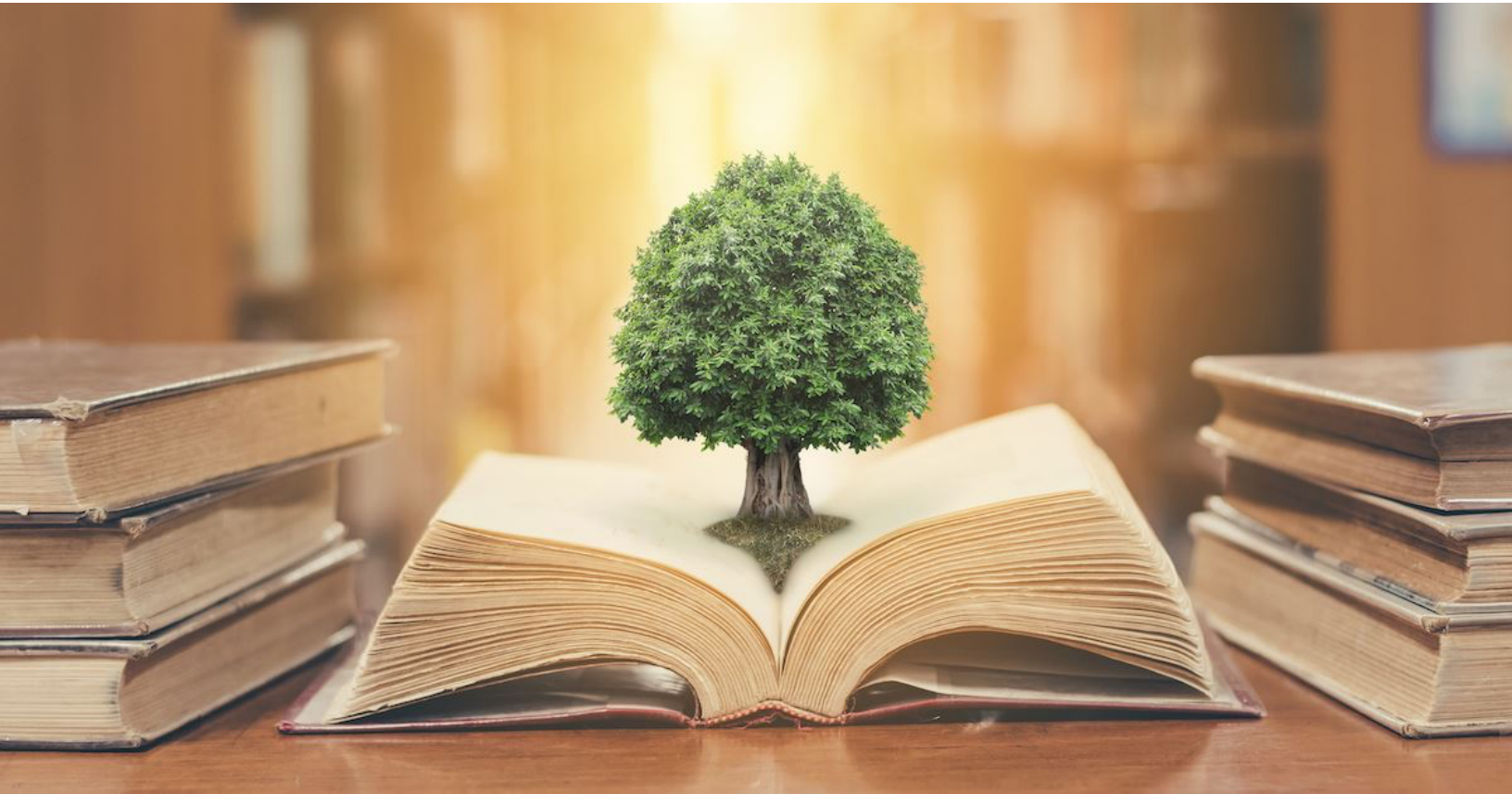


# **THE WISDOM OF PROVERBS**

**Second Baptist Church  
Summer Curriculum Series**



**August 2020**



# WEEK NINE

## Proverbs 11

Do you know what a linchpin is? A linchpin is an incredibly important part of a wagon: it keeps the wheels on the axles. If you were to remove the linchpin from the axle as the wagon is being pulled, the wheels would literally fall off and the wagon would be useless. Why am I talking about linchpins? The term can also be used figuratively of something or someone that holds the various elements of a complicated structure together. Integrity in the life of the believer is the linchpin of our witness. It doesn't matter how long you have been a Christian, how many verses you've memorized, how much money you've tithed, or how many people you've brought to Christ, if you are found to be a person without integrity then the whole of your witness is at risk.

### HOW IMPORTANT IS INTEGRITY IN YOUR LIFE? HOW IMPORTANT IS THE INTEGRITY OF OTHERS IN YOUR LIFE?

**Proverbs 11:3** The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

Have you ever gotten lost? How did you get that way? Generally, we find ourselves lost when we either fail to get directions to where we are going or fail to follow the directions we are given. Instead of relying on the wisdom of others, we rely on our own ability to navigate roads we have never journeyed upon. In verse 3 we see that **the integrity of the upright guides them**. Integrity guides the wise like a compass guides a captain. The beauty of the compass is in the fact that no matter where you are, no matter what situation you are in, no matter what position on the planet you find yourself, the compass will always find and point North. It never changes. Only our relation to north changes. The integrity of the upright acts as the compass of our lives. No matter what circumstance of life we find ourselves, it is our integrity that points to God and His commands. It is up to each of us to decide whether we follow that moral bearing or not.

### HOW DOES INTEGRITY SERVE AS A MORAL COMPASS IN YOUR LIFE?

On the other hand, **the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them**. Here, crookedness is also translated perverseness, meaning obstinate in opposing what is right,

reasonable, or accepted. In other words, the opposite of integrity. Instead of seeking what is right, good, and moral, the treacherous oppose in their words and actions what is good and moral. As a result, this pushing back against morality is what leads to their own destruction. This is painful not only for the person following the wrong path but also for their friends who recognize where their actions are leading them. It is painful to see a person walking the path of destruction and not listening to godly wisdom. The question comes, how many times have you been that person?

**Proverbs 11:5-6** The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust.

The first impact of integrity is on the individual. We see that **the righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight** and **the righteousness of the upright delivers them**. Your integrity keeps your path of righteousness straight and delivers you from pitfalls. When you live a life of integrity, it keeps you on the path God has called you to walk. You learn and apply His commands to your life in the way you treat and interact with others. Keeping your way straight keeps you from falling into the traps of satan that line your daily walk. When satan tempts you, you stand by God's word and continue to walk. Through this, God delivers you from satan's snares.

On the other side, **the wicked falls by his own wickedness**. While the wise lives by his integrity, the wicked are guided by their own wickedness. The wicked lives only to please himself. He falls by his own wickedness because he lives in his own wickedness. The wise looks to God for guidance and His Word for His commands. He loves the commands and puts them into action daily. The wicked look to no one but themselves for guidance. Since their beliefs and ways are contrary to God's, their path in life leads them far from God. In the same way, **the treacherous are taken captive by their lust**. While they believe themselves to be serving themselves, they are truly only serving their sin. Prior to salvation, we are in bondage to sin, unable to break the chains of the flesh. Upon salvation, Jesus break's sin's grasp on our lives and provides His Spirit to help us resist temptation. The wicked have no such assistance, so their lives continue to be bound by the lust of their heart.

**TAKE A MOMENT TO EVALUATE YOUR DAILY WALK. PRACTICALLY AND HONESTLY, ARE YOU BEING LED BY THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD’S WORD OR ARE YOU BEING LED BY YOUR OWN INTUITION?**

**Proverbs 11:11** By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown.

In these verses we see the impact of individual integrity on the community. We learn **by the blessing of the upright a city is exalted**. We do not live in a vacuum as individuals. Our decisions affect not just ourselves, but our family, friends, and community as a whole. God blesses the upright. When you follow God’s commands even when faced with difficult situations, then God’s blessing is poured out on you. This doesn’t mean following God’s commands guarantees material wealth. Instead God blesses through His Spirit and the fruits gained from following His guidance. We see these fruits in Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Imagine a community of people dedicated to God’s commands that see the fruit of the Spirit growing in their lives. That would be an incredible blessing for a community and the city, as the Word says, certainly would be exalted. How do we move towards a society like this? It all begins on the individual level.

**ARE YOU GROWING IN INTEGRITY? ARE YOU LEARNING GOD’S WORD AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?**

Just as individuals of integrity can bring blessing to a community, individuals of wickedness can bring ruin. **By the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown**. We learned a few weeks ago about the powerful impact our words can have on those around us. In the same way, the words of the wicked can bring great strife to a community. We are particularly susceptible to this in the church. Wicked words within the church create dissension among members. Wicked words divide brother and sister in Christ. It may be an off the cuff remark or a deliberate attempt to divide, but words that seek division in the church are wicked. We must be careful to examine what we say, the intentions behind them, and the resulting impact of our words. Ultimately, we must prove to be children of integrity instead of wicked instigators.

**Proverbs 11:14** Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

After reviewing the impact and importance of integrity, we now turn to a practical way of developing and maintaining integrity. The Scripture says **where there is no guidance, a people falls**. We know from the book of Judges that when a people are left to decide for themselves what is right and wrong, they naturally follow the path of destruction. With no guidance comes no direction. Where there are no morals there is no moral compass. Ultimately, this leads to the fall of the people. In our lives, when we fail to seek guidance or willingly choose to ignore guidance, we set ourselves up to fail.

In contrast, the wise realize that in an abundance of counselors there is safety. Note that the author doesn't simply say one counselor. He says that **safety comes when there is an abundance of counselors**. When you are in a situation where you recognize your need for guidance, it's important to seek out wise counsel from as many people as possible. Of course, you must make sure you are seeking counsel from those that are wise. Simply getting counsel from the people closest to you doesn't guarantee the wisdom of their counsel. If you don't believe me, just ask Job! Job discovers quickly that the counsel he receives from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zohpar is not godly counsel. Despite their words, Job maintained his integrity. It's important to be selective in from whom you seek counsel. When looking for counsel, be sure to seek out those who you respect, those who are further along in their spiritual walk than you, those who have lived through situations similar to you, and those who have walked in situations you can't imagine. If you pray for God's guidance in seeking mentors and counsel, He will be faithful to either reveal those who are already in your life or to bring someone new along your path.

**DO YOU HAVE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE FROM WHICH YOU SEEK GODLY COUNSEL? IF NOT, WHO ARE SOME PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH OR IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU COULD ASK FOR COUNSEL?**

# WEEK TEN

## PROVERBS 12

**Proverbs 12:1** Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

In this verse we see the contrast of how discipline and reproof are received. On the positive side, **whoever loves discipline loves knowledge**. Two questions come to mind: Who loves discipline? And: What does discipline have to do with knowledge? In answering the first question, you must think back to times of discipline in your life. Often that will bring to mind parental discipline. For me, I remember specifically a time my mom disciplined me. Our church youth group went on a ski trip that my older sister and brother attended. My parents chaperoned and I tagged along. After what seemed like countless hours on a church van, we pulled up to the ski lodge and I jumped out of the van and into a busy parking lot without giving it a second thought. Like most parents who see their kids running unattended in a parking lot, my mom snatched me up and disciplined me on the spot! At the moment, I certainly didn't love discipline. But as I look back, I'm grateful for the lesson. The spanking I received was painful, but it did not compare to the pain I would have felt had I been hit by a car. We grow to love discipline when we can anticipate the life lessons that will be learned from it.

Discipline brings a growth in knowledge. Looking back to my example, I learned an important lesson from my mother's discipline. Running in a parking lot is dangerous, especially as a little child. I learned to never do that again. Thanks to that knowledge, I have never unwillingly been hit by a car in a parking lot. I was willingly hit by a car in a parking lot one time, but that's another story for another lesson! To love knowledge is to love discipline, and vice versa. Discipline is the vehicle of learning knowledge.

### **WHAT KNOWLEDGE HAVE YOU GAINED THROUGH DISCIPLINE? WHAT EXAMPLES COMES TO MIND?**

God brings discipline in our lives when we need to course correct. Just like a parent disciplining a child in order to protect them, God disciplines His children to protect us. When we don't want God's discipline we don't want God's protection. By doing that, Scripture calls us stupid. **He who hates reproof is stupid**. Now I've got to be honest, part of the reasoning behind me

including this verse in our curriculum is because it is so bold in this particular statement. Bold, but very true. Hating reproof is hating knowledge. If discipline is the vehicle to learning knowledge, then to hate reproof is to hate learning. Our greatest spiritual lessons are learned in moments of trial and suffering. We learn important lessons in those times because we are forced to recognize our own inability and lack of knowledge compared to God's might and wisdom. In those moments, we find ourselves more open to God's guidance since we have exhausted our own limited capabilities. Our recognition of God's superiority to us, the very fear of God that we discussed to kick off this series, is the beginning of pursuit of Godly wisdom.

**Proverbs 12:10** Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

**Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast.** No, this is not a PETA endorsement, but the way you treat animals does say a lot about your character. Animals and pets are unable to communicate with humans as to how they are being treated. If you treat an animal cruelly, it cannot call the authorities and notify them of abuse. Also, if you treat an animal lovingly, they cannot shower you with material possessions. The way you treat animals is a glimpse into the condition of your heart. Loving people are not cruel when there are no immediate consequences. If you find yourself mistreating a helpless animal, then you need to evaluate the state of your own heart.

Ultimately, this is bigger than just animal treatment. This is an issue of integrity and compassion. If you cannot find compassion for the least of God's creation, how can you truly be compassionate to His image bearers?

## **HOW DOES THE WAY YOU TREAT PETS AND ANIMALS REFLECT HOW YOU VIEW YOUR FELLOW MAN (OR WOMAN)?**

**Proverbs 12:18** There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

We've covered the destructive nature of our words in previous lessons, so I won't dwell long on that portion of this Scripture. But the imagery is worth taking note of. We are warned that **one whose rash words are like sword thrusts**. Rash words can be cutting. Rash words are those that come immediately to mind and are spoken without thinking. Just like the treatment



of animals, the rash word is a window into the heart. When you do not allow yourself the time to filter your words, they can speak of the true intentions within your heart. While words can't do physical harm, the emotional harm that can be done is similar to sword thrusts. I've never been stabbed by a sword, but I'm sure it's painful. Words, too, can be equally emotionally painful.

### **WHEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED PAIN BECAUSE OF HARSH WORDS FROM ANOTHER PERSON? WHEN HAVE YOU INFLICTED PAIN ON ANOTHER THROUGH HARSH WORDS?**

In contrast, **the tongue of the wise brings healing**. While our words can do great damage, they also can bring great healing. Have you ever had that friend that knew exactly what you needed to hear in hard times? Have you ever received words of encouragement when you needed them most? Wisdom can bring healing in so many ways. Wise words can help us understand when we are not walking in righteousness. They can point us to Christ when we feel alone. They can heal hearts of those who are hurting. The intention behind the tongue of the wise is to point others to God. From there, God provides healing. The rash words above are focused on tearing down others, but the words of the wise are focused on lifting spirits and pointing to God.

### **WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SPOKE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO SOMEONE? WHO CAN YOU SPEAK HEALING WORDS TO THIS WEEK?**

**Proverbs 12:26** One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

**One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor.** We can follow this Scripture in two ways. First, we can intentionally be a guide to our neighbor. This takes purposeful action on our part. You have to ask yourself what are ways you can guide your neighbor towards Christ. If your neighbor is an unbeliever, this means intentionally developing a connection with them. Start by being a good neighbor. Get to know them, their family, their hobbies and interests. Invite them to your home. In every conversation, find ways to point them to Christ. This doesn't mean you need to recite the Romans Road to them every time you talk to them, but it does mean making sure Jesus is a part of your conversation in some way. You talk about the things you love, so if

you can talk sports, hobbies, career, and family, you certainly should be able to talk about Jesus.

If your neighbor is a believer, then you can guide your neighbor in a deep relationship with Jesus. Have devotion time and Bible studies with them. Invite them to dinner for fellowship and encouragement. See what you can learn from them and what they can learn from you. Show them what your walk with Christ looks like and be open to seeing what their walk with Christ looks like. Whether they are older or younger, you both can grow and learn from one another.

Both of these actions, with believers and nonbelievers, takes intentional actions. Another way to be a guide to your neighbor is through your lifestyle. Let them see how you live for Jesus. Your neighbors can gain closer insight into your true self since their experience with you is at home, where you are most comfortable. They can be a reminder that there is no point in our life where we set our Christianity aside. Our faith impacts those around us, including our neighbors, at all times.

### **HOW CAN YOU INTENTIONALLY ENGAGE YOUR NEIGHBORS FOR JESUS?**

Conversely, **the way of the wicked leads them astray**. There is great danger in leading your neighbor astray. Jesus speaks of this in Luke 17:

“And he said to his disciples, ‘Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.’”

Think of the imagery Jesus uses. Being drug under the sea by the weight of a millstone is a better outcome in the eyes of God than that His children lead others into temptation. This means you must be very careful in the way you lead your neighbor.

### **ARE ANY OF YOUR ACTIONS IN LIFE AT HOME LEADING YOUR NEIGHBORS ASTRAY? ARE YOU HAVING A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE INFLUENCE ON THEM?**

# WEEK ELEVEN

## PROVERBS 14

My first interaction with a homeless person came after a Braves game. I grew up in a small town, so I didn't often see people begging on the sidewalk. But when I was in middle school our youth group went to see a Braves game at the old Fulton County Stadium in Atlanta. We went for the cheap parking, so we had a long walk to and from the stadium. On the way out, there were people lining the sidewalks asking for money. I was a tender hearted kid with dollars in my pocket so I decided to give some money to one of them. I picked one guy on the sidewalk to give money to. I approached him quickly, didn't slow down my pace, dropped my money in his cup, and never looked at him. Honestly, as a 12 year old, I was just scared. Looking back at that now, my intentions were in the right place but my heart wasn't. I did the right thing, I gave the man money, but there was no love in my heart in my action.

That interaction has burdened me for twenty five years. The most loving thing I could have done, in addition to giving monetarily, would have been to recognize that man as a fellow human being and speak Godly words of love to him. At the very least, I could have looked him in the eyes. Even though Union City is a rural town, we have people living in poverty all around us. How we engage God's creation living in poverty says a lot about how in line our hearts are with God's.

**Proverbs 14:21** Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.

Last week we ended on a discussion of our influence on our neighbors. This week, we're continuing the focus of our interactions with with our neighbors. For this, we look back to Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan.

### READ LUKE 10:25-37

I start with a refresher on this parable to define who were are speaking of when we say neighbor. Last week I spoke specifically of those who live near you. This week I am speaking of those you come in contact with throughout the day, whether you know them or not. In this parable, there are four men involved. There is the man who fell into the hands of the robbers, there is the priest and the Levite, and finally there is the Samaritan man. The priest and Levite

pass by the wounded man, not even slowing down to check on his condition. Then comes the Samaritan. The wounded man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. We don't know anything beyond that, but let's just assume he's from one of those two cities, neither of which are in Samaria. So these two men, the wounded man and the Samaritan, are not neighbors in the geographic sense, but in the end the Samaritan proves to be a neighbor in the godly sense. He doesn't pass the man like you pass roadkill on a back road, which is what the priest and Levite did.

Instead he recognizes a fellow human being who has been hurt and in need. He does not know the nature of his wounds, whether he brought the attack on himself or was beaten for good reason: He just sees a man in need. They were neighbors because they share the same Creator. Sometimes we fall into the trap of rationalizing why we shouldn't help another person. We may think they are in their position in life because of their own decisions. We may rationalize not helping them because we don't trust their integrity with our gift. We may rationalize not helping them because we think they are "working the system." Each one of these rationalizations or, let's be honest, excuses for not helping, speak more of our belief in our own superiority over the person in need. It's a judgment of the person in need based on our own biases. The Samaritan doesn't exercise judgement on the wounded man. He sees a man in need and he seeks to provide for that need. It's a Christlike response. Jesus is the ultimate judge of our character and intentions. He sees the deepest, darkest parts of our heart. And He still died for us. If He can do that, if he can willingly go to the cross on our behalf knowing how sinful we are, then certainly we can help those in need around us without judgement.

### **HAVE YOU EVER PASSED JUDGMENT ON SOMEONE IN POVERTY? HAS GOD CONVICTED YOU OF THAT JUDGEMENT?**

**Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner.** The verb used here for despises indicates scorn or disrespect for someone or something. This is completely opposite of what we read in Luke 10. The command explored in the passage is how to love your neighbor as yourself. Even if you have low self-esteem, you still love yourself in some way. As Ephesians 5:29 says, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church." We care for our own bodies by providing for them. When we are hungry, as we are able, we feed ourselves. When we are thirsty, we give our flesh water. If, then, we despise our neighbor instead of loving him, then we have committed sin.

## **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN DESPISE YOUR NEIGHBOR?**

The discussion question above is key in evaluating whether there is scorn or disrespect in your heart for your neighbor. Again, we are not speaking specifically of those who live next to you. As we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan, your neighbor is someone you share some connection and proximity with. In a world that grows more connected by the day through the advancement of technology, those we should consider neighbors is growing exponentially. Look back at the meaning of despises: scorn or disrespect for someone. Have you scorned or disrespected someone lately? I'm just going to be honest, I have been burdened deeply by what I am seeing lately on social media. I have seen scorn, disrespect, and distasteful posts on Facebook pointed at those we should consider our neighbors. What burdens me most is the fact that I've seen this sinful social media activity from people in churches I've served that I've respect for a long time. Most likely that includes some of you reading this very curriculum at this very moment. Your posts are sinful and you should put this page down now and repent to our Lord.

## **HAVE YOU SHOWN SCORN OR DISRESPECT TO SOMEONE IN PERSON OR ONLINE? HAVE YOU APOLOGIZED AND SOUGHT REPENTANCE?**

In contrast, **blessed is he who is generous to the poor**. The one who recognizes those in need as fellow human beings and is willing to be generous in any way they can is blessed by the Lord. Jesus says in Matthew 6:2-4:

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

The reward and blessing of the Father comes to those who are generous to the poor and needy. I cannot tell you what form that blessing comes in. I will not promise monetary blessing for giving to the poor, because I believe God's blessing is worth far more than that. God will bring blessing and reward into your life in ways you could never imagine when you are obedient to His command to give.

## WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD'S BLESSING FOR BEING GENEROUS?

**Proverbs 14:31** Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

This proverb is another one reflected by a parable of Jesus.

### Read Matthew 25:31-46

In this parable, Jesus speaks of the final judgement. As He gathers the nations and begins to separate the sheep from the goats, He uses the treatment of the needy as His way to distinguish between those coming into the kingdom and those going into eternal punishment.

**He who is generous to the needy honors him** is reflected in the sheep who have given food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and hospitality to the stranger, clothing to the naked, and ministry to the sick and imprisoned. He uses this as a separator because the actions of the righteous to the needy were done as actions to Jesus Himself. If Jesus was hungry, we'd feed Him. If he was thirsty, we'd give Him a drink. If he were cold and naked, we'd give him a UGA shirt to wear. We would care for Him because we love Him. But Jesus says that if we love Him then we would care for those in need around us just as we would care for Him. In the parable, the sheep who are generous to the needy are honored by inheriting God's kingdom and eternal life.

In contrast, **whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker**. The goats in the parable did not care for the needy in their lives. They ignored the needs and ignored the people. As such, they ignored Jesus. Jesus makes it clear in verse 40, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." If we insult those in poverty, we insult the very Son of God. Jesus takes the treatment of our fellow man very seriously. Do you?

**WHO ARE "THE LEAST OF THESE MY BROTHERS" IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW? HOW CAN YOU SHOW KINDNESS TO THEM? HOW DOES SHOWING KINDNESS TO THEM SHOW KINDNESS TO JESUS?**

# WEEK TWELVE

## PROVERBS 15-16

Do you know what is the most useless purchase ever? A 2020 planner. I mean honestly, after March of this year you may as well throw a 2020 planner in the garbage. I've got one sitting on my desk now that hasn't been touched since March. We do not know what the world will look like next week or next month. Lately we can't even guess what the world will look like tomorrow! In a year like this where so many well laid plans have been ruined (like those Cardinals/Braves tickets still sitting on my dresser), we need to be reminded that God remains in control. We can rely on Him to guide our steps in uncertain times. If you haven't lived like that before, now is the time to learn!

**Proverbs 15:24** The path of life leads upward for the prudent, that he may turn away from Sheol beneath.

**The path of life leads upward for the prudent.** The overall trajectory of the prudent life is upward. When we live in a manner that points upward, we live in a manner that points to God. In our daily decisions we point to God when we stop to pray for God's guidance and follow how His Spirit leads. In our interactions with others we point to God when we consider how He would want us to treat our fellow man. Our path follows where our eyes are pointed. My favorite hymn is Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus. The chorus goes like this:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.

When our eyes and our path point upward to God, when we embrace His wisdom and grace, then the things of this earth will lose their appeal in light of the glory we face. This is what powers us to **turn away from Sheol beneath**. Focusing on the things of earth means we focus on the things here below. In Colossians 3:1-2 Paul says,

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

This all points back to having an eternal prospective in this temporary life. When our minds are on the things of God, we seek to have an eternal impact on those in our daily life. We think beyond the momentary needs or temptations and instead focus on how we can build God's kingdom. When our minds are on the things of earth, then our focus is only on our momentary needs and temptations. Our focus is on ourselves and our fleshly needs. To consider yourself wise, you must have an upward focus in your daily walk.

### **HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK OF THE ETERNAL IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR DAILY INTERACTIONS? DO YOU THINK MORE OF ETERNITY OR OF THE HERE AND NOW?**

**Proverbs 16:2** All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.

We are living this verse out in real time today. Many of those outside of our faith believe that man is fundamentally good. They believe that if man digs deep down inside himself that he will live a moral life and treat his fellow many kindly. The problem with this belief is it's foundational error: That man is naturally good. Romans teaches us that this is simply not true. Romans 3:10-12 says,

"As it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Pauls doubles down a few verses later and says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We know, biblically, that no one is righteous in and of himself. Man has fallen into the belief that he can live a righteous life on his own. In contrast, scripture tells us that **all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit**. Man believes his ways are pure because he is judging from a corrupt heart. Man measures righteousness and morality in millimeters when God measures it in gigaparsecs (google it!). Our measure of righteousness simply doesn't measure up!

### **IN WHAT WAYS DO OUR STANDARDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS NOT ADD UP TO GOD'S STANDARDS?**

Instead of having to search ourselves for our own flawed morality, God has provided His word as our guide. By the time you are studying this lesson, schools may have been back in session



for a couple of weeks. Think back to your time in school. Imagine you're back in Trigonometry and you have a test on Friday. What do you do? Do you simply look inside yourself and trust that your opinion on trigonometry will be right? If you take the test based on your personal mathematic beliefs, how do you think you will do? This, of course, would be foolish. If you have a trigonometry test, you study the trigonometry book because that is what your performance is graded against. You wouldn't dare take a test on a subject without studying it first. Or at least you wouldn't expect to do well on the test without studying first.

In the same way, when we live our lives searching ourselves for righteous guidelines, we stand no chance at getting it right. Instead we must search the words of the Authority on righteousness to even have a chance at knowing what is truly moral and what is not. God's Word provides those guidelines, we must simply be faithful in studying it.

The difference between the trigonometry test and the righteousness test is that while you may know the trig test is coming, we don't always know when the righteousness test is coming. Scripture says **the Lord weighs the spirit**. He's the one that administers the test to see the state of our spiritual walk. These tests come at random times in random ways. The weigh-in may come when you come home tired from a long day and find yourself irritated at everyone at home for no fault of their own. It may come when a friend calls for help at a time that's not the most convenient for you. It may come when you feel God's prodding to share the gospel with someone when you weren't expecting to.

### **WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF WHEN YOUR SPIRITUAL WALK HAS BEEN TESTED IN TIMES YOU WEREN'T READY FOR? HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR A TEST IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN IT IS COMING?**

**Proverbs 16:9** The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

There is an old yiddish adage that says, "Man plans, and God laughs." Have you ever found that to be true in your life? If you haven't found this to be true yet, the year 2020 certainly has proven this truth. We are planners, it's part of our nature. **The heart of man plans his way**. We want to know where we are going and why. We seek to plan because it gives structure to our lives and, in a sense, provides security in knowing what lies ahead. The problem is, we can't predict what's going to happen. If you don't believe me, just check the weather on your phone. My phone has a 10 day forecast, including today. I cannot tell you how often the forecast

changes ten days out. In fact, most days the hourly forecast changes. Planning our lives is like forecasting weather: we do the best we can with the knowledge we have. Problem is, we don't have much knowledge!

**WHAT ARE SOME TIMES THAT YOUR LIFE "PLANS" HAD TO CHANGE? HOW WERE THEY CHANGED FOR THE BETTER?**

That's not to say that planning is bad. We should seek direction in our daily life in order to fulfill God's calling. But we shouldn't be weighed down when our plans have to change. In fact, we should recognize that when our plans change, God is working! **The Lord establishes His steps.** God guides our lives, so if our plans have to change then that means they weren't right in the first place!

Think back to Week Ten when we discussed discipline. God's discipline can come in the changing of our plans. I think of this year, this crazy 2020 year. We, as a church, had plans. We had big events planned, small events planned, even just routine weekly events planned. Then everything halted, everything changed. The Lord worked to establish our steps. We were and are no longer able to sit and plan out the next six months. We really can't plan out the next six days with any confidence! But God has provided for us at every step. He has been faithful this year, as He has been faithful for some many years, and as He will remain faithful for eternity. We must simply be faithful to Him. We rest in knowing that, while our plans may change, He guides our steps.

**HOW HAS THIS YEAR TESTED YOUR PLANNING NEEDS? HOW HAS GOD, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF A YEAR OF UNCERTAINTY, CONTINUED TO GUIDE AND PROVIDE FOR YOU?**

# WEEK THIRTEEN

## PROVERBS 17-18

I love movies. If you've heard me teach or preach, then you've most likely heard me reference a movie at some point. Shockingly, I don't think I've referenced a single movie in the last 12 lessons. This is the lesson where I fix that! Remember Toy Story? At the very beginning of that movie we're introduced to a sweet Randy Newman song called "You've Got a Friend in Me." One of the verses goes like this:

You've got a friend in me, You've got a friend in me. If you've got troubles, I've got'em too. There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you. We stick together and can see it through 'cause you've got a friend in me.

It's a great friendship song that starts a great movie franchise centered on friendship. We should all be able to look at one another at church and say, "You've got a friend in me!" This week we're taking a look at biblical friendship.

**Proverbs 17:17** A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

A good friend is one that doesn't choose certain times to be a good friend. We can't choose our circumstances and times of trial, so we need friends that are willing to be there for us at all times, good or bad. I remember the day my mama passed away. It was a Tuesday and a school day. Most of my friends were in my youth group at church, and most of my youth group at church went to a different high school than I did. But on that day my two best friends, Brandon and Chris, left school to come be there for me in my time of need. I can't imagine what it's like being an 18 year old driving to see his friend who just lost his mom. I can't imagine the anxiety of not knowing what to do or what to say. Regardless, they knew their friend was in need and they were determined to be there for me. Twenty years later I haven't forgotten their kindness, and I never will.

**WHAT IS A TIME THAT A FRIEND HELPED YOU IN A TIME OF NEED? WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN THAT FRIEND TO SOMEONE ELSE?**

**A good friend loves at all times.** This means a friend is one who loves no matter the circumstances. For us, we can look at this from both sides of the friendship. First, we can use

this scripture as a framework for our friends. Do you have friends that are there for you anytime you need them? Do you have friends that are flaky, that don't show up? Finding those friends who love through all times can benefit your life beyond measure. Recognizing people that don't love you at all times help you to distinguish them from a good friend.

On the other hand, this scripture works as a framework for how we are as friends. Are you the type of person that will drop everything to be a comfort to a friend in need? Are you there on a Saturday to help them move, or a Monday morning to encourage them at the gym, or on a Sunday morning making sure they come to church? Are you living as a good friend described in Scripture? Jesus says in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." That's a great love! Do you love your friends like this?

Developing this type of love for one another elevates you from a good friend to a brother (or sister). This Proverb moves on to tell us that **a brother is born for adversity**. Those two friends that came in my time of need? From that moment I regarded them as brothers. There's something deeper in brotherhood than even in friendship. There is a deep bond and connection among brothers that isn't shared anywhere else. There's a willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of our brothers and there's a desire to help in times of need.

**Proverbs 17:22** A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

For six years I worked in an Assisted Living facility. I learned very quickly how true this Proverb is in that particular setting. When someone would become a resident at our facility, it was my job to make sure they stay active and engaged through daily activities. These activities were meant to facilitate socialization among residents. This was important because if someone moves into a facility like an Assisted Living and finds purpose and hope in life, then their health tended to improve. On the other hand, residents that came in and lost hope would tend to decline in health.

This Proverb says **a joyful heart is good medicine**. This is a great verse for us to study after 13 weeks in Proverbs. After studying God's wisdom, we should know by now how to gain a joyful heart. Knowing God, who He is, who we are in relation to Him, and how we respond in our life to the wisdom in His Word will bear the fruit of joy deep in our heart. That comes from knowing that God's wisdom is true today and forever. That His guidance for your everyday life comes from His all-knowing wisdom and guides us on the straight path. Following God's

commands leads us down the straight path that God guides us down and protects us through. Knowing that our lives are in His hands and not our own is good medicine. A loving God, powerful and mighty, has your every step in His hand and will carry you through all trials. That is good medicine.

## **WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED OVER THESE 13 WEEKS THAT HELP YOUR HEART GROW JOYFUL?**

On the other hand, **a crushed spirit dries up the bones**. Have you ever known someone with a crushed spirit. Someone who just seems to have no hope in life? Have you ever been that person? In the world today and in our community there are many who live with crushed spirits. Whether it's because of the pandemic, the economic downturn, the loss of loved ones, or other causes, there are many today who feel as though their bones are drying up. You may even be one of those people. Earlier in this lesson we learned about friendship and brotherhood. If you know someone who has a crushed spirit, perhaps God is calling you to lift them up today. If you are living with a crushed spirit, maybe God is calling you to give others the opportunity to be good friends and brothers. Either way, a crushed spirit is a serious matter. How can you help someone today?

## **DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS A CRUSHED SPIRIT? WHAT CAN YOU OR YOUR LIFE GROUP DO TO HELP LIFT THEIR SPIRITS?**

**Proverbs 18:10** The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.

The theme running through this lesson is our need for help from others. Sometimes it's help from other people. This time it's help from the Lord directly. Here we see that **the name of the Lord is a strong tower**. This verse evokes military imagery in a defensive tower. There was precious little as far as protection goes in battles in biblical times. Armor was for the wealthy and if you were lucky you received a shield. Otherwise, you are on a battlefield with nothing but a weapon and your bravery. A strong tower represents a solid defense against a battling enemy. Here it is the name of the Lord, His attributes and protection, that are the strong tower. There is not stronger and more able to protect us from danger than God. He provides that protection, but we must desire and accept it.

**The righteous man runs into it and is safe.** A tower won't provide a lick of protection if we do not utilize it. Imagine having a strong army bearing down on you when you look up and see a tower. How foolish would it be to ignore the tower and stand your ground? That's what we do everyday when we ignore the guidance and protection of God's Word. We look over at our Bibles and think, "Nah, I can handle it on my own." How foolish! In contrast, the righteous man runs into the tower. He sees the protection offered and he sprints to take advantage of it. He doesn't keep one foot in the tower and the other outside. He doesn't slowly make his way to the shadow of the tower. No, he runs into it with all that he has. That's what we must do to God. We must run with abandon into God's name. Anything less would be denying God's protection and believing in our own.

**WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF TIMES YOUR'VE FELT GOD'S PROTECTION IN YOUR LIFE?  
WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM SEEKING THAT PROTECTION AND SAFETY EVERYDAY?**

**Proverbs 18:12** Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

I chose this as our last Proverb in this series because it speaks so deeply to the problem of man today. The condition of the heart is a telling indicator of the rewards of life. In the first instance, before destruction a man's heart is haughty. Now we don't use the word haughty too often today, but it means to be proud or to lift up/exalt. Here, the man's heart is arrogant and self-exalted. The result of that heart condition is destruction. The higher we lift ourselves up, the farther we fall when we come to reality. Jesus speaks of this in Luke 14:7-11.

**READ LUKE 14:7-11**

In this passage we are told to not assume a place of honor, for you will be shamed when someone of greater honor comes and takes your place. To assume a place of honor is to believe yourself to be above another person. In reality, we are all on level ground before the cross, only Christ is exalted above all others. So when we assume we are better than others, when we live with a haughty heart, we are in for great shame one day.

**AFTER READING THE PARABLE OF WEDDING FEAST, HOW DO YOU THINK YOU  
WOULD FEEL IF YOU HAD TO BE ASKED TO SIT IN A LOWER POSITION? HAVE YOU  
EVERY SAT IN THE WRONG SEAT AND BEEN ASKED TO MOVE?**

Jesus finishes the parable with the phrase, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." This lines up with the second half of our proverb, humility comes before honor. In humility, we recognized that we are no better than anyone else. In fact, we elevate the needs and honor of others above us. We learn this through our humility before God. When we recognize who God truly is, we realize that everything we think we can boast of is of no significance compared to His perfection. We literally have nothing to offer that can compare to God. That extends to our comparison to others, as well. There is nothing we have that is of greater or lesser importance than those around us. As such, there is no basis for us to elevate ourselves above others or God.

Wisdom comes only after we humble ourselves before the Lord. Only then can we truly see how God's knowledge is greater than our own, and we would be fools to ignore it. Thank you for taking this wisdom journey with me. I pray God you have found a greater hunger for Him and His presence today.

**WHAT LESSON FROM THIS SUMMER STICKS OUT TO YOU MOST? HOW HAVE YOU CHANGED THIS SUMMER IN LIGHT OF WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED IN PROVERBS?**