



**Proverbs:  
Wisdom for Ministry and Wisdom  
for Life**

**A 12-WEEK BIBLE STUDY BY**  
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# Session 1

## True Wisdom

**Prov. 8:10-16, 22-31**

Moral instructions and scientific facts are good but they are not enough. Most decisions we make do not require a scientific equation to be solved or a moral judgment to be made. We need WISDOM. We will make a mess of our lives without Wisdom! In this course, we will discover the keys to Wisdom, the way Wisdom works in real life situations and how you can benefit from this in ministry. In addition, you will discover ways Wisdom is needed in real life situations that can be replicated so every person in your church can learn to use Wisdom in their own lives.

### **I. The Importance of Wisdom (8:10-11)**

- A. Wisdom is more important than anything else in the world
- B. The greatest power you have been given is the ability to handle a situation and even flourish in any circumstance no matter what you face. A small minority of people ever get their life to a satisfactory place of extreme peace and comfort, and if they do almost no one can keep it there.
- C. Having money, fame and power are all the things the world teaches that you need to make it in successfully. Religion tells you that need morality to make it. Science says you need facts backed up by air-tight evidence. All of these are good, but there is something more. We need Wisdom!
- D. Wisdom is needed even when you are doing something ethically good - poor person you might hurt rather than help because you don't know the lives of the people around work.
- E. Most decisions are more complex. They take knowledge and others principles or convictions. But there are some decisions where the rules of knowledge and principles do not apply. It's not cut and dry like these... (Marry? Career? Children? Live? Risk or Safe?).
- F. Knowledge and Morality are not enough to figure out some areas of life. You get stressed out and filled with anxiety because you face situations where you have no wisdom and you have no idea what to do.

## II. The Definition of Wisdom (12-16)

A. **Insight (14)** - (Benaw) Knowing how things really work

B. **Prudence (12)** -Knowing how things really are

C. **Decrees (15)** - Knowing what I should do about it

"Becoming competent with regard to the realities of life." - They have morals and knowledge but they right thing even when the rules don't apply/even when the way is unclear or not easily seen. *They do the right thing even when it's not clear what should be done.*

*1 Samuel 15-17 Absalom - Ahithophal (Absalom's counselor, very wise) Husai with David. Go back to Absalom's court to try to overthrow. Absalom makes a choice when he should attack David now or later. Ahithophel says go now. Husai appeals to fear and vanity "This is David! Tough, uncatchable, alludes you...your poll numbers will sink. Everyone loves you! Don't risk it. Wait it out. Absalom doesn't go. Ahithophel goes home and hangs himself. Rejected wisdom...no chance to win.*

It's not enough to work on being good,, you have to work on being wise.

## III. The Problem with Wisdom (22-31)

### A. Wisdom was used to make all things

- In all ancient *Eastern cultures*, creation, the material world was seen as an illusion. Therefore, the material world is like an accident, not the reality.
- *Western cultures* saw the creation as a power struggle between one god or the other...cosmic battles.
- ONLY here, do we have Creation being built, not on an illusion or power struggle but on Wisdom. Here you have the Creator designing everything like an artist passionately enjoying his work.
- Fabric pattern to all reality - If Wisdom made the world, then those who live there can live wisely. In other words, when a person obeys the laws of which Creation stands (gravity, thermodynamics, then things work) but you don't...breakdown and disaster.
- So, they must be a pattern to Relational fabric so that if you obey the relational laws relationships will work but if you go against them then they will fail.

- Same thing with your spiritual life.
- Foolishness is going against those patterns to try and make life work independently of how Creation was designed.
  1. **You have to admit there is a Pattern** - God has made the world with a design, with rules, with purpose, with principles.
  2. **You cannot know it all** - somethings are seemingly hidden from

Chapters 10-15 it tells how Wisdom makes life work

- A. If you work hard you will prosper. If you're lazy you will be poor.
- B. If you live according to moral absolutes your life will go well
- C. If you live a wicked life, your life will not go well.
- D. If you raise a child well then they will grow up to be responsible as an adult.

That's where most people live. Yes! Work hard and get the best result for life. BUT,

Chapter 16 it switches to people who live this way but their life doesn't go well. Some people are poor because of oppression. Some kids are raised right but they still mess their lives up.

Here's what he is saying, You can do all the right things but life can still be a struggle, kids can still rebel, you can still lose your job, people can still gossip about you and ruin your reputation in front of others.

**Conservative Fool** (live morally, your life will go well) **JOB** - friends come in...you must be a sinner. You can think that working hard will make it all better OR, You can think you are exclusively responsible for your life's outcome, that there is no higher power, no god...you are a **Liberal Fool** - Both are wrong!

These Proverbs were written to be studied in Community with people who can speak into our lives and where we can be challenged.

#### **IV. The Clue to the Solution (32-36)**

This book was designed to be a manual but they are a collection of sayings you have to connect. Manual used in a school for young men. Wisdom is written as if it was a

woman. The Proverbs want you to want Wisdom like a man wants a woman, passionately, lovingly...Long for Wisdom!

What if the Wisdom of God was more than poetry? **What if the Wisdom of God was a Person?** A Person you could know and love? Then when you were in a relationship with this person, it made you wise? Then all of us who didn't have the mentors or counselors or guides would have the Ultimate mentor, counselor and guide!

For all those who thought wisdom was unattainable or unreachable and that you had to go get it yourself, work hard to find it...**Then one day a Person steps up and says this...**

"Come unto Me all you labor and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of ME. For I am meek and lowly and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light". Who would or who could say that?

Every religion and culture says, "Get learning. Get wisdom. Get the resources you need to make life work."

BUT, Jesus says, "Come to Me. Learn of Me. Rest in Me." Why? Jesus is saying, "I am Wisdom!" It's the only effort that will not exhaust you.

John 1:1 (Logos - Wisdom), 14

Meaning of Life is not power or struggle for your place in the world, but to know God in love! To know His Love that existed eternally.

**I am the Wisdom of God to us** - I am the ultimate argument for the existence of God. **What God did not send was an air-tight argument? What if God sent an air-tight Person?** Go through the life of Jesus and see what you get. You will be shocked to meet someone who was perfect.

**I am the Wisdom of God for us** - so that you may know Him and be known by Him. He comes to live our life for us. **Jesus lived the life we should have lived because we couldn't do it.**

**I am the Wisdom of God with you** - Only Jesus Christ will be with you through every situation in life so that you will never be alone and know how to make the right decisions even when they are hard!

# Session 2

## The WellSpring of Wisdom that Shapes Character

Proverbs 4:11-27

- Wisdom is the Competence with regard to the realities and complexities of life.
- Wisdom is not less than being moral and good, but its quite a bit more. It's knowing what the right decision or right course of action is in the vast majority of life situations the moral rules don't address.
- "Wisdom is not having a right technique that helps you make right choices and decisions, but it's having character that enables you to make the right choices and decisions where the rules don't apply." How do you get that character that accords with discipline?

### 1. Wisdom's Progression (Development) - (11-19)

- **Living life is like walking a path** - life is not running (even though it can get busy and fast-paced), but it's more like walking. It's a daily step, step, step, the routine of life. Steps take you down a path to places where you were not before.
1. This is the bible's way of teaching you that your character is developed, not by the dramatic moments of life but by the daily choices you make, the smallest decisions, the ones that seem insignificant.
  2. **Verses 14-16** You start off with a choice, but if you start down this path, this path of evil intention and corrupt character, your thoughts are continually on who is ahead of you at work, who is ahead of you in your family, who do you need to bring down so they do not get the promotion you should have or gain more money than you. **It's an ADDICTION.** To what? To the thought or belief that YOU should be higher up than the other person. "I'm as good as that guy or that girl! I'm as good as you." Compare yourself - the more absorbed you are, the more you will be addicted to the downfall of others.
  3. **Superiority Complex or an Inferiority Complex** is both self-absorption! You're always thinking that others are getting ahead of you. **(17, 19) - where does this lead them?** To deep darkness. They are out of touch with reality. Their lives are consumed with envy, jealousy and they will do whatever it takes to get ahead...whatever it takes. But, the worst thing is that they don't why things are not going right in their lives...they get bitter and

totally out of touch with reality. They use and abuse relationships and make a mess out of life.

4. How does this happen? How do you get to this darkness? The PATH - step by step.
  - Experience something good - You're not deeply grateful or moved but take it for granted as if you deserve it. You're on the path to self-pity, your rights, what you think you deserve. It starts you on the path that ruins you.
  - Every time you get into a conflict - You can't admit you are wrong (if you are) and you blame-shift, rationalize, you defend yourself and make excuses.
  - "Every time you make a decision based on the principle: your life for my interests rather than my life for your interests...you're on your way down. Until you're out of control."

If you can understand this, it will help you with one of the most difficult parts of the Bible and that is Eternal Punishment, Hell. We think of God in terms of joyously sending people to Hell if they do not believe. But when you read the Bible, it shows you something quite remarkable and alarming. Your character is a part of this whole thing. The Bible teaches that when you die, your soul keeps on going.

**C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce***, "Christianity asserts that we are going to go on forever and that must either be true or false. Now there are a good many things that wouldn't be worth bothering about if I was only going to live 80 years or so, but I had better bother about if I am going to go on living forever. Perhaps my bad temper or my jealousy are gradually getting worse so gradually that the increase in my lifetime will not be very noticeable but it might be absolute hell in a million years. In fact, if Christianity is true, hell is precisely the correct technical term for it. Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others, but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer do so. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or to even enjoy the mood, but just the grumble itself going on and on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God 'sending us' to hell. In everyone of us there is something growing, which will be Hell unless it is nipped in the bud."

If Christianity is true and there is a hell, "No one spends eternity in hell except those who can choose it, and continue to prefer those conditions rather than being in the presence of someone bigger than them."

Your attitude that you want to be better than others, you want to bring them down so that you can rise up and be more than them, those choices will set your character and if they are not redeemed by Christ will haunt you and create a monster within you that you will live with forever!

## **II. Wisdom's Source (Origin) - vv. 20-21, 23**

- **The Heart** - not about our emotions, but our very life. It's how we perceive everything in life. When your heart is right, what is right?



- Words (24)
  - Eyes (25)
  - Feet or your Behavior/Actions (26)
- From your heart is what you really believe, the things you love the most. "If I have that, I know I will have significance and worth."
  - Every human heart is looking for Beauty that is someone or something to merge with, a beauty that we can share in so that we can merge with it.
  - Everything that you long for or believe gives you significance and value and worth flows from your heart. What does this have to do with Wisdom?

**"Whatever you have decided in your heart is its ultimate love, determines all the way you make choices in your life."**

- A. **Money** - If having money is not just a good thing but the Ultimate thing for your life, you're going to look for jobs that don't particularly fit who you are, your passions or ability to have balance in your life, and you will end up compromising, burnout working so hard or make lifestyle decisions that could ruin your family, or hurt others because you have to make more money or do unethical things to keep moving up the ladder. And, the things you most want in the world are now unattainable.
- B. **Marriage** - If marriage is not just a good thing for you but the Ultimate thing for you, the thing from which your heart is settled, the thing that you cannot imagine life without, then one of two things will be true: You will either be too picky! Or, You will be so desperate to find a mate that you choose the wrong person.
- C. **Children** - If your children are the Ultimate thing in your life, then you will either over correct them, expecting them to be perfect or under-correct them trying to be their best friend!
- D. **Work** - If work is the most important thing of your heart that will impact every relationship, your time spent with your wife, your children, your friendships...If work is your Ultimate means to getting everything you want then you have placed your life in an endless, vicious cycle that will only lead to frustration and despair.

If you don't get Wisdom, the things you most want out of life will be undermined and life will be come a disillusionment filled with unfulfilled expectations and unnecessary stress.

If anything becomes or is a replacement for God, if there is something that you can point to and say, "If I only had that or could only do this, then I could have real joy", then you will not be able to truly know God and know Wisdom.

**BUT,**

- IF God is more important than money then you can make right decisions that can help you financially.



- If God is more important than being married, then you will be in the right position to find the person God wants for your life.
- If God is more important than your children, then you will be in the right position to make good decisions for your children.

God has to be the center of your heart, the passion of your desires, the craving of your soul... if He is not, then you cannot have true, lasting and unshakeable wisdom. Everything you truly want in life will be undermined and lost if all you live for is your heart's desire that is divorced from God's wisdom.

When your heart is putting its claws into something besides God, you can't change! You can't change your heart's desires and when that kind of person dies, their eternity is then defined by the emptiness of self-want, self-rule and the endless dissatisfaction of wanting what you truly cannot obtain.

You know how deeply you want what your heart wants: Approval by Others, by Your Family, by Your CoWorkers...the feeling of self-worth or value or Need to feel accomplished.

Augustine said, "All human beings are curved in on themselves. They're self-centered, their twisted because they have chosen certain things, idols of the heart that they think will give them control, will give them the glory and beauty they are looking for, and so they are twisted in on themselves. They are facing away from God and away from others. They are curved in."

Martin Luther, when he read this, he freaked out. Confessor (6 hours): "Martin, it's as if you call every fart a sin." Luther said, "But, Everything we do in this world and all the evil in the world come from self-centeredness. The whole reason I became a monk was to escape self-centeredness but now that I have come to help the poor, to fight against injustice and to be God's hands and feet, I do it to feel noble. I confess to feel humble. I've come to realize that even my piety is about me...it's self-centeredness." What's the answer then?

### **III. Wisdom's Transformation**

The only way for your heart to change is for you to get a greater beauty, a greater treasure than anything else you could ever pursue in life. If anything in this world satisfies you more than God then you can't know Him. You have to give that up and see Him as the greatest beauty of all, one that you are willing and ready to pursue above all things. You can't try for it. Move around things in your life to get a better handle it. NO!

#### **John 14:1-6 He is the WAY!**

Only when He melts your heart away from everything else and you allow Him access to every desire you have can He change your heart and know His wisdom that will change your character and the path of your life.

# Session 3

## Training in Wisdom

**Prov. 3:1-12; 30:1-4**

Last week, we talked about how wisdom addresses the complexities and realities of life. That wisdom is not the same as moral values or ethical values. You might want to help someone who is poor, but without knowing the complexities and realities of life for them, you could do more harm than good. It's not enough to be a person of vision or of high moral values if you are not a person of wisdom.

Why?

Wisdom is the ability to know what is the right thing to do in the 80% of life situations to which the moral rules do not apply. Knowing what to do in the tough decisions takes wisdom.

HOW DO WE DEVELOP WISDOM?

### **1. The Path of Wisdom**

- (v. 6) Wisdom in the Bible is not a Door, but a Pathway over a long period of time.
- Life is not about figuring out techniques (HOW To books).
- People often ask, "How do I know what God wants me to do?" We look for this many different ways. People often say, "I have peace about it. Shouldn't I have peace if I know that God is in this or leading me to do this?" Or, "I read this Bible verse, could this be God's will?" Or, "I opened my Bible, closed my eyes and pointed at a verse..." "I saw a butterfly that came down from heaven and it flew on this car. Is that God telling me to buy that car?" People look for Signs - You have a brain, make a decision! Without wisdom, all you have are techniques.
- The Bible teaches that over time, you BECOME a person who naturally knows how to make the wise choice. Over time, time spent reading God's word, putting God's word into practice in your everyday life and trusting Him in every decision

you make, then and only then can you become a person of wisdom. It takes time to become that person.

## **2. The Process of Wisdom**

- What are the steady, normal things you do that will give you this wisdom?
  - A. **Knowing God (v. 3)** - Steadfast Love and Faithfulness are always used to describe an intimate, loving and covenant relationship with God. The word LOVE in Hebrew means an industrial strength, unending, unshakable love, where God is committed to you under any circumstances. Now, what does this mean to bind them around your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart? It means that it's not enough for you to know God's loves you, but you have to find ways to pound that deep into your heart that God loves you and He is absolutely committed to you and He will never leave you or forsake you.

Why? The bible teaches that wise people have a calm about them, an inner peace, and inner poise that no matter what they face in life, their confidence and assurance is in the Lord.

- B. **Knowing Yourself (v 5)** - Wise people are keenly aware of their foolishness. Foolish people are the ones who think they are wise, they lean on their own understanding. They believe they are all they need. But, when you can say, "I've been a fool! I've been a fool!" You are headed quickly toward wisdom. You see, wise people do not lean on their own understanding but Trust in the Lord, the One who knows it all! Being wise is being in touch with reality. You have to know who you are...your flaws, your places of vulnerability and your places of weakness. When you are always looking and pointing out people's flaws and criticizing them, then you are a fool. Fools are more concerned about themselves, looking better than others. You have to admit who you are, that you are flawed and without help or hope. That is why knowing who God is IS so important. It would be awful to realize who you are without having someone who loves you accept you for who you are and willingly change you. You'll deny who you are and not be able to admit it.
- C. **Knowing Your Friends (v. 1)** - You will never find wisdom by yourself. The fool is an individualist. A Wise person is the person who is unsure about his own understanding but searches out for people who have exhibited wisdom to counsel them. Too often, people just want to be told what to do by going online or to a seminar. The place the Bible tells us we get this is in community.

You get with people who are also walking this path with God and learn with them and from them.

- D. **Knowing God's Way for Making Good Choices (v. 1b)** - How do you do this? You have to master the manual that God's gives you, which is the Bible. Take God's word into your heart, meditate on the words of Scripture. Then, put them into practice. Let me give you two things that might help:

### **1. GROW Bible method**

**G** *What GRABBED You? What stood out the most?*

**R** *What did you REALIZE about God? People?*

**O** *How would you OWN it? How would a person apply this passage? What changes would need to be made?*

**W** *How will you specifically and practically WALK it out this week? Write it out.*

### **2. Praying the Hand**

**Thumb** - the people closest to you like family and close friends

**First Finger** - people who teach you

**Middle Finger** - people in positions of power

**Ring Finger** - people who are unbelievers or who are suffering/pain

**Fourth Finger** - pray for yourself and what you need

- E. **Knowing Trouble in the Proper Way (11-12)** - Up to this point, you see that when you use wisdom it leads to better living, right living. But here, you see that no every moment in life goes great. "Wisdom does not avoid suffering, it transforms suffering into more wisdom." So that, when you are walking in

wisdom, you will be able to go through difficult times and grow into more and more wisdom, making life easier to manage and even doing life with joy.

Suffering has many different faces - some suffering is hard and other suffering is devastating!

How do we get the wisdom to deal with the worst of kinds of suffering?

### **3. The Man Off the Mountain (30:1-4)**

- This man sees himself as someone who does not have wisdom but thinks more in line with the animals.
- Look at 30:4 What is he saying? He is saying that when he is going through a tough time and needs to know what to do, how wonderful would it be if he could climb to a high peak and look out over the valley and see the Big Picture, see what is really going on.
- Who has the Big Picture? God does!
- He asks, "What is His name, and what is His son's name?" What is the answer?  
**John 3:13** Jesus talks with a man named Nicodemus who is a religious leader looking for wisdom. Jesus says, "I am the man off the mountain. I came down from heaven to bring you ultimate wisdom. But I am not going to give it in a way you might expect. I am coming as the ultimate innocent sufferer to experience the wrath of God and all injustice so that I can give you what you do not deserve, to crush injustice and give you wisdom beyond all things!"

**III. Time Magazine article, "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?"** - There was an interview with an African American writer whose mother had been brutally murdered by her mother's boyfriend.... Years of anger and doubts - Graduate class studying the literature of the Bible and the life of Jesus when she realized that Jesus didn't just suffer for us, but He suffered **with** us. She said, **"I suddenly realized that Jesus knew what it was like to be beaten to death by someone who should have loved Him." On the Cross, God confronts the grave reality of our hopeless situation and responds with Great LOVE and Great GRACE that came with the Greatest COST.**

# Session 4

## The Order of Things

**Prov. 5:15-23; Rev. 21:1-5**

Wisdom is Competence in regards to the realities of life. Wisdom is not less than being moral and good, but it is far more. It's knowing the right thing to do in the vast majority of life situations in which the moral rules do not apply.

- Here is why so many people are captivated by the lure of religions. Churches, synagogues and temples want to multiply rules. Why? Because we do not want to have to think. We would rather be told what to believe and what to do. For religious leaders it also gives them greater control over the conduct of the people.
  - We don't want to have to master the human heart, the human nature, to think for ourselves, relationships, how things really work in the world...we would rather have a rule, something or someone to tell what we should do or how to handle a certain situation.
  - What is Reality? What does it mean to be in touch with reality?
- I. **The Persistence of Reality (v.16-20)** - Today's study will not address the specifics of these verses, we will do that later, but this study will focus on the wisdom and foolishness in general.

**There is a Divine Moral, Spiritual Order -  
Wisdom is recognizing that it is there and living within it.**

- **(v. 20) FORBIDDEN** (Alien or Strange) - what does this mean? It is not referring to their beliefs or race, but something much deeper and more personal. This word refers to something that is foreign or alien to your true nature. For example, if you were to get on a rocket and soar to Venus which is 96% Carbon Dioxide, 4% Nitrogen and 0% Oxygen and you were to open the door and take a big deep breath, what do you think would happen? Your lungs would be in an environment that doesn't fit their nature. The result would be breakdown and death. We see this in the law of gravity. Try going to the top of a building. No matter what you believe or how hard you try to convince yourself that jumping will take you up rather than

down, when you jump, you WILL fall down. Why? God has placed within space the Law of Gravity.

- God is saying that Adultery goes against our true nature. It is foreign to how He made us and it violates our physical nature. God is saying this, "There is a divinely established moral, spiritual order that is as persistent there as the physical order and when you do not follow His directions, you're hurting yourself."
- In the context of life, when the Bible tells us to forgive others, to not have sex outside of marriage, to tell the truth, to refuse to steal...to do any of these things fits who you are in the same way that we would say, "Don't jump off the top of First Baptist Church." To live on your own without God does not fit who God made you to be. If you refuse to forgive, if you choose to commit adultery, if you live dishonestly, then you are living in an environment that is foreign to your nature, foreign to the way I built you or created you. You were not built to work in that environment. Life will be out of order, it will not make sense, it will not work properly. "Disobedience to God creates an environment that is so opposite to your soul as ammonium is to your lungs."

## **II. The Problems with Reality (22-23)**

The Book of Proverbs is basically a group of sayings that gives us the ideal situation for living. In others words, if you live right, your life will go right. For example, "The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short." Or, "The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land." Or, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

***BUT, that is not how life always works...***

We have seen good people starve. We have seen hardworking people have their jobs taken away from them. We have seen people who lived close to God die at an early age. We have seen children who were raised by children who loved God deeply rebel and live immoral lives. We have seen people try and try to be good, but they still experience trouble.

***If this world is God's divinely ordered world, then something is wrong, something is broken!***

- Things do not always work out in an ideal way like we see in verses 22-23
- What we do see is that God is a God of judgement and accountability(v. 21)



God has created a divine moral order and does not leave us to our own schemes and devices. People have a real problem with this because they realize that if this is true then they become accountable for their actions. People do not like this because they have seen abuses of power in the name of God. Therefore, people have said that we need to get rid of this idea of God because it only leads to power struggles and injustice.

Author Leff, professor at Yale Law School, wrote an article for Duke Law School, who was an agnostic, someone who did not believe there was a God but was not sure. He said that people cannot argue for human rights if there is no God. Leff said that life without God means that no one can say with any authority that something is right or that something is wrong. Therefore, how we treated others could not be subject to any law because no one had the right to declare that anything was right or wrong. No matter what a court or congress said about something, it all came down to a human opinion or assertion. Who gets to determine one law over the other so that everyone has to obey it? The net result is that you cannot criticize or legitimately try to change any injustice in the world (slavery, sex trafficking, abuse of women, poverty by the hands of a corrupt government) because you have no absolute authority to base your moral disagreement. If you do not believe there is a god, then all you left is a naked use of power. You have people doing whatever is right in their own eyes. If a person does not believe in God, then they are left with no legitimate foundation for the order of life.

The religion of the world today is that no matter what we do, no one will be there to judge us. I can do whatever I want and no one can stop me. I am the master of my fate. It may be that believing in God, a higher moral order, leads some people to abuses and extreme forms of power, but NOT believing in God is far worse! That leads to even more abuses of power.

So, what do we do? Both views lead us to abuses and disorder on some level.

### **III. How it Gets Healed (Revelation 21:1-5)**

- What we do not see at the end of time is not people leaving reality but God stepping into reality. What is God doing? (v. 4) God is healing the old order of things.
- Verse 4 shows us that there are some things about this life that was not a part of God's original order: death. What happened? In Genesis 3 something happened

that transformed the way life was experienced. There was disintegration, breakdown and death. But, look at what happened before that (Genesis 1:1-2a).

- What happens when the Spirit of God hovers over the chaos? Life, Order - The closer you get to God, the more order and life you experience, but the farther you get from God the more disorder, chaos and un-creation.
- Look back at Revelation 21. God steps into reality to bring healing. Reality is broken and God steps in to heal the brokenness. Where does this healing come from? (v. 5) The THRONE. The throne is normally the seat of judgment, but here the throne is the source of healing. How could the Creator do this? Hebrews 4:13-16!
- Every other religion says that there is a judgment and you have to pass it. Even Buddhism teaches that if you did not do well enough you go back in the reincarnation cycle to try life again until you get it right.
- Christianity goes in a totally different direction - The Judge came to the earth and took up human flesh. He went to the cross to Himself pay for every person's sins and He experienced un-creation, disintegration and all those forces of disorder. In other words, God, the Judge came to be Judged. "On the cross, the One who made us was un-made, so He could remake us. The One who made us was un-made so we could be remade."
- Only until you take this into your life will you be able to know wisdom.
- The Gospel gives us three implications:
  1. **Believing in Jesus makes it safe to believe in God and God's justice.**
  2. **The Gospel makes it safe to read Proverbs** - there is a divine order and it needs to be healed. When we read the Book of Proverbs we see them as principles not promises. That makes a difference because life is broken. Generally, if you follow these principles your life will go better, but it doesn't have to. When we acknowledge this and see life through the lens of the Gospel, then we are able to work through life properly and get to the principles in the book.
  3. **The Gospel gives you radical moderation.** People with wisdom do not live on the extremes. How do people do this? The Gospel. They are overjoyed by what they see in God's new creation (Revelation 21:2)

Bottomline? No matter what you face or what life looks, nothing compares to what life will be like with God forever. Nothing compares to what you look like when God

covers you and presents you to Himself. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is what makes sense of reality and makes reality something not to dread but to embrace. How? By embracing God, He gives you all you need to see life from His point of view.

# Session 5

## Wisdom for Dealing with Anger

**Proverbs 14:29-30; 15:1, 18; 16:32; 19:11, 19; 24:28-29; 25:21-22; and Jeremiah 45:5**

This bible study is about what the Bible says about anger and how you can utilize anger in the proper way. The Bible has so much to say about this human emotion. Wisdom is knowing why we have anger and how to use it in a way that is productive and destructive.

How do we handle anger in ourself and in others?

### 1. Dangerous Power

*Proverbs 14:29-30 "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot."*

Anger has the power to destroy. Anger is explosive in nature. Anger is the dynamite of the soul.

- A. Anger can disintegrate your body. Nothing harms your physical body more than anger.
- B. Anger disintegrates community. When you get angry you throw around words like weapons. They wound and hurt people.
- C. Anger disintegrates your wisdom. When you cool off from being angry and doing or saying things that were unkind, how do you feel? Awful! Why? You have not used wisdom!
- D. Anger disintegrates the will. Anger is the most like an addictive substance. You can admit almost anything about you except anger. Anger leads you to denial. When you are angry, you never think you are in the wrong and you will do almost anything to justify your actions. The more you allow anger to dominate you and the more you deny it, the more anger fills your life.

## 2. Basic Goodness

*Proverbs 15:18 "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention."*

*Proverbs 16:32 "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."*

*Proverbs 19:11 "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."*

The Bible says that there is some good that can come from anger. From the bible's perspective, it's not NO anger or blow up anger, but slow anger. We are to be slow to anger, not quick tempered. The bible says in Eph. 4:26, "Be angry, but do not sin." There are times when you should be angry. When are those times?

The bible says that to NOT get angry is Sin! What? Most people think that God does not want us to get angry, but that is not the case at all. What does the Bible teach?

God is slow to anger. When Moses met God on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34), God told Moses that He was the Lord, slow to anger. That was God's glory!

People only want to believe in a God of love, not one that gets angry. They believe that God cannot be a God of anger, but that is not good. To believe that God should or never could get angry is to believe in a God that does not love you. You see, if you have a god that cannot never get angry then you have a god that loves nothing. Why? Because anger is the emotion that compels us to action when someone or something we love is threatened. If we never get angry and we're indifferent, then it means we love nothing.

How would you respond to someone you love who is threatened?

True love always get angry. Anger in its uncorrupt origin, its pure form is love in motion toward someone who is under threat. That is why anger pulverizes or destroys!

This is why God, who often seems as if He is constantly angry, really is expressing His love toward those who are in danger to sin and its deceptive power.

What are the things that get you the most angry and ask, "What am I defending?"

What you are defending is what you love. You have an answer to what your heart loves the most.

If God is angry all the time its because He loves us!. Even Jesus who was perfect, got angry! Several times we see Jesus get angry. Why? Because Jesus was a man of pure love!

For individualistic cultures where the person rules their own life and insists on individual rights, you are encouraged to express your anger. In more family, moral cultures where there is a collective responsibility for one another's actions, you are encouraged to suppress your anger (never let it show). Neither are the picture God gives us in the Bible.

God sees anger's basic goodness and its destructive power. How do you balance between the two?

### 3. Why it Goes Wrong?

*Proverbs 19:19 "A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again."*

*Proverbs 24:28-29 "Do not testify against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, 'I will do to him as he has done to me' I will pay the man back for what he has done'."*

How can you have anger that is disproportionate to the cause? The reason is that we take things to their extremes. We make things that are good into things that we idolize. We make good things into ultimate things.

St. Augustine talked about Disordered Loves. Those things that are good to love but get out of order. They are good but then they become the main thing, the ultimate things in our lives! That is, we look to people or things to give us worth, value and purpose rather than to God, then those good things or good people take the place of God.

When we love good things too much, more than God, then our emotions can get distorted. For example, if someone we love breaks up with us and we get sad, that is good, but when we go to the extreme and kill ourselves, then that good thing has become an ultimate thing. We love that person or thing more than we love God. God has been replaced. When this happens, we are not able to handle it emotionally because we have not been designed to make things or people ultimate things replacing God. But that happens all the time!

Disordered love leads to disordered anger.

- **Anger is disordered in its Cause** - Why do we get so much more angry about getting snubbed or disrespected than we are toward what is happening to people in other parts of the world or in our cities? Disordered love. There is nothing wrong with getting ticked off about something, but why are you so much more upset about it than the horrible injustices going on in the world? Augustine said, "You may believe in God, but if God's love is an

abstraction, if what you're really looking for is your self worth and security is people's approval or a good reputation or status then when anything gets between you and what you think you really have to have, you get extremely angry." As a result, our causes may not line up because of our ego or pride.

- **Anger is Ordered in its goal** - Ordered love is when you want to destroy the negative within the positive, in other words, when you see a negative thing in your child, you want to destroy the negative thing but not the child. In disordered anger, you don't want to just go after the problem, you want to go after the person. You don't want to just destroy the habit, you want to destroy the person with the habit. It's when you want vengeance!

*Level 1: Anger is on the surface, nothing that really hurts deeply, like small insults or wrongs*

*Level 2: Anger gets below the surface and is deep through betrayals, and injustices*

*Level 3: Anger goes deep and causes an eruption of emotion that is destructive.*

## **4. How it Can Be Healed**

- Admit your anger.** The key is to be angry well. Not to blow up or suppress it, but admit your anger and deal with it constructively.
- Analyze your anger** (Remember Proverbs 24:29 "Do not say, "I'll do to him..." - Self-talk) What makes you angry is not what has happened to you, but what you tell yourself has happened to you. It's not what you have lost but what you say to yourself that means. Your anger comes from what you believe, not from what people are doing to you. How is that? Because you have made what you want the most the most important thing and when you feel like that is being taken away, you become angry. What can people take away from you? Everything! However, there is One thing that no one can take away from you.

### **Here's an example:**

What if I run into a restaurant with only 20 minutes to eat and the waitress is slow?

The truth is that the reason I only have 20 minutes to eat is that I didn't plan my day that well and I only have 20 minutes to eat. So, if I get served in time, then I don't look foolish because no one will know that I did not plan my day well. However, if I do not get out in 20 minutes then everyone will know I haven't managed my time well but I will get ANGRY at the waitress. What am I defending? Myself!!

### **What do you have to have to live?**



Whatever that is, when it is threatened or taken away, your anger will cause destruction and control you the rest of your life.

### **C. Transform your anger**

*Proverbs 15:1 "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."*

*Proverbs 25:21-22 "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."*

*Jeremiah 45:5 "And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the Lord."*

When you become parent life gets very complicated and you are constantly put to the test. That child, when you cross his or her will, when you try to steer them in a direction that is healthy and productive, but to them they don't want to do it, they might say things like, "I don't love you. I hate you. You're ruining my life. You've never done anything good for me."

When that happens, there is nothing more painful than that. Even if you have been a bad parent, there are times you sacrifice. It's what love does. And to have someone you have given so much to say such hurtful things goes to the heart. This is now a test for the parent. What do you do? Three options:

**1. You can withdraw and allow them to go down the roads of self-destruction.**

**2. You can go in with guns blazing, go after them with your words!**

**3. You can do a surgical strike** - you have come in close, insist on the truth and absorb their anger without paying them back. You can save a child without allowing anger to win. Absorb the rage without paying back.

Now, do you realize what God has done! We don't want to admit that we are mad at God. But the proof is that when God came to us, when He became vulnerable, when God became killable, we killed Him. We are like the kid mad at their parent. We have hurled all kind of hurtful words toward God. We have rejected His love, His kindness and His truth in our life. We have pushed Him away in our anger, but God has come in close. He came to us! God didn't withdraw. He didn't come in with guns blazing. He went to the cross. He told us the truth and absorbed our anger without paying us back. He took all of our rage, all of our anger to the cross and died for us in our place. He took all the anger we deserved on Himself.

# Session 6

## Wisdom for Times of Envy

Proverbs 23:17-18; Psalm 73:1-5, 20-26

### 1. How to Understand Envy (Ps. 73:1-5)

- A. **Envy is simply wanting someone else's life.** We look at people's lives, the things they have or don't have, and rather than being happy for them, you weep because you do not have it yourself.
- B. **Envy is always about resentment.** We resent the things people have or the positions they hold or the lifestyle they have obtained. Praise focuses on what people have or do that is better than you and you encourage them, but in Envy you see it and resent them for it. "Envy is being unhappy at other people's happiness. Envy is weeping because people rejoice." Envy gets excited and rejoices when other people fall down. Envy is happy when people who have more than you fail or lose it all. Envy sheds no tear for those who have had much and suffered great loss. Envy Rejoices in their pain! Envy dances in their blood!

### 2. Why We Ought to Deal with Envy

Now, we know that most of the issues in Proverbs to this point have been obvious things we should deal with: Anger, Lust, Laziness, Pride, etc. All of these things hurt us and hurt others, but why envy? What is the big deal about it?

- A. **You have to deal with Envy because it hides itself!** More than any other of the deadly sins, envy hides itself because you do not want envy to be true of you. (Proverbs 6:16-19)

Joseph Epstein, Envy, secular atheist and writer, professor at Northwestern, "Most of us could still sleep decently if accused of anger or pride or lust or even greed, but to be accused of envy would by far be the worst. So clearly does such an accusation go

directly to character. The other sins, though all have the disapproval of religion, do not so thoroughly deeply demean, diminish and disqualify a person, but you see the stigma of envy is its enormous pettiness.”

What he is saying is that there is nothing so humiliating, so small as to admit to someone that you are envious, that you want what someone else has because you cannot find contentment or meaning in what you do have. It is so humiliating that we don't want to admit that we envy.

Psalm 73:21 “My heart was grieved when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.”

This man is admitting that he is envious and he doesn't like it. He honestly comes out with it. That is the first step toward getting a grip on your envy is admitting that you envy. Put it to a test:

- When see a bad person who has more money or power than you fall from power or lose their money, does that warm your heart?
- How about people you really like who have more than you, speak better than, get more attention than you...when they screw up, it's comforting?
- Envy rejoices when people weep.

### ***B. You have to deal with Envy because it Sucks...the life out of you!***

There nothing that sucks the joy out of your life like Envy. Nothing steals away the happiness of your life like wanting someone else's life.

Even with other sins (anger, lust, adultery, materialism) have temporary pleasure, but not with envy. There is nothing about envy that finds pleasure!!

### ***C. You have to deal with Envy because it poisons the ability for you to enjoy and be grateful for the life and things you have.***

Someone said that envy could be called “Comparison-itis”. You know that you are in the grips of Envy when nothing is good enough for you. Your job is not good enough, your home is not good enough, your car is not good enough, your body is not good enough, your life is not good enough, your marriage is not good enough...nothing is good enough. You're always comparing yourself to others or critical of what you don't have. You cannot enjoy the moment. There is always something wrong! Why? You're comparing yourself to someone else.

- **Beauty is one way we Envy.** We live in a culture that spreads this like cancer. Women, especially, are lured into believing that they do not look good enough. They need to look like this person or that person. What happens is that when you look in a mirror, you cannot enjoy what you see at all! You have been conditioned to think that because they look that way and that way is right way to look, that you are deficient and so you envy to be someone different.
- **Materialism is one way Envy.** We want someone else's job because they make more money and money is status and status is our culture is honor or esteem.
- **Prestige is one way we Envy.** We want to acclaim that another person is getting. We want people to think as highly or more highly about us than they do about the other person.

Jonathan Edwards when preaching on Envy said, "Never underestimate the spiritual power of envy."

Look at the very beginning where God puts Adam and Eve in a perfect environment and guess what? It wasn't good enough! Envy turned the Garden of Eden in everything that is ugly about our world.

***D. You have to deal with Envy because when you understand what you envy, you'll understand your own heart.***

Epstein later said in his book, "Envy might be the greatest roar shock test of all. Learn what you envy and you will know who you are." Tim Keller, in a podcast, pointed to Soren Kierkegaard, who called everyone to live before God. He calls every human being to build their identity on God, to center your life on God, make God the main source of your happiness, but Kierkegaard said, "Human beings are offended by this invitation (to build their identity on God) because they do not want anyone in their life superior to them. So instead of living our life before God, we live our life before other things." We live before people's approval or we live before money or we live before career or achievements or whatever. Kierkegaard goes on to say, "If you want to understand what it is you look to instead of God for your identity, if you want to understand what you look to for your justification for your existence...figure out your envies."

You see, if you replace God with anything else, if you find your identity and self-worth in anyone or anything else, you never truly be able to enjoy life. You will always be wanting what others have, never content with what God has given you, always trying to be someone else and you will be drained by envy!

Remember what Rocky wanted in the first movie? He wanted to go the distance. Why? He didn't want to be a "bum". You see, Rocky believed that his identity was wrapped up in boxing. He had to go the distance to prove that he was worth something. Whenever you find your identity in something other than God, you will be the victim of Envy!

### **3. Where Do We Take our Envy (Proverbs 23:17-18)**

- A. **You have to take your envy to the fear of the Lord.** What does that mean? The fear of the Lord is Worship. It's about being in awe of God, His beauty and His glory! This man here worshipped and experienced the wonder of God. He came into the presence of God and worshiped Him. This means to get to our senses: Taste and see that the Lord is good. Hear His voice in the sanctuary. Feel the wind of His Spirit. Touch the face of God. All of these expressions speak to the sense of our humanness. How does this deal with Envy?

***When you get into an experience with God that touches your soul, all of the sudden, you come face to face with someone greater than anything or anyone else you could ever desire, and the desire for anything or anyone else never truly satisfies.***

That is what God does to replace Envy in our lives! The cure is found in Worship! Look at Psalm 73:21-23. Here is a picture of grace! How can you know this grace? You see, every time we have needed God, He has been there with His hand to grab us, but He could only do this because when Jesus came to die on the cross, the Father was not there to grab His hand. When Jesus needed someone to rescue Him, there was no help. The Gospel says this: No matter how bad you have been, no matter how forsaken you have felt, when you have reached out for God, you realize that God has always had you by the hand unconditionally. How is this possible? Because God needed a payment for our sin. You had already been corrupted by sin, you were already an envious brute, ignorant and a beast, but Jesus who was perfect took on Himself our bruteness, our ignorance, our beastliness and gave us His hand so that when God reached down to us, He found a hand to grab.

Heb. 12:2 tells the story... "looking to Jesus, the founder and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."

**B. You have to take your heart to the future when envy does not exist**

Let's be honest, there are some good points to Envy. There's nothing wrong with wanting a good family, with wanting a decent body, with wanting to be heard by the masses, with wanting a good job or a good marriage...but if that is all you look for then Envy will rule your hearts. BUT, when you realize that the world to come that Christ is bringing fulfills all that is missing in our hearts and lives but in a way that glorifies God then your heart will find contentment.

**Psalm 73:25-26 This is the KEY!**

# Session 7

## Wisdom in Your Work

**Proverbs 8:1-4; 10:4-5; 12:10-11; 15:19; 22:29; 27:18**

The book of Proverbs talks positively about work by using a word like Diligence (persistent, hardworking) and negatively by using a word like sluggardliness (or sluggish, lazy). We live in a culture, a place and around many people where work is the source of our value and meaning in life. Thankfully, the Book of Proverbs gives us the right balance and instructions so that we may view our work rightly.

Here are four practices every person needs if they are going to have the perspective and balance related to their work:

### **1. Do Your Work (Proverbs 10:4-5)**

**v. 4 "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich."** - He uses the word SLACK here which means a bow that is not stung tightly. It's not that it does not work, but that it does not shoot the arrow accurately. Therefore, the word DILIGENT does not mean hard work but smart work, targeted work, strategic work - knowing when to work that will be the most fruitful. So, the writer is not talking about laziness nor drivenness but diligence in our work.

**Proverbs 27:18 "Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored."** This is saying that the most common task or work has honor to it. God honors any effort at work, no matter the task or how it is viewed by way of its value. The main thing you want to see is that God honors work. This is contrasted clearly when you look at all the other ancient religions and cultures of history. Let me give me a couple of examples:

**A. The Greek Legend of Pandora's Box.** The story begins with Creation and the first people created are living in paradise. Pandora gets a box and the gods tell her not to open the box, but she opens the box. What comes out? All the human problems and evils that plague humanity today come out of the box, including death, sickness, aging, pain, suffering...and, WORK. Work comes out of the box of all the human ills.

**B. Enuma Elish.** This is a Babylonian or Mesopotamian epic about creation, but when they get into creation they find out there is a lot of work to keep up all things you have to do.



So, Marduk, the leading god, says, "This is too hard. I have an idea. I will bring into existence lowly creatures called man who will do all the work so that the gods can have rest."

In contrast to every religion in the world, you go to the book of Genesis and what do you see? God with His hands in the dirt. God doing manual labor, making us and it not being beneath him. The Greeks believed that the material world was beneath them and work was a necessary evil with out merit or status, only to be done by servants and slaves, but here you see God with His hands in dirt...working!

When you look closely at what God created, you notice that He makes Paradise and into this perfect environment, He puts WORK. He makes them Gardners and Zoologists. Before sin and brokenness and the Fall, God puts work. He gives man things to do that has meaning and value and purpose. What does all this mean? That there is no text or religion like the Christianity that says work, no matter what the work is, is not held in high regard by God. There is no class conscience or snobbery with God toward one form of work as opposed to the other.

You see when God came into our world, He did not come as a Greek philosopher, He did not come as a conquering General, He did not come as a teacher or sage with mystical teachings...**He came as a Carpenter.**

AND, that tells us something very important about God! That while God is about redeeming us from sin and getting us in a right position with Him so that we might know Him personally, He is also about cultivating our hearts and everything we do. That means every ditch we dig to get water to our gardens, every piece of music we compose, every hedge we trim, every blade of grass we cut, every machine we build, every lesson we teach, every toilet we clean... it all has spiritual value with God. God is just as interested in our creation being tended as he is our hearts being tended. No religion or philosophy looks at creation and work in this light.

Tim Keller, "Because work was put in paradise, because it is part of the environment you have to have for the human heart to flourish, if you are not working or if you are not doing work you are proud of in any way at all, you're being cut off from your humanity, there is going to be a disorientation, an atrophying of your soul, because the Bible says work is not a necessary evil, work if a good."

## **2. Love Your Work**

Work in response to human community. **Prov. 10:5 "He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame."**

- The writer uses the word "Son". Why? Because when we fail to value work properly, we are failing not just ourselves but our family.

- Shame - This is NOT the same as guilt. Guilt is about not living up to the standards. You have a set of rules and you do not live by them, you failed, you're guilty. BUT, shame or disgrace is a failure of community. When we fail to do our work, it impacts more than just you, it impacts the community around you. Therefore, you should do your work and choose your work more for how it helps other people and the community and the greater society and the people around you, than for personal advancement or profit. This is what the Bible teaches that work is giving to you for the greater good of those around you, not for your greater good. But, how often do people choose work and do work for their own personal gain?
- Dorothy Sayers, British writer, "The habit of thinking about work as something one does to make money is so ingrained in us that we could scarcely imagine what a revolutionary change it would be psychologically and socially to think otherwise. In the modern view, people become doctors not primarily to relieve suffering but to bring themselves and their family up the world. People become lawyers not because they have a passion for justice, but to bring themselves and their family up in the world. After WW2, one of the greatest surprises for many British men who had to serve in the army was that they found themselves for the very first times in their lives happy and satisfied. Why? For the first times in their lives they found themselves doing something, not for the pay and not for the status because everyone was just thrown in together, but for the sake of getting something done for us all."
- What she was saying was that if we could work not for the pay or the personal advancement as the goals but for the benefit of one another, we would find the greatest amount of contentment. The men and women of WW2 did not get paid much at all, but they were doing jobs that gave them happiness and fulfillment!
- Not every job is wise, of course, but Work itself is about loving others more than yourself!

**Proverbs 22:29 "Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men."** (Skillful - gifted, a talent). God, your Creator, has gifted you and called you to do work that you are good at and fit you. This is how you will have fun at your work, a passion for your work and find in it the right balance in life. You will work, not for yourself or for the money but for people, the community around you for their benefit.

### **3. Re-narrate Your Work (8:1-4)**

The writer mentions three places where wisdom cries out:

- (1) Gates - the place of Justice
- (2) Crossroads - the place of commerce or the markets

(3) Heights - the high places of worship (towers, highest places in the city) - it is our master narrative. That is, what gives our society its meaning or what tells the story of what we love the most. In every city, what are the highest buildings about? Money or Profits

"Individual freedom and fulfillment trumps everything: family, commitments, traditions, and divine authority. As a result of that, our story is that financial profit is the only bottomline. People or businesses do community service not only to make themselves feel better and look better but only if it increases profits."

This is what God says is wrong in our society, that everyone is basically out for their own personal gain and personal fulfillment. We are selfish to the core! God comes into our world with a different Master Narrative. He says that He has not given you work and money and security so that you can come in here on Sundays and Wednesdays to get filled up and feel good about yourselves, but we are to put our work into God's master narrative. For example, profit should not be the goal of your life to be used for your own gain, but for the greater good of others so that it helps the community flourish.

The best example of this in the last 100 years was with the African Slave Trade. The government, to supply the loss of profit to the farmers, made through the abolition of slavery would cost the British government nearly 1/2 of the annual budget. Abolition Act passed 1833 and enacted in 1834. As a result, taxes increased, the cost of living increased and profits fell due to Emancipation so much that they went through at least a generation of poverty so they could rid themselves of the slave trade!

#### **4. Redeem Your Work (Prov. 15:19)**

The hardest part about this is that we desperately want to prove ourselves, that we matter, that we are worth something. It's really not about the money or the security but our own self esteem. Why? Because we feel soulless.

Look at **Prov. 15:19 "The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway."**

Who is Upright? - Not us! The word "thorns" is so significant. It takes you back to Genesis to what God says after sin enters the world. Why does life not work easily? Why is it that we put together plans but they fall apart? The world is BROKEN! PAINFUL!

Galatians 3 says that Jesus Christ came to be a curse for us! The night Jesus died they put thorns on His head. He took our curse! Jesus did our work, our toil - Why? 2 Cor. 5:21 How can you keep working when it just doesn't seem to pay off? Your hope is not in this world, but in Christ.

**He took the thorns so we could get the highway! Therefore, don't work for You, work for Him!! You belong to Him!**

# Session 8

## The Wisdom of Beauty and the Temptations that Follow

**Proverbs 5:15-19; 11:16, 22; 30:18-20**

Today's lesson is about having the wisdom to manage the power of sexuality.

### **1. Why Should Never Undervalue Sex (Proverbs 5:15-19; 30:18-20)**

Remember that the Book of Proverbs was originally written as a manual to teach and train young men. That is why there are many passages that address young men, men with their wives, etc. But, for ladies, it does not take much for you to understand how to reverse apply the instructions for your own application.

The imagery and wording of the Bible in this section is very erotic and explicit, almost embarrassing for those who are not comfortable talking about sex publicly. In many cultures, to discuss sexuality in mixed audiences is taboo or at minimum, not comfortable.

Look at the language given in 5:15 which speaks of a woman's sexuality, and then look at 5:18 which speaks of a man's sexuality. Then again, there is the woman's sexuality with her husband in 5:19.

The teaching here is about how two people should be in marriage. The writer uses the word INTOXICATED. It means to be drunk or staggering. Literally, the Bible is saying that your marriage should be such that you are intoxicated or staggering drunk in love with your spouse.

The love is NOT to be shared with others (v. 16). Casual sex or sex outside of marriage is out. You are not to share your sexuality with anyone other than your spouse.

This passage is a massively high view of marriage and the love God designed for it. There is a blessing given here (v. 18) for the sexuality between a husband and wife.

- **Why did anyone get married?**

1. People married to improve their social and economic standing in the community.
2. People married to have children
3. But, in those days, rarely if ever did people get married for LOVE.
4. If you wanted romantic love, you got that somewhere else.
5. And, no one got married for companionship.

- **What was marriage to be?** (Prov. 2:17 calls your spouse your “haloop” - your most intimate friend, your best friend). This was not what most cultures practiced and even today, many cultures do not see marriage this way. The reason why this is not appreciated or practiced in many cultures even today is that to have your spouse as your companion or best friend implies equality. In ancient culture, men thought of themselves as superior and could do with women as they pleased. So for Proverbs to teach that a man was to love his wife, be intoxicated by her love physically, emotionally and intellectually was totally foreign.

- **What was Sex then in Marriage?** Look at Proverbs 30:18-20. The writer uses three images that describe the beauty of nature as a wonder of God’s creation and then brings in the image of a man and woman in intimacy saying that sex is like sailing and soaring in absolute bliss.

- Then we have a change in imagery...on purpose. This verse was meant to be jarring and shocking! Look at Proverbs 30:20

“This is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I have done no wrong!’”

What imagery do we have here? It’s the imagery of sloppy eating. What is missing? There is no BEAUTY. For this view, sex is about your appetite, consuming something, sex is routine, sex is about feeding an appetite. If I am hungry I eat, if I feel sexy I have sex...what’s the big deal? What is missing? There is no WONDER.

We live in a time related to sexuality that could be called COMMODIFICATION. This simply means that things and people are commodities to be traded and sold at a price. “Social relations are reduced to economic exchange relations. An economic exchange relation is a consumer or vendor relationship. A consumer only stays in a

relationship with the vendor if the product comes to you at a cost that is acceptable. If the quality of the product goes down or the price of the product goes too high, then you will leave that relationship for another. In a consumer relationship, your needs and your rights are more important than the relationship.”

What is the difference between a Consumer Relationship and a Commitment Relationship?

What sociologists are discovering now in our culture is that the commodification of our economic relationships are bleeding over into our social relationships, so that we are treating all of our relationships like consumer products. People go into relationships and have relationships based on what they can get out of them, not what they can give. It's the Product, not the Person that matters.

How does this impact how we view Sex in relationships? The bible teaches that when a person has sex not only are they to go through the act of sex but be ready to give their entire life to that person. To do this you need to be married. To have sex with someone outside of marriage is not sharing your life with them but holding on to your life. There is no commitment to give the other person all of you, everything in your life hands off. You haven't made a commitment to love them no matter what, with all their flaws, with all their failures, with all their stuff...You haven't shared YOU! Sex outside of marriage is an exchange of products but not an exchange of lives. You want the pleasure, you want the product but you do not want them. It's the height of selfishness!

If a person feels like they really love the person they are having sex with then why do they not get married? The person who refuses is saying that I am holding out in case the other person does not meet my needs. They are treating the person as a commodity.

## **2. Why We Should Never Overvalue Sex (Proverbs 11:16, 22)**

We overvalue sexual attractiveness and physical beauty. Now, when you read verse 22, it seems disgusting, right? It was meant to be! The illustration is this: there is a beautiful ring that everyone would admire but looked at what it is attached to...a **PIG!** Pigs love mud, slop and dirtiness. You reach out to grab this ring and do not realize that it's attached to a pig and what happens? You are all of the sudden covered in mud and slop. What's the meaning?

When you see someone who is beautiful, attractive and seemingly has it all together and you pull that person close to you and you don't realize that they are shallow or crude or foolishness or selfish, what does that mean for you? All you done is been fooled by the outer beauty without realizing that you have been covered with mud!

You see, its the inside of the person that truly counts, not the outside. It's the person's character that determines who they really are, not their outward physical beauty, and their character will reflect not only who they are but the life and character of the people around them. @ I knew a man who fell for outward beauty and it destroyed his life because the people around the other person were toxic.

VERSE 22 is a Proverb directed at men, that is why the writer uses a woman to illustrate his point. **Why? Tim Keller observes here: "The habitual and widespread habit of men to objectify, dehumanize and commodify women by evaluating them almost strictly on their looks is destructive foolishness. This behavior erodes women's trust of men and damages the relationship between the genders, but it also damages their own self-image and their own self-regard."**

BUT, this also plays out in a woman's life. **Look at verse 16. "A gracious woman (or a beautiful woman) gets honor (or wealth), and violent men gets riches."** The word **HONOR** means Importance or Significance. When you consider this, we understand that often men use power to get significance and often but not always, women use their looks to get significance. Now the problem is this: women feel that their significance or their value is wrapped up in their looks, their appearance, their weight or their hair or their dress. The men can do this too, but their issues have to do with gaining more possessions or position in their companies or among their co-workers.

**WHEN WE UNDERVALUE SEX BY MAKING IT A COMMODITY OR PRODUCT, WE DEHUMANIZE OTHER PEOPLE. WHEN WE OVERVALUE SEX WE DEHUMANIZE OURSELVES!**

This plays out in every facet of life. When a woman believes that her significance is not her **character**, when all she believes is that no one really cares about her character, all men want is her attractiveness, then she doesn't care about developing her character. Women measure themselves by other women and the acceptance of other men. This is DANGEROUS! Why? The closer you get to the big cities, the more educated you become, the more distant you are from the realities of your true worth, the more destructive behaviors are seen, such as eating disorders and self-debasement.

**For men, the destruction comes through pornography.** It has damaged the lives of millions of men around the world and caused untold amounts of harm in

relationships. Why? Real relationships, relationships between a man and a woman are complicated. That's why men and women escape to the easier path. You see real women do not look like the magazines or movies, they don't act like that, they have depth, emotions and feelings. They are human. False relationships dehumanize one another.

For a person to choose the right person, they cannot stay shallow but look deeply into a person, not just the outward appearance. We must value the opposite sex, and when we do not, it could mean that you yourself do not feel beautiful on the inside, you do not believe that you are lovable or worthy of love. This is why so many people trade intimacy in relationships for momentary sexual pleasures. ***This is what we saw in Genesis 3 where the two needed to cover up!***

**UNTIL** we realize that we are lovable, that we are accepted, we will struggle and always feel like we have to get our significance from our physical appearance or to gain our significance from our abilities to perform with power.

**Psychologists** tell us that men leave their wives for younger women and women try desperately to stay young looking as they get older because there is an obsession with staying young out of a fear of dying.

You need a **POWER** to overcome the pull toward self-destructive behavior! Where do you get that **POWER?**

### **3. How the Problem Can Be Solved**

#### **Ephesians 5:25**

You will never get passed this or solve this unless you realize "that God Himself is your lover who has died to make you beautiful" (Keller).

God did not create you just to be His sheep, God created you to be His lover. That is, when you are in love with someone, you want to be with them, you foster intimacy, and you want to spend time getting to know them deeply. God created us so that together we could have a relationship that values one another. He wants you to be in love with Him as He is in love with you! He wanted us to see Him as the ultimate beauty that He is!

But, what did we do? We turned away from that love and gave our hearts to other things. However, God pursued us anyway! You see, God wanted something deeper.



In **Isaiah 53:2** it says, **"He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him."**

This seen so clearly in the story of **Rachel and Leah in Genesis 29**. Rachel was the most beautiful woman among all the other women and that is who Jacob wanted, but she was offered Leah first. Leah was not attractive, she was not a beauty queen and she was not the person Jacob really wanted. However, when God into the world to redeem and save the world, He did not come through Rachel...He came through Leah! Why would God does this? Why would God not come in majesty and glory and beauty? TO SHOW YOU REAL BEAUTY!

*You see, Jesus came into our world that was consumed with power with no power. He came into our world that was consumed with beauty with no beauty, and what did we do with Him? We cast Him aside. We killed Him! Why?*

*Because Jesus traded His eternal beauty for our eternal ugliness to give us true beauty that is not all about the outward appearance, to give us the true picture of beauty that is about character, loveliness and the beauty of loving others who feel like no one could ever truly love them for who they are!*

**YOU ARE HIS BEAUTY!**

*The thought of you and Him together in close relationship, loving one another, not based on what you can give to Him but based on His love for you and your love for Him, that is what makes life truly meaningful and that is what it takes for you to see sexuality as God designed it!*

# Session 9

## Wisdom in Regards to Money

**Proverbs 10:5-6; 11:1, 4, 24, 26; 13:21, 23; 30:8-9**

Wisdom is not less than being moral and good, but it is much more. Wisdom is the ability to know what the right choice is in the majority of life's situations where the moral rules do not apply or do not address.

Having wisdom in the area of money is so essential that without it you can slip into dangers that will impact not only you but those closest to you, and could impact generations. In this study we will look at wealth and possessions in the context of these three things:

### **1. Money has Power**

#### ***A. There is an Inherent Goodness to Money***

The Book of Proverbs has so many positive things to say about money and creating wealth.

- *Proverbs 10:22 "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it."*
- *Proverbs 10:4 "Lazy hands causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich."*

Proverbs teaches us that those who work hard, those who are not lazy, those who really try to make life better through a good work ethic can prosper and make life better. It would give you the impression that prosperity really is the purpose of life. Why?

The writings in Proverbs is based on the Book of Genesis, and that is because it is based on a Hebrew way of thinking. In many other cultures and religions such as in Greek thought, the material world had little significance. Only the spiritual world had true meaning or purpose. Eastern religions believed that the material world was an illusion. Scandinavian cultures saw creation beginning with wars or by an accident. ONLY in Genesis do we see God making the world to be beautiful and placing us in it to enjoy it and prosper from it. We are given stewardship over it so that as we work hard, it prospers and we prosper.

To make money and to own things is good is because you were made for it.

### ***B. There is a Spiritual Danger Attached to Money***

- (1) **Money has the power to corrupt your integrity. Proverbs 11:1** *“A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight.”* People who gain a lot of money often find themselves in compromising positions where they lose their integrity, doing things that are dishonest or deceitful. You may be a person with high integrity and moral character but in the presence of a lot of money you lose your integrity. Dishonest scales were common. A buyer would mark a weight as 1 kilo of grain when it should have been 2 kilos.
  
- (2) **Money has the power to magnify self-absorption to the detriment of the social fabric and community. Proverbs 11:26** *“The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.”* What is happening here? There is a food shortage and the one who has the grain holds it back and sells it at an inflated price or drives up the price even though there are people who are starving! Now, for the most part, this is not illegal. But look at what this says..the person is cursed. He is cursed by the community. Why? Because he is contributing to their demise, to their downfall, to their suffering. There is a loss of community and goodwill. ***The Book of Proverbs is condemning a business with only ONE bottomline: Personal Profit...unless, they equally have as their bottomline, the good the community.***

Look at **Proverbs 10:16** *“The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.”*

He is saying that the righteous person (or the righteous business) is focused on how to make the community better, how to make the lives of people better, how to influence others toward growth in every way, rather than hoarding their profits. They make their money in such a way that it builds up the community. In other words, when a company moves into a community, the community (the families and the environment) should have as its primary goal the betterment of community. So, if a company wants to buy another company but they have a choice between two companies, the question should never be, “Which company is making more money?” But, “Which company is impacting the community in a more positive way?”

**(3) Money has the power to distract you from what is really important. Proverbs 11:4** *“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.”* This is simple enough: when you die and face judgment, you will NOT take your money with you. In fact, there will be no reward for how much money you made, but

there will be reward for how much you gave. The Bible **never** teaches that doing something, such as giving earns you favor or position with God. The bible teaches that position with God is given by God's grace to those who do not deserve it through believing in Him. However, for those who do believe in Him, giving is an act of obedience and selflessness. Now, wealth or riches can blind you to that because Judgment Day questions are like this: What has my life amounted to? What difference have I truly made? — Money keeps these questions from being asked or considered.

Money makes you say things like: I've made some money and now I need to make a little more. I have earned these things with my money and I really can't afford to give up any of the money because I need it to make more. It's like saying, "I've worked hard today and tomorrow I have to work even harder. Therefore, I can't help this other person because I need to rest so I can work harder (for myself) tomorrow."

"Wealth makes you much busier than you should be! And all the time you feel strapped. All the time you feel like that you never have enough to keep up. All the time you feel like you don't have enough for the people around you. You feel like, "I just barely have enough to make ends meet now."

#### **(4) Money has the power to make you overconfident.**

**Proverbs 30:8-9** "give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of the Lord." (Pharoah said this to Moses)

You see this in the Bible and you see this in life: "there is nothing like economic success to make you feel overconfident." When a person starts having success, there is this temptation to feel like you have conquered the world. You become fearless and you become vulnerable and you become proud. It's not a bad thing to make money, until you fall to its dark side which is always clamoring for you to cozy up to its fire.

Bernard of Clairvaux: "To see a man humble under prosperity is the greatest rarity in the world."

The Bible is so unique from the world viewpoints, especially today with our discussions of capitalism and socialism. One writer said it this way: "The Bible's understanding of money is such that it does not fit into either socialism or capitalism or any view of economics in between that we have in the world today. On the one hand, it's way too positive about the good of wealth creation and making money and the good that riches can bring and the connection between wealth and hard work. It's way too positive to fit into those things to fit into a socialistic system. But on the other

hand, all this talk about when you make money it is not yours, it belongs to the community with multiple bottom-lines. The way money blinds you and makes you proud and leads to oppression and exploitation does not fit into capitalism. Why? Humanity underestimates the power of money. They do not understand what a spiritual power it is but the Bible does."

## **2. Money has Power for a Reason**

**Proverbs 10:15** "A rich man's wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin."

The cities were the place that people wanted to be in times of war or when they needed protection. To be inside the city walls was to find shelter, food and protection. That is where the wealthy lived, but not the poor. Here, the writer says that the rich man's wealth IS his strong city. What does that mean? Look at **Proverbs 18:10-11** "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe. A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall *in his imagination*." The meaning is clear: for the obvious alternative to God is money. Money is what a person turns to when they turn away from God. Money IS their protection, their provision, their purpose for living. The most obvious thing to turn to if you turn to anything or anyone other than God is to money. Why? Because, everything you long for...Purpose, Fulfillment, Security - all of it, you find in money. That is the spiritual power or the draw of money in our lives. Money gives people their identity.

Money does things to us. We have to admit it. When you sit with someone or are around certain people who have less than you, how do you feel? You feel superior to them. You feel sorry for them. You feel like they should make way for you. Why do we feel this way? Money!

The reason money has so much power is that it is the only thing that can truly turn you away from God. Money is one thing that people use to try and give themselves what only God can truly provide. The truth is though, money has no real power to change the most critical things about life and death. Money cannot stop death. Money cannot heal the heart that is broken. Money cannot put a marriage back together. Money cannot cause a child in rebellion to come home. Money cannot give you unconditional love. Only God can do those things!!

## **3. Money's Power can be Controlled and Mastered for a Greater Purpose**

- A. **Assume you are in denial of money's mastery over you - Prov. 11:1** "False scales are an abomination to the Lord." This is the strongest language! The word for abomination is normally used for sexual sin. God is saying that He is as offended by you when money is misused in your life as if you cheated on your spouse.

Why is God so harsh and so strong about this? When Jesus taught he was always warning people to avoid materialism. He never went around warning people to avoid adultery, even though it was a sin. But Jesus was constantly warning people to not get caught in money's trap. Why? Because adultery is obvious! But almost no one believes they are misusing money. It's hard for us to admit it because we have been conditioned by money. Americans never think they have enough, when the rest of world knows they have more than enough. No where in the world is their collective wealth like we enjoy in this country. Our wants we turn into needs while the world needs what we want.

But we can't see or don't want to see it because we enjoy and believe that it is our right to have what we have.

**B. Apply the principle of giving to your life - Proverbs 11:24** "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer, another withholds what he should give, and only suffers poverty."

Here is an unconventional way of thinking. You would think that the person who gives much would be poorer and the person who saves all their earn would be rich. But, the Bible tells a different story. The person who gives becomes rich and the person who hoards their riches becomes poor. It doesn't make sense.

The bible tells us the more we scatter the more we reap. A farmer who hoards his seed will never get an abundant harvest, but the farmer who is generous with their seed will get an even greater harvest. Here's the best part: when you sow the seed (when you give away a portion of what you have) you get something back that is better than what you sowed, right? You can't really take the seed and eat it. But when you sow the seed, it goes into the ground and produces wheat or fruit or vegetables, something that can be eaten and can be enjoyed!

**Here's the Main Lesson of Proverbs Concerning Money and Wealth:  
Just like the seed, your money or your wealth can never produce anything  
of real substance until it is given away.**

Money is not the end of all you need. It is only the seed for a greater harvest of blessing for the community around you. "The more you give it away, the more you will increase in real wealth." If this makes no sense to you or you cannot get past that principle, you are an addict, you are addicted to money's power!

**Look at 1 Corinthians 8:8-9; 9:6-11**

**You see, it's not about giving some away so that God will bless you more or to make sure God makes you wealthier or to win favor or points with God. It's about who owns our heart.**

For our hearts to be changed and for money to have no power over us we have to look at the Cross. ***When Jesus went to the Cross, His body was distributed, broken apart SO THAT, we could gather us together and multiply us around the world.*** The cross, the ultimate act of sacrifice and the ultimate act of generosity and the ultimate symbol of our security, proclaims loudly to us that our significance is not found in money which can give none of these things, but our significance is found in Jesus Christ.

Listen, when you can take your wealth and give it freely to the poor, to the missionary, to the neighbor in need, you name it, when you can give away your money without trying to make yourself feel better or expecting anything in return, then you will begin to see God do eternal and radical things that in reality will make you truly wealthy. It's not about accumulating but about giving that pleases the heart of God.

How can you obey the rule (tithing) but miss the point? By only following the rule but forgetting the cross. The Cross means that my heart is involved, sacrifice is realized and only He has my heart!

# Session 10

## Wisdom in Regards to Pride

**Proverbs 11:2, 12; 13:10; 15:25, 33; 16:18-19; 21:4; 28:26**

Wisdom is not less than being moral and good, but it is much more. Wisdom is the ability to know what the right choice is in the majority of life's situations where the moral rules do not apply or do not address.

*C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity, writes: "I now come to that part of Christian morals where they differ most sharply from all other morals. There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else' and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time I have very seldom met anyone, who was not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy to it in others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.*

*The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility."*

### **I. The Diagnosis of Pride**

- A. **Pride is needing to feel better than some people in some way.** - Proverbs 11:12 "Whoever **belittles** his neighbor lacks sense."

Lewis continues in *Mere Christianity*: "Take it with money. Greed will certainly make a man want money, for the sake of a better house, better holidays, better things to eat and drink. But only up to a point. What is it that makes a man with \$10,000 a year anxious to get \$20,000 a year? It is not the greed for more pleasure. \$10,000 will give all the luxuries that any man can really enjoy. It is Pride—the wish to be richer than some other rich man, and (still more) the wish for power. For, of course, power is what Pride really enjoys: there is nothing make a man feel so superior to others as being able to move them about like toy soldiers. What makes a pretty girl spread misery wherever she goes by collecting admirers? Certainly not her sexual instinct: that kind



of girl is quite often sexually frigid. It is Pride. What is it that makes a political leader or a whole nation go on and on, demanding more and more? Pride again. Pride is competitive by its very nature: that is why it goes on and on. If I am a proud man, then as long as there is one man in the whole world more powerful, or richer or cleverer than I, he is my rival and my enemy."

You see, pride wants to tear down. The reason is that in our human nature, we want to be on the top, even if we do not say it, and seldom will we admit it, but we want to step on top of the person in front of us so that we can be just a little bit higher.

**Why do we do this?** Because we want to know and we want others to know that we matter! People inherently want to feel like they are their own savior, that what they do in life in some way validates their existence.

*"We are all unsatisfied enough, incomplete in some way, we are all out there amassing a resume, we're in a courtroom, we are constantly arguing, whether you believe in God or not, whether you believe in salvation or not, we are all out there earning our salvation."- Tim Keller, commenting on contemporary culture and people's endless striving for meaning. Pride feeds on this kind of thinking.*

**B. Pride wants to take God's place in your life (15:25 and 16:19)** The Hebrew word used there is "Guy-on" - always used for God to mean Supreme Majesty. To use it in human terms tells the story of man's true desire. You see, man wants to be their own Supreme Being. The last thing man really wants is for someone to have authority over them. They want to be their own savior, lord and master. People want to find meaning in life on their own.

**Lewis Smedes** writes: *"Pride in the religious sense is the arrogant refusal to let God be God. It is to grab God's status for one's self. In the vivid language of the Bible, pride is puffing yourself up in God's face. Pride is turning down God's invitation to join the dance of life as a creature in his garden and wishing instead to be the Creator, Independent, reliant on one's own resources. Never does pride want to pray for strength, ask for grace, plead for mercy, or give thanks to God. Pride is the grand illusion, the fantasy of fantasies, the cosmic put-on."*

Smedes' goes on to say: *"The fantasy that we can make it as little gods leaves us empty at the center. Once we decide we have to make it on our own, we are attacked by the demons of fear and anxiety. We are worried that we cannot keep our balance as long as we carry no more inside our empty heart than what we can put there. We suspect that we lack the power to become what our pride makes us think we are. So we learn to swagger, to bluff, to use symbols to cover up our fears that we lack substance. We*

*force other people to act as buttresses for the shaky ego that pride created by emptying our soul of God. In the words of God's love song, we become arrogant."*

### **C. Pride makes life all about them and draws attention to self - Prov. 13:10**

"By pride comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom."

Why? Pride tells you that you are always right and everyone else is wrong. When you see something being done the "wrong" way, you will make sure they know about it and that you would have done it differently.

## **II. The Destructiveness of Pride**

"Pride **goes before** destruction, and a haughty spirit **before** a fall. It is better to be a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud."

**~ Proverbs 16:18-19**

Pride is pictured here as something that comes but in its wake is destruction. Pride is like a bomb that hits a target and explodes leaving disaster in its path. Why does Pride do this?

- **Proverbs 11:10** "By pride comes nothing but strife, but those who take advice is wisdom" A proud person does not want to take advice. They believe they have all the answers they need and they don't need you to tell them anything.
- **Proverbs 21:4** "Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin." Lamps were always meant to expose by the light the lamp provides. It reveals everything. However, if your lamp or the things that you see are exposed only by pride, then everything in your life will be colored by it. You will not be able to see your own mistakes or failures; you will not be able to admit that you need help; you will always be hyper-critical of others. You will always have the sense that you have to prove yourself, that you are better than others and worthy of acclaim and value. And you will distort others and their reputation if it means you can make yourself look better.

*But let's look at pride from a bigger picture.*

### **A. *Pride is Destructive in Your Relationship to God***

- **Proverbs 15:25** "The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries."
- **Proverbs 16:19** "It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud."

These verses show that God loves the people who have been overlooked or hurt by others. Why does God put this here in the context of Pride?

You see, from all eternity God has enjoyed the company that exists between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in **John 17:5** "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." Before God created time and planets and people, God gave love between Himself. God's very nature and character is to give love.

**Psalm 138:6** "For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar."

If you really want to know God, you cannot come to Him in pride. You cannot know God and also have a heart that is filled with self. **C.S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*, "In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."**

### ***B. Pride is Destructive in Your Relationship to the Future***

**James 4:10** "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and in due time He will exalt you." There is coming a day when God will put down the proud and arrogant of heart, and lift up those who are humble and do not seek their own glory. But, if your whole life is about proving your self-worth, your self-value, if your life is wrapped up in pushing your way to the top so that you can prove that you are better, then you are on a collision course with God.

## **III. The Remedy for Pride**

- A. **Find the glory that is only there for the humble - Proverbs 15:33** "The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor."

The fear of the Lord for people is the ability to submit oneself to a power greater than themselves, to find glory in the things that are counter to self and find glory in the things that delight the heart of God.

God's very nature is different from all we think. The way Jesus came reveals this! What if Jesus came in the way you would think He should? Who would it exclude?

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

People across the world still follow this man who and read His book and speak of Him and depend on Him for their life and their eternity. Why? Because Jesus came to live the life you were too weak to live, and died the death that you didn't think you needed to die. He came in weakness and poverty and humility so that **NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE, YOU WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER HIM AS IF HE IT WERE ENOUGH, BUT ALL YOU COULD DO IS FALL AT HIS FEET WITH A THANKFUL HEART REALIZING THAT WITHOUT HIM YOU ARE NOTHING!**

The Gospel says that God takes His perfect record and swaps it for your imperfect record of sin, and you get His perfection.

### **B. Use the Gospel to find the joy for all of life**

Here is the Key to living this out everyday when you fall back into the trap of your own performance...**Romans 8:33-34**

1. Remind yourself daily that God is for you!
2. Remind yourself daily that God did spare His own Son for you!
3. Remind yourself daily that God is the one who justifies you!
4. Remind yourself daily that God is interceding for you!
5. Remind yourself daily that God has completely accepted.

**Therefore, you have no reason to perform or try to gain or prove anything!  
You are HIS!!**

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**Additional Comments by C.S. Lewis:**

Pleasure in being praised is not Pride. The child who is patted on the back for doing a lesson well, the woman whose beauty is praised by her lover, the saved soul to whom Christ says, 'Well done,' are pleased and ought to be. For here the pleasure lies not in what you are but in the fact that you have pleased someone you wanted (and rightly wanted) to please. The trouble begins when you pass from thinking, 'I have pleased him; all is well,' to thinking, 'What a fine person I must be to have done it.' The more you delight in yourself and the less you delight in the praise, the worse you are becoming. When you delight wholly in yourself and do not care about the praise at all, you have reached the bottom. That is why vanity, though it is the sort of Pride which shows most on the surface, is really the least bad and most pardonable sort. The vain person wants praise, applause, admiration, too much and is always angling for it. It is a fault, but a child-like and even (in an odd way) a humble fault. It shows that you are not yet completely contented with your own admiration. You value other people enough to want them to look at you. You are, in fact, still human. The real black, diabolical Pride, comes when you look down on others so much that you do not care what they think of you. Of course, it is very right, and often our duty, not to care what people think of us, if we do so for the right reason; namely, because we care so incomparably more what God thinks. But the Proud man has a different reason for not caring. He says 'Why should I care for the applause of that rabble as if their opinion were worth anything? And even if their opinions were of value, am I the sort of man to blush with pleasure at a compliment like some chit of a girl at her first dance? No, I am an integrated, adult personality. All I have done has been done to satisfy my own ideals—or my artistic conscience—or the traditions of my family—or, in a word, because I'm That Kind of Chap. If the mob like it, let them. They're nothing to me.' In this way real thorough-going pride may act as a check on vanity; for, as I said a moment ago, the devil loves 'curing' a small fault by giving you a great one. We must try not to be vain, but we must never call in our Pride to cure our vanity.

# Session 11

## Wisdom Needed for Self-Control

**Proverbs 18:10-1; 23:19-21; Titus 2:11-14**

Wisdom is not less than being moral and good, but it is much more. Wisdom is the ability to know what the right choice is in the majority of life's situations where the moral rules do not apply or do not address.

The Book of Proverbs does not necessarily tell you how to make right decisions, but is designed to help you become the right kind of person who makes right decisions. We have been studying the kind of qualities you need to make wise decisions. Today, our study goes to one of the most difficult qualities but most critical, and that is the subject of Self-Control. Without self-control a person will mess up their lives and they will damage the lives of the people around them.

### **1. The Problem with a Lack of Self-Control**

A. **It causes you to be distracted with a lack of focus.** The writer uses the word: Slumber. He is saying that the person who drinks too much or eats too much gets drowsy or sleepy. They walk around in a daze and cannot focus on the task ahead of them. They are not ready for the moment but are sluggish. Now, this passage is not referring to the momentary periods of drinking or eating but to a lifestyle that has resulted in a loss of possessions or loss of a job or a loss of self-respect and purpose (i.e., Rags), and because of this their life falls apart.

B. **It causes you to be exposed and left without purpose or protection**

*"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."*

**Proverbs 25:28**

1. This describes a man who cannot control his spirit (your energy or your emotions or desires).
2. A city without walls was disastrous. We do not have many cities with walls anymore, but in ancient times, a city with walls was essential if that city was to survive the attacks of its enemies, and the greater the fortification of the walls, the greater the city had of staying healthy and strong and the people

flourishing. An example of this is Nehemiah (Neh. 1:3-4). A person who makes goods things their ultimate things where they depend on them for survival has made themselves defenseless against the onslaught and chaos that will certainly come into one's life.

3. **What is self-control?** *Tim Keller:* "It's the ability to recognize and choose the important thing over the urgent thing at any given moment, because within yourself your desires and your passions are properly ordered. That is, the most important things are wanted most and less important things are wanted less." *Psychology Today:* "Self-control—or the ability to subdue one's impulses, emotions, and behaviors to achieve long-term goals—is what separates modern people from their ancient ancestors and the rest of the animal kingdom."
- **Eating.** In other words, if you settle for the urgent things (such as eating what is right in front of you or what you most desire but may not be good for you) then your health (which is more important) will fail. Anything like this, when not brought under control can spin your entire life out of control. If this happens, then it could be a heart attack or stroke that stops you and forces you to get your life under control.
  - **Spending.** If you are addicted to spending or buying things you don't need with money you really don't have, then your life will spin out of control, and you could lose everything.
  - **Talking.** If you cannot control your tongue and lash out at people in anger or spread rumors through gossip, then you could ruin relationships, damage your reputation and hurt others in major ways.
  - **Sexual Intimacy.** If you satisfy sexual urges with pleasures that are not within your covenant commitment, then you damage the person with whom you are committed and do so at the expense of real relationships and perhaps at the expense of your marriage. Do you see how much a lack of self-control can cost you?
  - The problem is that you are choosing the immediate thing over the important thing. When your life is not ordered properly, and with it, your health, your financial security and your relationships which are much more important than the temporary satisfaction of unhealthy food, unhealthy spending, unhealthy speech and unhealthy relationships, then your life will be chaos. You need wisdom to show you that those immediate things are not the most important things in your life.

There are all kinds of things in our lives that can get out of control. What are some of them and how does it impact life?

## **2. The Principle of Self-Control**

How do we figure this out and get self-control?

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man **runs** into it and is safe. A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall (unscalable) in his imagination.”

### **Proverbs 18:10-11**

- Everyone runs into whatever they believe will protect them.
- The problem is when people run into imaginary high towers. In other words, people run into high towers that cannot protect or provide for your deepest needs. A person might depend on their wealth for their security, while another looks for significance and self-worth but rather than permanent and satisfying fulfillment, they are addicted to gambling, alcohol, eating or other physical things as they try to find that fulfillment.
- *“Most self-control problems do not have a physical addiction. While there is the component that comes along with it, the physical is a byproduct of a greater problem. Anything besides God that you look to for your ultimate security creates addiction patterns in your life writ large.”*
- This could be a person you run to, a philosophy you hold, a religion or religious traditions you follow...anything besides God creates addictive patterns in your life.
- **Neil Planton wrote an article on *The Tragedy of Addictions*:** “Addictions begin when we use something we believe will relieve distress, then eventually the addictions create their own distress, and finally, addicts spiral down when they try to cure the additional pain with the thing that caused it.” We do this with various forms of alcohol all the time, right? But it’s this way with anything.

Remember, the story I told you about the man who found his identity in giving to others? He loved to give (a very good thing), but it became the ultimate thing in his life and he believed that he had no real value as a person if people did not recognize his generosity. The result was that he had to earn more and more money to give bigger amounts which led to an addiction to gambling, which led to increased debts, which led to more gambling and eventually prison and eventually his own death.



Neil Planton goes on to say this: "What moves the addict on to the bait? At every stage addiction is driven by one of the most powerful, mysterious and vital forces of human existence. What drives addiction is a longing, not just brains, belly or loins, but finally of the heart. Because we are human beings, we long for wholeness, we long for fulfillment and for the final good that believers call God. Like all idolatries, addictions tap a spiritual force and draws off its energies to objects and processes that drain the addict, instead of fulfilling them."

***What is the answer? Proverbs 18:10 "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe."***

Timothy Keller looks at this and gives us two practical ways to deal with self-control issues:

- (1) **Telling your mind the truth** - In the Bible, the name of the Lord tells His nature. Your name conveys who you really are. To run into the name of the Lord is to forcefully remind yourself of who God is and what has been revealed about Him. The Lord is your strong tower. He alone is able to give your life meaning and fulfillment and purpose and security. (Luke 8:22-25 Jesus on the boat with His disciples). Truth is not about your feelings or what culture says!
- (2) **Convert the soul to love** - The name of the Lord means He is a person and being a person, God is able to be loved. You can love God! Jonathan Edwards said, "Forget the notion that your will and your emotions are separate. They are not. You never do anything other than what you most want to do at that moment. Basically, the will is just the exercise of the heart. A man sticks an object in your back and says, 'Give me your wallet', and you give him your wallet. You think you have exercised your will but you have done what you really wanted to do...live!"

You see, self-control hinges on what you love the most. Whatever you love is where you run, it's what you long for. The bible is telling us that nothing in the entire world can sustain you or hold you up if your love for anything is greater than your love for God.

*Lord of the Rings - "My Precious!" The ring was his love and it drove him crazy.* If you go to God constantly in prayer to get things, you are being driven by your out of control lusts or desires. You have to find your love exclusively in Him!

### **3. Practicing Self-Control (Titus 2:11-14)**

How did we get control? By fear? No!

- The grace of God has appeared - how? Jesus!
- **Titus 3:4-5**
- When Jesus was crucified, He was driven out of the city...so that you and I could run into the city (God) and find security and provisions for life.
- Why and how could Jesus do this? **Hebrews 12:2-3!** Do you see it? The motivating factor for Jesus doing what He did, enduring the Cross, despising the shame...the reason why Jesus exhibited the greatest self-control ever known...He wanted us!
- We are His Rachel (**Genesis 29:1-20 "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her."**) That is a picture of Jesus Christ's love for you and me! He would do and endure anything for you!
- When His love for you converts all your love for other things, then all your wants, desires and addictions will be gone as they are replaced with a love greater than you have ever known.

**This is the key to self-control.**

# Session 12

## Wisdom to Follow God's Guidance

**Prov. 11:3; 12:5, 15; 15:22; 16:1-4, 9, 25, 33; 21:5; 27:1**

From the beginning of our study in Proverbs, we have said that wisdom is the ability to make right decisions where the moral rules do not apply. Wisdom is needed to make decisions about relationships, money, parenting, careers, you name it. Making the right choices when given a situation that is unclear takes GUIDANCE. That is the essence of this bible study. How do we use the guidance God provides to be the right person and make the right decisions.

The word for Guidance came from the Hebrew word that meant: Rope, as in ropes used while sailing. In ancient days, ropes were used by sailors for navigation. They would use ropes to raise the sails and lower the sails so they could navigate the ship most effectively. Without ropes, the ship would have no means of guidance.

Life is about knowing how to navigate through life's situations. Without the right navigation, your life drifts without purpose and often drifts into places of devastating danger. What we need to discover is how to find God's guidance for life. If God knows all things and sees all things, then logically, you would want a greater perspective or vantage point to see how to navigate through the various issues of life (choices about parenting, marriage, work, money, pleasure, and spiritual things). How do you get this guidance?

### I. God Guides

#### A. **God's guidance is paradoxical -**

- **Prov. 21:5** "The plans of the diligent(strategic) lead surely to abundance. But everyone who is hasty(impulsive) comes only to poverty." - He is saying that living life so that you act and do so intentionally that it will make a difference.
- **Prov. 16:33** "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." - Casting lots was like flipping a coin or drawing straws. BUT, look at the rest of the verse. The bible is teaching here that every flip of the coin, every straw that is drawn is planned by God. No matter how big or small, every decision goes through the sovereign plan and agenda of God.

### **Here is the Paradox!**

We have the freedom to make choices and should make choices but at the same time, God's plans are fixed and His order of things cannot be changed. This is hard for people to grasp because we wonder why our decisions have any weight or consequence if everything in life is determined. Therefore, some people live their lives recklessly because they do not see what difference it makes. But look at the next two Proverbs...

- **Proverbs 16:2** "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs his spirit."
- **Proverbs 16:9** "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."

Your plans and choices are yours! God is not forcing you to do anything. Every decision you make whether is good, bad, stupid, smart, evil or kind...every decision is yours and every consequence is your responsibility. However, at the same time, God's plans and the way He has designed everything to work means that He knows what you will do and their consequences, which are fixed into the fabric of life. For example, if you choose to rob a bank, then God has put in the heart of man to establish laws that will result in your incarceration. If you choose to jump off a steep cliff, God has put into life the laws of gravity which will result in your fall and probable death. You have the choice, but God knows and works through every choice to accomplish perfectly His desired will and plan for your life.

U.S. popular culture says, "Your future is whatever you make it, so make it a good one."

*Tim Keller, "It may be true that intellectually it's almost impossible to hold together this biblical concept, that we are absolutely free and absolutely determined. We either believe we are determined or we believe we are free, but if you believe either of those, you are cooked. It's impossible to live a decent life that way. For example, if you believe everything is fixed no matter you do, if there are no connection between your choices and your destiny, you are going to be totally passive, totally bored, totally cynical, totally hard, totally indifferent...who cares! But if, as U.S. popular culture believes, not the way fatalist believe, that there was no connection, if you believe there was a total connection and you thought about it, you wouldn't get up in the morning. Now, the Bible does not say that your choices have no connection to your destiny or that your choices determine your destiny, but rather, God in His sovereignty relates your choices partially to your destiny, but He is the One who fixes everything. And therefore, you are held responsible and you are completely free, and yet, you can*

*relax. You see if everything was fixed there would be no incentive but your plans are yours and they belong to you and consequences that will come from it, you have every incentive to work with every fiber of your being to do well and to do right and to be wise, but on the other hand, since everything is under the control of God, who is working everything out for your good, you can relax."*

You don't want to be passive, nor do you want to be cynical. You want to live well, knowing that God is in control.

### **B. God guides non-obviously**

- **Proverbs 16:4** "The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." God is not the author of evil, even though He allows it to happen. How?
- **Proverbs 16:1** "The plans of the heart belong to man...". Man is given the choice to live for Him or to live for himself; to do right or to do wrong. Now, God promises to bring it all under His control and to make it all right...In the END (even the wicked for the DAY of trouble).

### **This is clearly seen in the life of Joseph (Genesis 37-50).**

Never think that God is not working, no matter how silent He may seem. AND, never think that you are going to be able to figure out what God is doing...not until the end. We want to know what God is up to right now!! We almost demand of God that He show what He is doing and tell us His ways. But, God doesn't work that way. He is not obvious in how He deals with us and in what He is doing through us.

Listen, "God's will is more about what God does than what God gives" (Keller). If you want to know God's will, He does not tell us His will, He takes us through His will. You are standing in His will right now. Even if you have gotten yourself in a mess, God is working it through your life to discipline you or train you or help you navigate the currents of life. In fact, you are being navigated!

It's when you realize this and rest in this that you are able to live within His guidance.

## **II. God Provides His Guidance to Us - How does God help us make decisions?**

### **A. You have to pay the price for God's guidance**

- **Proverbs 16:3** "**Commit** your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." This is just the reverse of how most of us think and live our lives. We say, "Yes, I need to commit my plans to the Lord, and then He will bless my

work. Commit what I want to do in life and then having done that, God blesses me." BUT, look! This is just the opposite. What the Bible teaches is that the more you do for the Lord, the wiser you become. The more obedience you display through action, the more wisdom God provides for future living!!

- **Elisabeth Elliot:** *"The more we pay for advice, the more we are likely to listen to it. Advice from a friend which is free we may take or leave. Advice from a consultant we have paid much for personally, we are more likely to accept but it's still our choice, we can take it or leave it. But the guidance of God is different. First of all, we do not come to God asking for advice but for God's will, and that is not optional. And, God's fee is the highest one of all. It costs everything. To ask for the guidance of God requires abandonment. We no longer say, if I trust you you will give me such and such, instead we must say, "I trust you. Give me or withhold from me whatever you choose." As John Newton says, 'What you will, when you will, how you will.'" This is ALL Trust! No matter what! No Matter what God gives or does not give, you Trust!*

When this happens, you become the person that understands the value of God's guidance and rather than stumbling through life aimlessly, frustrated and faking it, you can see clearly the path because you following the One who can see much farther ahead.

Why can't life be like a TV show: there is a crisis and resolution in 30 minutes?

*"Nobody has ever learned they are a sinner by being told. No one has ever discovered their flaws by being told. They have to be shown. And until you see your flaws, they are going to control your life. In more, no one learned that God loved them by being told. In order for your to really know that God loves you, you have to be shown. Over and over and over as life goes on, you have to be in positions where you are absolutely sure that God has abandoned you and then find out later on that you were wrong" (Keller).* A person who understands this truly is growing, but it takes time and experience in the good times and bad times.

## **B. You have to develop the wisdom for God's guidance**

- **Proverbs 12:15** "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." How does this happen? It goes back to Commitment. Commit yourself to the Lord. You see, the One who knows everything offers you counsel, but the way you receive that counsel is not by Him dropping it in your lap, but by entrusting yourself to Him. When you do that, over time, he makes you into the person who makes wise decisions.

When you are not sure what to do, what do you do? Make a Decision! In the Old Testament, they used the two stones, and they would roll them like dice and if they turned this way or that way, they would think that is God's will. What if Jesus had done this when facing the cross? Jesus didn't have peace about going to the cross. The cross was a painful, awful thought, but he made the decision to go believing that His Father would lead Him through anything he had to endure. That is how we must live our life.

We want God to make all our decisions for us, but God wants us to make a decision.

@ What is the difference between your 4 year old child asking you if he/she can play and your 20 year old child in college calling to ask if they can go out and play?

God is not like the parent who wants their children emotionally dependent on them. God wants us to be like Him, able to make decisions and think and reason so that we are not robots or trapped in an inhumane existence.

"Guidance is as much as what God does as something God gives"(Keller).

- **Prov. 16:3** "Commit" total, unconditional, rolling yourself over onto God. Who does this? Hardly anyone consistently!

### **III. God Purchases Guidance for Us**

- Guidance from God is about recognizing His sacrifice - that may be the hardest thing for us to do. Look at **Mark 4:35-38**
- You see, what Jesus did when He took all of our sin upon Himself, He said, "I will go through the storm of your sin without any navigation. I will be abandoned. I will go through the waves of torment and pain. I will commit everything to the Father and go down with the ship!"
- Jesus is saying that I am willing to be abandoned without navigation, so that you will have access to divine navigation and never be alone!

In our trips to the moon, our space crafts were off course 90% of the time. If not for constant contact with Ground Control, the necessary corrections could not be made. We must stay connected to God's control and use Him as a guide to make the course corrections in life.