they will guide you;
when you sleep, they will watch over you;
when you awake, they will speak to you.
For this command is a lamp,
this teaching is a light,
and correction and instruction
are the way to life,
keeping you from your neighbour's wife,
from the smooth talk of a wayward woman.

Thought

When I was in Malawi, I got the opportunity to head across the border into Zambia on safari for a couple of days. You got to stay in a fancy safari lodge and were taken out on safari, generally stupidly early in the morning, for the best chance to see the wildlife.

For the more adventurous, you could go for the immersive experience of a camping safari...trekking through the savannah and camping under canvas. Of course you would have a team of guides...to show you where to go, to talk to you about the wildlife and plants you see, and to watch over the camp while you sleep, so you don't wake up to a hyena looking you in the eye.

Wisdom does this in the safari of life...guiding us as we make our way along, talking to us and advising us about what we see and experience, helping us understand it, and watching over us as well.

And so again the father passionately encourages his sons to value wisdom...

My son, keep your father's command
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
Bind them always on your heart;
fasten them around your neck.

Therefore

Proverbs manages to say the same thing in different ways over and over again, so keep praying the same thing over and over again, that you would find and listen to and keep wisdom (that's Jesus!) on your heart.

WEEK 8

SERMON / PROVERBS 7:1-27

REMEMBER

NOW THEN, MY SONS,
LISTEN TO ME;
PAY ATTENTION
TO WHAT I SAY.
DO NOT LET YOUR HEART
TURN TO HER WAYS
OR STRAY
INTO HER PATHS.

PROVERBS 7:24-25

REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

LORD I NEED YOU / **MATT MAHER**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 8 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 19:5

A false witness will not go unpunished,
and whoever pours out lies will not go free.

Thought

When I was 12 I found 50p in a leisure centre locker...but when the previous user, a younger boy, came and asked me, as I was putting my clothes in the locker, if I'd found it, I lied and said no. And I continued to say no when his big brother came and asked me.

Which was all good, until his big brother pointed at me in the swimming pool from the gallery and pulled his finger across his throat in a threatening manner...and a few minutes later appeared in the pool in his trunks again...looking for me.

Terrified, I scarpered, putting my clothes on over my wet trunks and springing away from the leisure centre until I found a payphone to phone my mum to come and pick me up...using the 50p! I didn't return to that leisure centre for a number of years, so scared I was of meeting the brother again...

I escaped the physical punishment of the there and then brother, but my freedom was severely limited by the effect of the lie, as the lie itself stopped me from enjoying going to that leisure centre when my friends went for years.

The context of this Proverb is more courtroom than swimming pool changing room, but the warning is that lying, or bearing false witness will ultimately suffer punishment and the liar will lose their freedom. It's a reminder that God sees all things...every lie...even if we get a way with it at the time...one day they will catch us up, and one day they will take everything we have.

But if we come to Jesus who is the way, the TRUTH and the life, we can find forgiveness and freedom!

Therefore

As you follow the one who is truth, ask the Holy Spirit to help you be a person of truth and integrity....and if you find money in a leisure centre locker, don't hide it in your shoe and lie about it!

WEEK 8 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 19:11

A person's wisdom yields patience;
it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

Thought

Today's proverb upholds the virtue of patience and mercy and slowness to anger in contrast to the prideful demands of payback for relatively minor offences.

This isn't a command to be a doormat and take everything lying down., and it isn't a case of letting everything go...serious offences need to be dealt with in appropriate ways...in order to stop evil and to bring about justice.

But even then, a wise and godly approach is one of patience rather than a reactionary explosion of anger. James 1:19-20 says, Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Again, the righteousness that God desires does not rule out justice when it is required. But as people who know what it is to have committed offences and then found forgiveness from "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," we are called to show patience and forgiveness and seek restoration of relationships.

Therefore

So maybe the Lords Prayer is a good prayer to pray today, focussing especially on the line...

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

...asking God for the wisdom to show patience this week.

WEEK 8 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 19:17

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,
and he will reward them for what they have done.

Thought

One of the early versions of reality TV was a programme called Undercover Boss, where the CEO of a big company would rock up to one of it's branches as a regular member of staff. And as they worked their shifts undercover they'd often see the awful ways some of their staff acted or branch was run...but they would also find some other staff who were generous and kind towards them. And it was only in the final reveal that they would find out just who they had been kind too.

Proverbs gives us an early reveal...telling us that whoever is kind to the poor, lends to the Lord. The very nature of "the poor" implies that they won't be able to pay you back, but because ultimately your kindness is towards the Lord, he will reward us from his riches.

That doesn't mean that you give to get back...this isn't about sowing a seed to reap riches...but it is to encourage us towards sacrificial generosity, and a heart to serve the Lord by showing kindness to those who need it, with the knowledge that nothing goes unnoticed and unrewarded in the economy of God.

Therefore

So whatever poverty you come across over the next week or so...be kind, knowing that God sees and God repays.

WEEK 8 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 19:22

What is desired in a man is steadfast love,
and a poor man is better than a liar.

Thought

Steadfast love is definitely a good thing...

Because steadfast love is a God thing...

The Hebrew word used here is *hesed* which is the word used to describe God's covenant love for his people, that is, his committed, loyal love.

It is something that we should desire in others...how would the world be different if everyone's character was marked by steadfast love?

And it is something that is undeserved from God. Yet even though we are marked by betrayal of God and his good way to live, he still shows his covenant love towards us in Jesus, forgiving us, restoring us and changing us by his Spirit in to people of steadfast love.

And so it is something that we should desire in ourselves...God's steadfast love for us...and then his steadfast love flowing out from us to the world around us.

The second line reminds us that who we are is more important than what we possess...what is in our heart is more important than what is in our hand...and so rich or poor, we can give people what they really desire...steadfast love that is good, but ultimately points them to God.

Therefore

Ask the Holy Spirit to grow steadfast love in you, so you can show steadfast love from you!

WEEK 8 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 19:21

Many are the plans in a person's heart,
but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Thought

Have you ever had plans that didn't work out?

The car broke down...the interview bombed...the person didn't reciprocate...you forgot to put the oven on...disaster struck...

From the silly mistakes that we make, to the massive things we can't control, the reminder here is that we can have plans, but they don't always prevail.

But the verse doesn't stop there, leaving us drowning in blind chance that leaves us hopeless in a world of uncertainty and fragility. Rather it goes on to tell us that at the foundation of all things is the Lord's purposes that prevail...no matter what we plan.

That's good news to remember when we're distressed by the hurt and pain of our failed and broken plans...that God is still "plotting for our joy" as one writer put it.

That's good news to remember when others plans against us seem to be prevailing...that God's purposes will still overcome them...remember Joseph's words to his brothers (Genesis 50:20)...

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Therefore

Whatever your plans, seek to align them to God's purposes, and when your plans bomb, lean on the promise that God's purpose prevail, and his purposes for his people are good

WEEK 9

SERMON / PROVERBS 8-9

REMEMBER

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS
THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM,
AND KNOWLEDGE
OF THE HOLY ONE IS
UNDERSTANDING.
FOR THROUGH WISDOM
YOUR DAYS WILL BE MANY...

PROVERBS 9:10-11

REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

BLESS GOD / **BROOKE LIGERTWOOD**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 9 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 20:6

Many claim to have unfailing love,
but a faithful person who can find?

Thought

If you were putting up a new fence in your garden, Ronseal might be a product you'd look for. Amongst other things it makes different types of wood stains and its advertising slogan has been "Does exactly what it says on the tin." So if you buy One Coat, the claim is that you'll only need one coat. If you buy 10 Year Woodsman, guess what, the claim is you shouldn't need to pick up a brush again for 10 years. The question for the consumer is this: "Does it do exactly what it says on the tin?"

In the Proverb unfailing love and faithfulness aren't two different things. The Hebrew word for unfailing love is that word "*hesed*" again...love which is, as the Jesus Storybook Bible describes it, "Never-Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love." Love which is faithful.

The Proverb is saying that "being a faithful person is rarer (and more valuable) than describing oneself as a person of committed loyalty or steadfast love." But the call on the life of the follower of Jesus is to "be" rather than just to "claim to be." We are to be people who "do exactly what it says on the tin" - love the lord your God...love your neighbour...love your enemy...

Therefore

The contrast between "being" and "claiming to be" doesn't just exist in terms of love...but across all areas of our character... joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Where do you need to ask the Spirit to help you be a bit more "Does exactly what it says on the tin"?

WEEK 9 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 20:9

Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure;
I am clean and without sin"?

Thought

It's only a few days since Sunday when we took time during the service to pray a prayer of confession...to bring our sin to God and ask for forgiveness.

Yet this question can only be answered in one way...unless you're a fool!

The answer of course is "No one!"

No one has kept their heart pure, no one is without sin...which should be a terrifying thing in the light of the previous verse of Proverbs...

When a king sits on his throne to judge,
he winnows out all evil with his eyes.

Our evil brings God's judgement...but the good news we rest in is that God's grace brings our forgiveness and restoration. Wisdom answers this Proverb with honesty - "No one!" - but it also answers this verse with hope, because in Jesus, wisdom in person we have the one who can answer this request from Psalm 51

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence

or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Therefore

So don't we weighed down by an honest answer to today's proverb, but find hope in the one who allows us to pray Psalm 51 and then answers it joyously for our good and his glory.

WEEK 9 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 20:17

Food gained by fraud tastes sweet,
but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel.

Thought

There's a stupid Monty Python sketch (which is a summary of every Monty Python sketch) where four Yorkshire men try and outdo each other's tales of an impoverished childhood...one man describes having to eat hot gravel for breakfast...which the next calls him lucky, because he had to eat freezing cold gravel...see told you it was stupid.

But here in Proverbs we have more gravel eating, not because of a poor childhood, but because of a poor decision, a foolish decision to gain food (or anything that satisfies a desire) by fraudulent means whether that be illegal or immoral.

The thing we gain and consume tastes sweet initially, but soon we discover just how awful and destructive it is. Just imagine the trips to the dentist and the A&E department after eating a mouthful of gravel.

The way of wisdom is the way of integrity and righteousness, trusting God to satisfy us with the things he provides, in the ways he defines through his word.

Therefore

So what is it that has tasted sweet recently but actually is gravel in your mouth. Spit it out and ask God to satisfy your need.

WEEK 9 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 21:2

A person may think their own ways are right,
but the Lord weighs the heart.

Thought

Have you ever managed to convince someone to choose something...a movie, holiday destination, what's for dinner...which ultimately was your choice, they just didn't know it. They thought they had chosen something good but they had just been influenced by your selfishness?

This proverb reminds us that we don't just do that with others, but we do it with ourselves. We convince ourselves in lots of very creative ways that the choice we made is for our good, and not just an answer to our selfish desires...that's why the Bible describes our hearts as deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9)

Our friends and family members don't often see through our convincing but here we're told that the Lord weighs the heart. He not only sees our choices but sees the motivation behind them. And so even if they look good from the outside, the Lord sees the deceit of our heart on the inside.

But he is also the one who is creating a new heart within us (Psalm 51) and so we need to ask him to purify our motivations and help us see the foolish ways of self-justification

Therefore

Keep asking what Psalm 51 articulates for us...

Create in me a pure heart, O God

WEEK 9 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 21:13

Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor
will also cry out and not be answered.

Thought

Colossians 3:12 reminds us that as as "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved," we are to clothe ourselves "with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

And so when we are faced with the poor in this world, those who lack what they need in terms of money, food, clothing, justice, etc. we are to be the people God called us to be, people with ears that are open with compassion and kindness.

And if we aren't, then there is a very real warning.

So what is it that shuts our ears? Charles Bridges in his commentary says (in old and flowery language)...

"Consider [miserliness] in giving; the useless expenses that abridge our power of helping; luxuries, while our brethren are starving around us; restraining the full extent of what we ought and might give – all this as virtually stopping our ears against their cry. Covetousness and sensuality harden the heart; and when the heart is hard, the ear is deaf.

We've talked this week about God creating in us pure hearts...which are open hearts, generous hearts, compassionate hearts... transformed ultimately by experience of these things in his grace.

Therefore

So as you meet poverty, consider the poverty of your soul that met the open heart of God and experienced the riches of his grace. And then do likewise.

WEEK 10

SERMON / PROVERBS 30

R E M E M B E R

EVERY WORD
OF GOD
PROVES TRUE;
HE IS A SHIELD
TO THOSE
WHO TAKE
REFUGE
IN HIM.

PROVERBS 30:5

R E J O I C E

Here's our song for the week

CHRIST OUR WISDOM / **SOVEREIGN GRACE**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 10 / READING 1

Text - PROVERBS 22:2

Rich and poor have this in common:

The Lord is the Maker of them all.

Thought

On Sunday we were looking at Proverbs 30 and a series of questions that a guy called Agur posed in order to help us have a big vision of God as Creator. And in seeing God as he really is, it pushed us into humility, seeing ourselves as we really are.

But at the same time, as causing us to humble ourselves in comparison to the Creator, the fact that we are created by the Creator should cause us to honour those around us...no matter, as we see from this proverb, whether they're rich or poor.

Our dignity and value is not something we earn or save. It is not something tied to our profit margins and bank balances. It is something that has been deposited in us by God himself. In simply giving us life, he gave us value, worth, dignity and honour.

And that impacts how we live in a world as followers of Jesus with other created people...how we treat our neighbours and community, whoever they are, whatever they have (or don't have)...how we approach the issues of the day...abortion, euthanasia, poverty, immigration...

And not only do the rich and poor share value...being created by God, they share need...being reconciled to God. So the highest way we can honour them is to share the good news of Jesus with them with our words and ways.

Therefore

No matter who you meet this week, rich or poor, honour them as people created by God, and help them as people who need to be reconciled to God.

WEEK 10 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 22:4

Humility is the fear of the Lord;
its wages are riches and honour and life.

Thought

Way back in Proverbs 9:10, we had one of the foundational verses of the book of Proverbs...

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

Now we have this proverb...

Humility is the fear of the Lord

And so if we laid them on top of one another and cancelled out the matching words we'd be left with this...

Humility is the beginning of wisdom...

The start of becoming wise is to be humble enough to admit you're not wise...that you need wisdom. That's how Agur starts Proverbs 30...I'm too stupid to be a man...I need wisdom. And so he gives us the model of humility.

As we come towards the end of Proverbs in the next few weeks... maybe you've seen wisdom in this book, wise sayings, wise words, wise ways to live...but to be all that this book wants you to be, you need to be humble enough to admit that you need wisdom.

Therefore

Hear and respond today to the message of James (4:6-7, 10), the New Testament version of Proverbs...

"God opposes the proud
but shows favour to the humble."

Submit yourselves, then, to God...Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

WEEK 10 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 23:4-5

Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
do not trust your own cleverness.
Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone,
for they will surely sprout wings
and fly off to the sky like an eagle.

Thought

I'm sure you've felt worn out at times...energy gone...batteries empty. But there's two ways of feeling worn out...

You can feel satisfied, knowing that the effort you spent, the energy you've used up has been worth it, maybe it's a project, a relationship...

Or you can feel unsatisfied, with nothing in your hand at the end of it, a total waste of time.

Here Proverbs is warning us that getting rich is not something to wear yourself out for (despite what lots of Instagram and TikTok channels might tell you). Wealth might seem attractive, but it is ultimately insecure...and can vanish at any point...sprouting wings and flying off like an eagle.

Better to give yourself to something that will last, will be worth it, will be worthy. And who better than Jesus to tell us what that should be...

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness..." (Matthew 6:19-20,33)

Therefore

Where is your energy going today...on your own wealth or on kingdom treasure in your life and the life of others?

WEEK 10 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 24:19-20

Do not fret because of evildoers
or be envious of the wicked,
for the evildoer has no future hope,
and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

Thought

When we look around the world we see the creeping influence and impact of evil. We see it in threats to our safety and wellbeing, from the global threats to local crime. We see it in the injustice of the prosperity of people through lying and cheating and stealing on large and small scales.

And these things can distract and discourage us.

We worry about our present safety and security...yet Proverbs tells us that we should not fret. We get jealous of what other people presently have...yet Proverbs tells us not to be envious.

Why?

Well it points us to the future...and the lack of hope for the evildoer and the loss of light and life for the wicked. Which points us to a God who judges and deals with evil and ill-gotten gains.

Andrew Peterson in his song Rise Up writes...

If a thief had come to plunder when the children were alone
If he ravaged every daughter and murdered every son
Would not their Father see this? Would not His anger burn?
Would He not repay the tyrant in the day of His return?
Await, await the day of His return

The flip side of that is that the God who judges is also the God who justifies people through his Son, and because of that calls them his children...and so on the day of his return, our hope will be fulfilled and our lamp will burn bright with the love and life of Jesus.

And so in the present we do not need to fret because "it'll be grand" and we do not need to be envious because the riches of his grace await us into eternity.

Therefore

Give "Rise Up" a listen, and let go of fret and envy and embrace assurance and promise in Jesus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5NSGyDXEjs>

WEEK 10 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 25:25

Like cold water to a weary soul
is good news from a distant land.

Thought

How'd you get on in the sunshine yesterday?

I got asked by someone, "Do you enjoy this type of weather?" Their answer to their own question was a firm no, because it feels like you're always soaking with sweat...which is a nice thought to start your day with. Our youngest wasn't enjoying it either..."Daddy, it's too hot!"

But what perked her up was a Pear Picking Porky (other ice lollies are available) from the shop! Something cold that brought relief and joy to a weary and warm 3 year old oppressed by the baking sun.

You know the feeling, an ice lolly...or ice cold water...refreshing, reviving, life giving. Which is what good news does for us when it arrives...it brings life to our living especially in a world where bad news is so prevalent, globally and personally.

The good news that the proverb finds its ultimate expression in is obviously the good news of Jesus, which brings real and lasting life to our living.

Therefore

This weekend allow the good news of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection and reign, his love and sacrifice, his peace and purpose, his care and compassion refresh and revive you. And give thanks for those who brought that good news to you whether from a distant land or from closer to home

WEEK 11

SERMON / PROVERBS 31:1-9

R E M E M B E R

FOR WE ARE
GOD'S HANDIWORK,
CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS
TO DO GOOD WORKS,
WHICH GOD PREPARED
IN ADVANCE
FOR US TO DO.

EPHESIANS 2:10

R E J O I C E

Here's our song for the week

PSALM 150 / **MATT PAPA**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 11 / READING 1

Text - Proverbs 25:27-28

It is not good to eat too much honey,
nor is it honourable to search out matters that are too deep.
Like a city whose walls are broken through
is a person who lacks self-control.

Thought

Recently I looked out one of our upstairs back windows and for a moment thought a spaceman had landed in the neighbours back garden...but after a second glance I realised one of our new neighbours was wearing a bee keepers suit...they'd just got a beehive (it seems it's a big thing nowadays).

And so even though I'm called to "love my neighbour", I now have even more motivation...because I love honey!!!

But I also need to heed the warning of today's proverb...not to eat too much of it. Earlier in the chapter it gives one good reason...

If you find honey, eat just enough—
too much of it, and you will vomit. (Proverbs 25:16)

But the underlying reason is about self control. Which has wider implications that putting me at risk of diabetes. If I lack it, I leave myself open to attack by those things that can distract and destroy me...the world, the flesh and the devil. Without self control, we have no defence against the "deceitful ideas that play to disordered desires that are normalized in a sinful society" (John Mark Comer).

Self control isn't just about our physical health and well being, but about our spiritual health and well being...so that we have security and stability as we seek to live godly lives

Therefore

In what areas of your life do you need to ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your self control?

WEEK 11 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 26:4-5

Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you yourself will be just like him.

Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes.

Thought

At first glance these two proverbs seem totally contradictory...so do I answer a fool, or don't I?

But actually the fact that the two proverbs say different things teach us about wisdom...and the skill in godly living isn't just about memorising proverbs and regurgitating them, but working out when they apply.

Take another apparent contradiction for example. You know the non-biblical "proverb," "Many hands make light work" which you might quote when you're trying to convince some of your kids to help with the gardening (totally non-biographical here lol). And you might also know the non-biblical "proverb," "Too many cooks spoil the broth" which you might quote when you're trying to get all the kids out from under your feet in the kitchen when you're trying to cook something (totally non-biographical here lol).

They seem to contradict each other, but they're also both true in different situations, and wisdom is about working when. And so the same is true with the biblical proverbs. especially these too.

When confronted with a fool, wisdom is knowing when to answer them, confront them, challenge them and try and convince them of a wiser way to live...or knowing when trying to do so will just draw you into foolish arguments. Foolishness is serious and so we want people to steer clear of it and be rescued from it onto the way of wisdom... but we need wisdom to know when to engage and when to step back...we want to be wise and not get drawn back into foolishness.

Therefore

Maybe there are situations in your life where you need the wisdom to know when to challenge someone's foolishness so that they might find wisdom...and when you just need to step back, because trying to bring wisdom is actually damaging you and drawing you into foolishness. Ask the Holy Spirit to generously give you the wisdom to know which is which.

WEEK 11 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 26:11

As a dog returns to its vomit,
so fools repeat their folly.

Thought

Apologies if this you're reading this proverb over breakfast...or any other meal of the day! It is pretty minging...but then again dogs can be can't they...especially when they go back and lick up the very stuff it's vomited out.

Let's be honest, there is nothing good for you in vomit...in fact the dog has probably vomited because something it has eaten has been decidedly bad for it.

And so not only is returning to its vomit minging, it's mindless as well. Why would you want to go back to something that was bad for you?

And as we all nod accordingly, we can all think of the multiple times we've gone back to a sinful behaviour that has been bad for us...and it's not just that it has been bad for us, the image of vomit is supposed to make us realise how repulsive sin actually is in the cold light of day.

Therefore

So whatever sinful habit might have crept (back) into your life, this proverb is supposed to help you see it for what it is...minging and mindless. And as this proverb helps your clarity, ask the Holy Spirit to help you repent and resolve not to return to it.

WEEK 11 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 26:17

Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears
is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own.

Thought

Our youngest daughter loves dogs and at three years old will gravitate towards any dog she sees, small or big...and will try and stroke them...and occasionally will grab a tail or an ear. And so as a responsible parent I try and manage her canine contact, so that she doesn't surprise or upset a poor wee pooch and suffer a snap or a yap in her direction.

But imagine if she ran up to a stray dog and just yanked on its ear... it'd be more than a snap or a yap she'd suffer...it could be a whole lot worse.

And so another graphic dog image (dogs get a rough ride in Proverbs) is meant to warn us about foolishness, this time in terms of jumping feet first into an argument or a quarrel that has nothing to do with you. Now I don't think it's telling us to just walk on past every argument...if we can be helpful in calming or bringing reason to a situation then we should do that carefully...but it is warning about the danger of blundering in and suffering a snap, a yap, or something worse.

Therefore

So be careful stroking random dogs today...and definitely don't grab their ears...and be wise when it comes to dealing with other peoples arguments and quarrels.

WEEK 11 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 26:23-25

Like a coating of silver dross on earthenware
are fervent lips with an evil heart.

Enemies disguise themselves with their lips,
but in their hearts they harbour deceit.

Though their speech is charming, do not believe them,
for seven abominations fill their hearts.

Thought

Rec

Therefore

In

WEEK 12

SERMON / PROVERBS 31:10-31

REMEMBER

CHARM IS DECEPTIVE,
AND BEAUTY IS FLEETING;
BUT A WOMAN
WHO FEARS THE LORD
IS TO BE PRAISED.

PROVERBS 31:30

REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

CHRIST IS ENOUGH / **HILLSONG**
DOXOLOGY (ROMANS 11) / **ANDREW PETERSON**

WEEK 12 / READING 1

Text - Proverbs 31:10-20

A wife of noble character who can find?

She is worth far more than rubies.

Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value.

She brings him good, not harm,
all the days of her life.

She selects wool and flax
and works with eager hands.

She is like the merchant ships,
bringing her food from afar.

She gets up while it is still night;
she provides food for her family
and portions for her female servants.

She considers a field and buys it;
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.

She sets about her work vigorously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.

She sees that her trading is profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at night.

In her hand she holds the distaff
and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

She opens her arms to the poor
and extends her hands to the needy.

Thought

One wise person said that Proverbs 31 portrays “before us who wisdom is in all of her glory and all of her love and in all of her labour on behalf of the neighbour” and so because Jesus is “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24) we should “...take whatever theme is emerging and then ask yourself, okay, how does this apply to the person in the ministry of Christ?”

The ways of wisdom in this passage start with trustworthiness...full confidence...and so loved ones lacks nothing of value, are brought good, not harm and are provided with what they need. And this

provision and sacrificial generosity spills over to the poor and the needy who find someone they can put their trust in also.

It isn't a massive jump to see this in the life of Jesus, is it?

One who is trustworthy...if we are faithless, he remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13)

One whose loved ones lack nothing of value...The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing (Psalm 23:1)

One who brings good to those who trust him and not harm...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28)

One who provides what we need...His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life (2 Timothy 1:3)

One who cares for the poor and needy...The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor (Luke 4:18)

Therefore

Proverbs asks us who we're trusting in...and thereby encourages us to put our trust in Jesus the wisdom of God. Psalm 146 contrasts it with putting our trust in anyone else.

Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.
When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.
Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.

So today put your trust in Jesus, for your good and for all you need, no matter how poor and needy you are!

WEEK 12 / READING 2

Text - Proverbs 31:21-25

When it snows, she has no fear for her household;

for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

She makes coverings for her bed;

she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

Her husband is respected at the city gate,

where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them,

and supplies the merchants with sashes.

She is clothed with strength and dignity;

she can laugh at the days to come.

Thought

If you were to describe what you think typical weather might be in the Middle East, I don't think snow would be on the list...although I've just googled a ski resort in Lebanon! Who knew!

Anyway, snow isn't the most likely event in most of the Middle East, so this image of this woman of valour having no fear even in the most unexpected weather events...and having an ability to laugh at the days to come...speaks to a confidence and assurance in her security and safety no matter what!

Jesus is the most assured person in the universe, not only knowing about, but having experienced the power of resurrection and the unshakability of God's plans and purposes...and so he has no fear no matter what comes, no matter what the enemy tries to do...he laughs at the days to come, mocking what the enemy will try to do, but also with a joy about what is to come in terms of the restoration of all things.

Therefore

So if you're anxious about what may come today, tomorrow or whenever, Jesus invites you to a life of confident assurance in the one who is the most assured person in the universe...the one who is in control of all things, the one who is working all things together to his

ends and the one who will be with us and for us, not matter what the enemy throws at us.

WEEK 12 / READING 3

Text - Proverbs 31:26

She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

Thought

I love listening to talk radio above music radio...particularly talk about sport...and particular talk about imminent football transfers. And the reason I love it, is because I love listening to people who know what they're talking about, experts who have knowledge and understanding.

This woman in Proverbs 31 must have been someone who could have had her own radio programme, with record breaking listener figures, because she speaks with wisdom...and this wisdom is centred of God's law and God's love...that's what the two Hebrew words, *torah* & *hesed*, for "faithful instruction" literally mean.

And again it's no jump to get to Jesus and his wise teaching, on God's law and love. Not only did he leave people amazed with his teaching, he left people amazed with his living. If you want to know what it looks like to live according to God's law, the spirit of God's law, the heart of God's law, look at Jesus...and if you want to know about God's faithful, committed love to people who keep messing up their keeping of his law, look to Jesus as the one who gave his life to purchase our forgiveness.

Therefore

So are you listening to Jesus wisdom day to day...his teaching about God's law and God's love that will lead us into fullness of life forever?

WEEK 12 / READING 4

Text - Proverbs 31:27-30

She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

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

"Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all."

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

Thought

The global medical aesthetics market weighed in at \$75.6 billion in 2023 and is expected to reach \$212.5 billion by 2032 (an interesting contrast is that the World Food Programme estimate it would take \$40 billion for the next ten years to end world hunger). People are spending huge amounts of money to get praise for something that ultimately is fleeting.

Yet ultimately it should be our character that defines us, that brings us praise...and here Proverbs tells us what should be at the heart of that character...the fear of the Lord!

Isaiah 53:2 prophesied that the coming Messiah...

...had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

And Isaiah 11:3 told us that the coming Messiah...

...will delight in the fear of the Lord.

And that fear of the Lord, led him in sacrificial service to the cross where he gave his life for mine and for yours.

Therefore

So as you brush, pluck, gel, plump, shave and whatever else,
remember that the fear of the Lord trumps fading beauty.

WEEK 12 / READING 5

Text - Proverbs 31:31

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

Thought

As Proverbs 31 closes out, it pushes us to think not just of what this woman's hands have done, but what the hands of the one who is wisdom in person has done...and then honour him for it.

As the Bible closes out in the book of Revelation, John describes a vision of heaven in Revelation 5...he sees "a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne" and he hears a song from "four living creatures and the twenty-four elders" honouring the Lamb for all that his hands have done...

you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth."

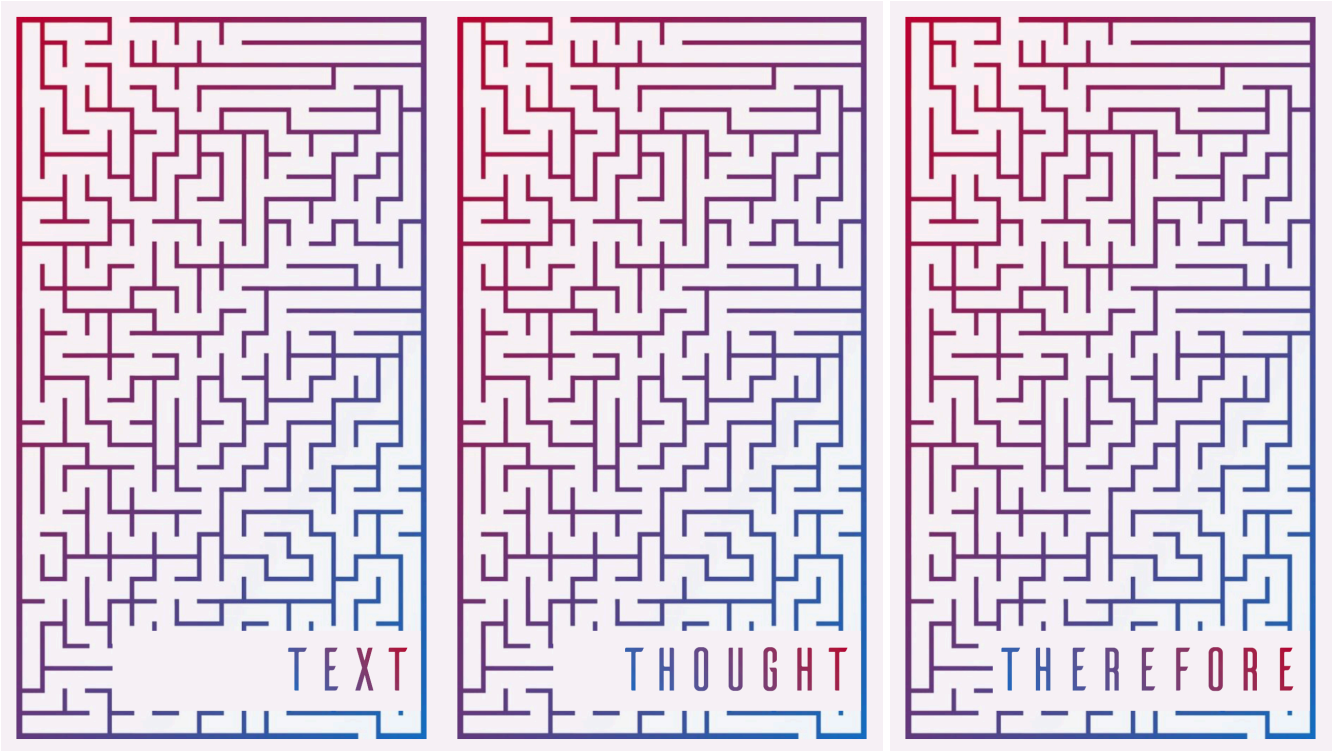
And then he sees "many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand...and they're singing..

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and praise!"

And then he sees and hears "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"

Therefore

As we head towards Sunday, let this verse spur you towards honour and praise for Jesus, not just in your words as you sing but also in your ways as you live.



GROWING & GOING

/AS FAMILY
/AS FOLLOWERS
/IN PRAYER

/WITH THE
/GOOD NEWS
/OF JESUS