

## PROVERBS 3: 21-35

- <sup>21</sup> My child, do not let these escape from your sight:  
keep sound wisdom and prudence,  
<sup>22</sup> and they will be life for your soul  
and adornment for your neck.
- <sup>23</sup> Then you will walk on your way securely  
and your foot will not stumble.
- <sup>24</sup> If you sit down, you will not be afraid;  
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.
- <sup>25</sup> Do not be afraid of sudden panic,  
or of the storm that strikes the wicked;  
<sup>26</sup> for the LORD will be your confidence  
and will keep your foot from being caught.
- <sup>27</sup> Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,  
when it is in your power to do it.
- <sup>28</sup> Do not say to your neighbour, 'Go, and come again;  
tomorrow I will give it'—when you have it with you.
- <sup>29</sup> Do not plan harm against your neighbour  
who lives trustingly beside you.
- <sup>30</sup> Do not quarrel with anyone without cause,  
when no harm has been done to you.
- <sup>31</sup> Do not envy the violent  
and do not choose any of their ways;
- <sup>32</sup> for the perverse are an abomination to the LORD,  
but the upright are in God's confidence.
- <sup>33</sup> The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked,  
but God blesses the abode of the righteous.
- <sup>34</sup> Towards the scorners the LORD is scornful,  
but to the humble God shows favour.
- <sup>35</sup> The wise will inherit honour,  
but stubborn fools, disgrace.

There are three parts to this passage from Proverbs.

1) 21-26 – Wisdom is such a rich and multi-dimensional word. In previous passages, words to supplement the meaning of wisdom were words like knowledge and understanding. In this passage the word that brings forth another side of wisdom is prudence (vs.21). What is prudence? Prudence is a practical word. Prudence is acting with care, caution and good judgement. It is wisdom in looking ahead and carefully measuring the consequences of one's actions. Prudence is not fear. It is thinking through how our actions affect the lives and the

environment around us. Prudence is super-important especially in our world today where fast action is prized above taking the pause to think it all through some more.

And what will the wisdom of prudence offer you? It will provide groundedness and confidence in making good choices, peace of soul and soundness of conscience.

The one danger to prudence is fear and especially “the sudden panic or the storm that strikes the wicked” (vs.25). The opposite of prudence is rashness. We make rash decisions and bad decisions when we are afraid or angry and jump quickly into things. We get drawn in by the drama and the ups and downs of life. Of course this happens because we care and are invested in life and the lives around us. But rashness and precipitous actions lead to bad consequences and harm to others and to us all too often. The wisdom in prudence is in resistance to fear and the triggers of anger through a disciplined trust in God where we weigh our actions according to the values of love before we commit to them, however urgent and pressing they may seem.

How important is prudence in the cultivation of wisdom for you?

2) 27-31 – These verses are proverbs rooted in loving our neighbour inspired by our reverence for God. Read these verses again and reflect on ways they may be relevant for you. In commenting on all the “do not” commandments in the bible, Protestant Reformer John Calvin would say that we should also flip them around into “do this.” So, how would these “do not” proverbs become a positive doing? We should do good to everyone we can whenever we can do it (vs.27). We should give to our neighbour whenever we can and not wait till tomorrow to help when we can help today (vs.28). We should care for our neighbour, especially when they’ve been harmed or are extra vulnerable (vs.29). Make peace with your neighbour, seek opportunities to connect and offer kindness, and if there is disagreement make your peace and walk away rather than hit back (vs.30). Violence is not just open force. It is also about control, coercion and pressure. Wherever possible we must make room for our neighbour to choose for themselves rather than push them in the way we want (vs.31). This is my positive rendition of these proverbs. What would yours be?

3) 32-35 – These final verses of proverbs describe two opposite kinds of people. There are the “upright...righteous (meaning: just)...humble... and wise” and there are the “perverse... wicked... scorners... and stubborn fools”. While I’d like to say I am upright, righteous, humble and wise and definitely not perverse, wicked, scornful and stubborn a fool, I don’t know anyone who is all one and not at least something of the other, especially when things are difficult, stress is high and people trigger us. And yet, proverbs are intended to inspire us toward a better way of being and away from a worse way of being. The word wisdom captures it. And while there is always the promise of blessing and reward and the threat of curse and punishment (vs.35), we know that in the real world where wisdom is not prized above money, power, popularity and recognition, wisdom has to be its own reward and treasured by those

who also share such valuing. And sometimes, choosing the way of wisdom over material or social self-interest and security can cost us.

Do you value wisdom above all other things in your life? Will you keep seeking it and rooting yourself in it going forward? Remember how the book of Proverbs begins: “The beginning of all wisdom is the fear (reverence) of the Lord.”

PRAYER: Grant us wisdom, O God, and grant us growth in wisdom as we seek it ever more diligently. Show us the way, especially as it pertains to our lives, our relationships, our struggles, our opportunities and possibilities too. Show us who we are not simply in our weaknesses and frailties, but in our beauty and potential yet to be fulfilled too, because that is how you see us. Give us peace in who we are and where we are even now. For we do not have to strive to be something in order to be beloved by you. Amen.