

PROVERBS Bible Reading Schedule

5 Weeks

WEEK 1

I wonder what you think about Proverbs? I imagine that most of you have had little time in this book. But those of you who are familiar with the message realize how practical and useful a slow and careful reading of these wise principles has previously been for your life. We are dedicating the month of July to Proverbs. You probably think that these are sayings from Solomon who is introduced in the very first sentence of this book. Even though Solomon may get most of the credit for this book, scholars believe that there were many wise authors involved who added to the book but Solomon often is thought of as the author. Actually, the collection of Proverbs was edited to its final form several years (200 to 300) after Solomon's time, later in the history of Israel. Of course, it was ultimately authored by God through several wise teachers.

One scholar named M. V. Fox summarized the importance of Proverbs in this way: "Proverbs' guiding belief is that the human intellect—wisdom—founded on the fear of God and tutored in traditional teachings, is the prime virtue of character, and as such is the necessary (and almost sufficient) means for creating a life of success—materially, physically, socially, and morally." Get ready for an impacting month in God's Word!

DAY 1 – Proverbs 1

If you would like to read the backdrop of this book, I suggest reading about Solomon's amazing prayer request in 1 Kings 3:1-28. It tells us why Solomon is thought of as the wisest man to ever live. The first seven verses clearly introduce us to the book and tell us an overarching theme: "the fear of the Lord." (V7) Most every commentary on Proverbs cites verse 7 as the theme of the book. Why do you think that is so important? Solomon is telling us that it all begins with awe and reverence for God. God is the Creator and he is the Source of all things. Solomon will repeat this truth in 9:10. I also notice the significant influence of parents in verse 8. At my Mom's 90th birthday I read the second half of this verse: "Don't neglect your mother's instruction." There is no doubt that my Mom was more involved in my day-to-day life than my Dad. She readily gave her instructions. I wasn't always jazzed about it, but looking back I deeply appreciate it. I did throw in a bit of humor regarding my Mom's strong will. Maybe some of you feel the same and also may this motivate you to be an active parent or grandparent because this is God's way of passing on his truth. Amen! This first chapter will easily get you into the "feel" of Proverbs. Beginning in verse 20, we read about wisdom talking about itself. This way of speaking about wisdom will occur again in chapters 4 & 8. What do you notice in verses 20 to 33? What stands out to you? Pick one verse about wisdom's warnings and instructions and take a few minutes to absorb the message. My verse was 33! Listening to the voice of wisdom is a principle that caught my eye. I need to slow down enough to hear wisdom's voice. How about you? How has God used this first chapter to speak to you?

DAY 2 – Proverbs 2

My reading through Proverbs will primarily be from the New Living Translation but I like to check out the wording in other translations as well. Chapter 2 highlights the importance of wisdom. The title says, “The Benefits of Wisdom.” I can’t help but think of James 3:17, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” A New Testament definition of wisdom makes the pursuit of it a top priority, right? Verse 11 has a similar ring to it, “For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy.” What’s there not to like about that?! Too often people view wisdom as boring or something only a really smart person will possess. But wisdom is much more practical than mere intellect. Wisdom helps us know how to act and speak in different situations. It provides the ability to avoid problems as well as the skill to handle them when they arise. Wisdom seems to be about navigating through life skillfully. Spending the month of July on wisdom seems like an especially great way to grow and be more ready for the upcoming challenges that are sure to come across our paths. What statement about wisdom caught your attention in this chapter? What is your response to it?

DAY 3 – Proverbs 3

How did you like the most powerful chapter, in my opinion, of the whole book? I could focus on verses 5 to 12 and come up with a four-part sermon series that would emphasize trust in God, the importance of wisdom, the blessing of generosity, and the reality of God’s discipline. In fact, Proverbs 3:11 & 12 are quoted by the author of Hebrews in 12:5-6. And I am sure you know people who have said that verses 5 & 6 are their “life” verses. Have you memorized those two verses? They are on the top of any biblical list worth memorizing. The idea of trusting God with all your heart is closely connected to the meaning of “the fear of the Lord.” A believer is confident in God’s ability to do anything and the assurance that he always has our best in mind. Fear is a response to God’s authority and trust is focused on his goodness to us. Verses 9 & 10 pertain to the importance of generosity because our God is very generous. We reflect his character when we give generously. First-fruit’s giving is usually associated with tithing, which means a tenth. The “first fruit” is a portion of the whole and so is the tithe. Malachi 3:10 essentially says the same thing, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house...” I encourage you to read the rest of the verse and notice the challenge from God written by Malachi. However, the most repeated aspect of wisdom in the New Testament refers to God’s discipline and how he uses trials to refine us. He utilizes “tough love” to shape our lives to become more like Jesus. Amen! Hebrews 12:5 to 11 says it best. Assignment: find 1 Peter 5:5 in this chapter. Oftentimes the message of Proverbs is repeated in the New Testament because maturity in Christ leads to greater and deeper wisdom. Christ is wise and displayed wisdom time and again when he walked this earth. How has this chapter impacted you? Why?

DAY 4 – Proverbs 4

The most quoted verse in this chapter is clearly verse 23, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” NLT says, “for it determines the course of your life.” Literally, it says, “For from it flow the springs of life.” Obviously, I am suggesting you memorize this verse. The heart represents the center of emotions, thinking, and reasoning. There’s no question that the Bible elevates the significance

of your spiritual heart. It is the center of your inner life and your desire for God. If the heart wanders in allegiance to the things of God, everything is up for grabs. Verse 13 says something very similar, "Take hold of my instructions; don't let them go. Guard them, for they are the key to life." Most Bible Scholars believe these are the words of Solomon and no one else. He says, "tenderly loved as my mother's only child." (V3) This may not mean only child ever, but the one cherished most by his mother who would be Bathsheba, of course. The identification of both father and mother was rare in ancient literature. This is an affirmation of God's purposes for the family. The family would be the best environment for passing on the principles of God that lead to a life of wisdom. What are some of the results mentioned in this section on wisdom? What about the results of a lack of wisdom? There are several comparisons in these verses. Which gets your attention? How are you being shaped by these first few days in Proverbs?

DAY 5 – Proverbs 5

This chapter seems especially relevant in our sexually crazed world. The warning and destruction of promiscuity from verses 1 to 14 is contrasted by the importance of faithfulness in marriage from verse 15 to the end. Solomon knew firsthand the damage and downfall of giving into sexual temptations. Solomon, the wise teacher, frequently warns naïve young men to avoid the lure of sexual expression outside of marriage. Chapters 2, 6 & 7, along with chapter, address the topic with words of warning. The message to succumbing to these sinful desires is dire. One's family and professional aspirations might be destroyed as verse 9 mentions. Proverbs teaches men to cultivate a strong relationship with their own wives which is obviously still so important to us today. From the beginning of Scripture, marriage is sacred, and appropriate sexual expression is an important part of marriage. Sin in the Garden really smeared the beauty of sexuality for Adam and Eve. They could no longer stand naked in the Garden without feeling shame. Proverbs will continually urge men and women to reclaim the beauty of marital love and guard its sanctity as God intended it. Verses 15 to 18 described marital intimacy as drinking from the right well which means one's own well with his wife as his sexual partner and lifelong mate. The Bible clearly presents the joy and intimacy of marriage as a gift from God to be honored within his parameters. But the strongest reminder to me was the truth that God sees all in verse 21, "For the Lord sees clearly what man does, examining every path he takes." We might think our wandering sexual pursuits are secret but nothing is hidden from God. Verse 21 got my attention; which statement or principle got your attention? Why?

DAY 6 – Proverbs 6

Even though the list of detestable things to God gets my attention first, I easily notice the illustration of "ants." As I read that, I think of the movie "Antz," I have to admit. I thought that was an incredibly engaging movie with the humanizing of ants and their ultimate victory. So too, Solomon elevates the determination and organization that these small little insects portray. Even the ant shows more self-motivation and ingenuity than many lazy humans. It is actually quite a slam on the aimless person who becomes a victim of their own disappointing life. But verses 16 to 19 have to be the most relevant truths in the chapter. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list but definitely speaks to issues that grieve our God. It has been suggested that changing the list to seven items actually draws even more attention to the seventh one, "and one who sows discord among brothers (the community of faith)." (V19b, ESV) I can't tell you how often people in the church community have been guilty of this sin. Gossip, a critical

spirit, a negative assessment, and so on have riddled the harmony and beauty of being the Body of Christ so often. Unity, harmony, and peace are especially important to our God. Jesus prayed for unity among believers in John 17:21 & 23 saying that people would recognize him when his people are unified. To bring discord or division is so grievous to God. The sin of bearing a false witness, which is the sixth thing detestable to God, is also a part of the Ten Commandments. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." (Exodus 20:16, KJV) These last two are somewhat related as lying about someone can quickly lead to discord. How do you view these seven detestable things? Why are they something that God hates? The chapter closes with sexual sin and adultery which is a prevalent theme in these first seven chapters of Proverbs. Why do you think that is the case? How has God spoken to you from the reading today?

DAY 7 – Proverbs 7

I can't help but think that Solomon is writing out of his personal experience of being lured into the grasp of a promiscuous woman (women). This is the fourth chapter of 7 with lust, sexual immorality, and adultery taking center stage with a strong warning to flee. In the movie "City Slickers," Mitch is posed with the scenario of a spaceship coming down to earth and a beautiful woman steps out of the spaceship and offers herself to him. Mitch's friend said, "Would you do it; no one would ever know?" His answer was, "No, because I would know." Plus, God would know. Lust, sexual sin, and broken relationships are as real today as they were in Solomon's day. The point is that true wisdom will beg you to flee sexual immortality just like we read in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee from sexual immortality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body." Why is sexual sin so destructive? Why does the Bible elevate the seriousness of sexual sin? What does it mean that this kind of sin is more serious than other sins? I think you know how to answer those questions. In what ways might you be vulnerable to the sexual confusion and decline that is so prevalent in our world? How has God used this first week in Proverbs to speak to you?

WEEK 2

Are you ready for dozens and dozens of wise sayings that apply to so many aspects of life? I hope so because I am sure God will use these each and every day for your daily journey in life. Chapters 8 & 9 will again affirm the importance of wisdom in our lives. But beginning in chapter 10, the specifics and practicality of wisdom will be front and center. I am confident that many of these timeless truths will speak a fresh word to you and me.

DAY 8 – Proverbs 8

The words of this chapter are spoken by wisdom personified. “I love all who love me. Those who search will surely find me.” This approach to speaking about wisdom as being a person is used throughout this chapter. What’s there not to like about wisdom? In verses 6 to 9, wisdom is associated with truth, understanding, and knowledge, which are right, wholesome, plain, and clear. And how’s this for a value statement about wisdom, “Nothing you desire can compare with it” (literally, with her)? (V11) It seems to me that Solomon wants to make sure we know the importance of wisdom as he spends nine chapters elevating it. His presentation in verses 22 to 25 is the most compelling to me. “The Lord formed me (wisdom) from the beginning...” God’s wisdom has always existed. His wisdom is here personified, but wisdom itself is not a person, of course. Wisdom does not exist outside of God; wisdom is an expression of his character and nature. Unlike pagan gods, God needs no outside counselor to give him instructions (Isaiah 40:13-14). You might not think of Jesus as the wisdom of God but you would be in error. “In Christ lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3) I think of Jesus being completely wise. A prime example is when he responds to the questioning Pharisees about taxes, “They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said to them, ‘so give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’ When they heard this, they were amazed.” (Matthew 22:19-22) Why is wisdom so valuable? What do you learn about wisdom in this chapter?

DAY 9 – Proverbs 9

The woman representing wisdom is to be appreciated and befriended. But beginning in verse 13, the woman of folly, the opposite of wisdom, is to be avoided. Wisdom is affirmed from chapter 8:1 to 9:12 in this section, but folly is only worth six verses and should be discarded as worthless. The comparison should point us to the wisdom of God versus the deception of the devil who leads us astray into folly. Verse 8 teaches us that wisdom is teachable. “But correct the wise, and they will love you.” I want to stay teachable realizing there is so much more I need to learn. Verse 10 closes this section as we began in 1:7, “Fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.” I like the addition of the “Holy One” clarifying the pinnacle of who is in charge. Just ask yourself, how can we understand life without knowing the most fundamental truth about it—that God is the source and creator of it all? The word “foundation” in the NLT is usually translated as “beginning.” But I like how the word foundation portrays the ground on which we build. It begins with God; his gift of wisdom is shared with those who fear him. I enjoyed reading chapters 1 to 9 immensely and it reminded me of what a significant role wisdom is meant to play in my life. How might you grow in wisdom? What have you learned from these chapters that will help you mature as a wiser child of God?

DAY 10 – Proverbs 10

We begin a section often referred to simply as “The Proverbs of Solomon.” The main characteristic of these chapters is called antithetical parallelism. The contrast is between wisdom and righteousness compared to folly and wickedness. The arrangement of these sayings appears to be mostly random but now and then you will notice a theme like the tongue, planning ahead, anger, or material possessions. Chapter 10 seems quite random as we get a feel for this ancient approach to wisdom literature. In my reading for this week, I have noticed a recurring theme of speaking and the use of our words. Verse 19 is an example, “Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep you mouth shut.” Oftentimes, the NLT will help with expressing the Biblical truth in a more understandable way. For example, verse 19 in the ESV reads, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.” As I mentioned already, sometimes the author puts themes together even if it is only for two verses. Verse 20 follows the theme of verse 19 with, “The words of the godly are like sterling silver...” You probably remember this childhood proverb, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That proverb did not come from the Bible. In fact, Proverbs often suggests that words have the power of life and death (18:21). I would encourage you to “camp out” on one verse or two after reading the whole chapter. My verse is 11, “The words of the godly are a life-giving fountain.” I can’t help but think of James 3 with the same theme of the use of your tongue. I might suggest you also read the wisdom of James on this topic. What might you need to do to improve what you say and how you say it?

DAY 11 – Proverbs 11

I noticed how many times the NLT translates righteous person with the word “godly.” The Hebrew word is best translated as righteous but godly is appealing to me. The word righteous can trigger thoughts of making a show of my righteous behavior compared to godly which has an internal quality to it for me. Whether you prefer righteous or godly, the idea points to character. Honesty, compassion, leadership, respect, integrity, discretion, generosity, and good deeds fill these verses as the theme of this chapter could be the character of the godly. I am thinking of verse 20 which points to the Lord who delights in those with integrity. I think integrity means being the same on the outside as one is on the inside. Is that a good definition for you? How might you define integrity? Again, other translations use the English word “blameless” instead of integrity. Jesus said something about this, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.” (Matthew 5:8) Pure in heart explains blameless and integrity for me. Now and then a verse will be parallel and both statements are positive like verse 25, “The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.” Generosity for me is connected to how generous God has been and continues to be with me. It would be grievous to hold on to his blessings for only myself. So too, is the idea of giving to others in kindness and love which is often reciprocated as the second half of verse 25 suggests. Verse 25 was my verse of meditation; what verse did you contemplate more deeply? How did God speak to you through it?

DAY 12 – Proverbs 12

I am sure you would say that this chapter is very similar to the previous one but the words of instruction are often unique and bring out other important topics of godliness. We could add discipline, justice, hard

work, listening, calm, truthfulness, etc. to our list of godly characteristics, right?! These are similar but unique and remind us of the foundation of a godly life. Verse 25 caught my eye with the idea of “worry.” Anxiety can pop up in my life as I fixate on something that concerns me or those I love. There’s no doubt about the fact that “worry weighs a person down.” (V25) But the next two sentences are a remedy that God provides through the community of faith. “An encouraging word cheers a person up. The godly give good advice to their friends.” (V26) It is again interesting to me that verse 26 is translated differently in the NIV, “The righteous choose their friends carefully.” That makes perfect sense also. The Hebrew happens to be difficult to translate but you can know that the right friends in your life make a big difference. I notice that worry increases in life when I isolate. The solution in these two verses has to do with friendship, encouragement, and support. You might get the idea that you live out these proverbs on your own. But I read about the significance of community and the quality of your relationships is essential to becoming wise. Tomorrow we will read this verse which is the summation of what I am thinking about concerning worry. “Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.” (13:20) Just know that you will enhance the possibilities of growing in wisdom by choosing the right people to become your inner circle of friends. How’s the journey in Proverbs going so far for you? Did a verse pop out more so for you in today’s reading? How so?

DAY 13 – Proverbs 13

In Proverbs 3:34 we read about how God opposes the proud. Pride is mentioned in verse 10 and again in a strong verse in chapter 16, “Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.” (16:18) I like to stay positive as Proverbs includes many positive characteristics. But our reading also includes many negative traits that smear our testimony and cause us to stumble. Pride has an overarching rebuke that says God is against it. Pride never brings the approval of God. Pride is related to being stubborn and self-centered. Pride not only repels God but it repels people. No one likes being around an arrogant person. How self-sufficient am I? How stubborn can I be? These are tough questions to answer honestly. Something else that is prevalent with pride is not taking any advice. Verse 13 says, “People who despise advice are asking for trouble.” The opposite is found in verse 14, “The instruction of the wise is like a life-giving fountain.” My mind propels me to James 4:6-10 with the posture of humility before God is the beginning and end of wisdom. I will probably refer to the Book of James again because I think of his writings, as New Testament wisdom, with his profound definition of wisdom in 3:17. I invite you to prayerfully examine your heart regarding pride and humility. If pride is a ten and humility is a one on the scale, where do you land? How might God be speaking to you today?

DAY 14 – Proverbs 14

Yesterday, I highlighted “pride” and today I noticed “anger” in our chapter. Do you see it? “People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.” (V29) Because anger can be very reactionary, I think verse 16 also applies, “The wise are cautious and avoid danger; fools plunge ahead with reckless confidence.” Proverbs reveals a big concern regarding human anger and the loss of self-control. Proverbs 16:32 is great advice from the RSV translation, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” That’s the idea. This is marvelous advice. It seems to me that anger can be bottled up or spewed out. There is seldom a middle ground except in the wise person. Burying your anger can poison your soul. Venting your anger can plow people

over and leave wounds in others that can last too long. So, you can't ignore anger and if you release it without restraint it can cause irreparable damage. Throughout this Book, we will get advice on how to deal with anger. Even tomorrow we will read 15:1 which says, "A gentle answer deflects anger..." Keep your eyes open for wisdom on how to deal with anger. But for me, the counsel of others that I trust has made a huge difference. Again, tomorrow we will read 15:22, "Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success." Anger is often an isolating issue in someone's life. A safeguard for unhealthy anger is a relationship with people who are courageous enough to speak the truth in love. Do you have trusted friends in your life? How do you respond to this topic of anger?

WEEK 3

You will recognize several of these proverbs because they are a part of our vocabulary as Christians. “Pride comes before the fall,” is an example. “Iron sharpens iron, as one man sharpens another.” “There’s a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” We will find familiar verses this week. But what do they mean to us? The character-shaping power of these proverbs has incredible potential. It is with that in mind that I also include the prayer, “Have your way in our lives Lord!”

DAY 15 – Proverbs 15

Most of these verses that I know, I have them in my mind according to the NIV translation like verse 1, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” I think this is an especially wise saying because I have experienced this many times and I am sure you have too. Emotions tend to escalate when we are in an argument, right? But what if the wise person lowers the volume, a productive conversation is much more possible. As has been noted, the use of the tongue is a prevalent theme in this Book. So too, in this chapter verses 2, 4, 7, 23, 30, and 31 highlight some of the other “wise sayings” found in the chapter also relating to the words we use. Anyway, it is a repeated topic from Solomon. I wonder if Solomon struggled in this area. Often these verses represent two paths in life. One that will lead to blessing and the other to one’s downfall. Sometimes however, the verse shares a positive principle of life and then elaborates on it like verse 23, “A person finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word.” (NIV) Again, this pertains to what we say but also portrays a verse that says the same thing in a way that strengthens the message. Verse 30 does this also, “A cheerful look brings joy to the heart; good news makes for good health.” In other words, another person’s smile can lift us up as well. Skipping ahead to chapter 17, I refer to one of my favorite sayings, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person’s strength.” (17:22) As Nehemiah said, “The joy of the Lord is your strength!” (Neh 8:10) So, pick a verse that catches your eye and reread it several times. What comes to mind? How might you apply this to your life?

DAY 16 – Proverbs 16

Solomon was a very wealthy man. He often refers to God blessing the wise materially. The wise will have more money. But he doesn’t always say that. Verse 8, “Better to have little, with godliness, than to be rich and dishonest.” He also says essentially the same thing in verse 16, “How much better to get wisdom than gold and good judgment than silver!” These two verses and others like them help us realize that character is more important than wealth. But you probably remember reading several of these proverbs that suggest the wise get rich, “The blessing of the Lord makes a person rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.” (10:22) In our reading today, I think Solomon wants to make a strong point about how money can be detrimental. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote on the subject, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Timothy 6:10) I have found that the Lord especially blesses those who are a funnel of His resources. What I mean is generosity stirs God’s heart to be generous with us. The one who sows generously will reap generously (2 Corinthians 9:6). At first you might have perceived Proverbs as a book on how to get wealthy. But I hope these thoughts assure you that wealth is only as good as the person

who receives it. If one receives God's blessings with gratitude and humility, the Lord will continue to bless and use a wise person to help others. How do you respond to the topic of wealth and poverty? What verse or verses in this chapter might be used to shape your thinking on the topic?

DAY 17 – Proverbs 17

As I read through this chapter, I noticed verses that speak to me. Verse 3 tells me about the refining fire that comes from the Lord. In 1 Peter 1, we read that trials refine us like fire refines gold. Malachi 3:2 tells us, "He will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes." The discipline of the Lord is real and has a purpose. We know that the tough love of the Lord is how he helps us get stronger. The next verse that slowed me down and caused me to contemplate is the truth from verse 9, "Love prospers when a fault is forgiven..." Forgiveness is essential to a healthy relationship. Verse 10 continues the idea with, "A single rebuke does more for a person of understanding..." A teachable person has the potential to develop into a wise person. Honesty and forgiveness are top-level characteristics for relating well. I am noticing the principles in this chapter that pertain to relationships like verse 17, "A friend is always loyal..." The NIV reads, "A friend loves at all times." Friendship is a big deal and too many of us have too few. What makes for a good friendship? What can cause a friendship to break down? There are several important statements in this chapter. Which one are you noticing? Still, my favorite is "A cheerful heart is good medicine." (V22) I mentioned two days ago but let me say that it is proven that an optimistic person is healthier. Being grateful goes a long way to better health. How would you evaluate your cheerfulness, optimism, and strong hope? Believers can be the most joyful people on the globe. How might you live more joyfully? How has today's reading touched you?

DAY 18 – Proverbs 18

Throughout these chapters, Proverbs utilizes parallelism and, in this chapter, we see the use of what is called synonymous parallelism which essentially says the same thing twice with the second statement often sharpening the meaning of the first. I actually prefer this approach over the use of opposites that dominated chapters 10 through 17. It helps me focus on a wise saying that says it twice, giving it more meaning. In the first 9 verses, we are struck by the rebuke they provide, except for verse 4, affirming the positive effect of wise words shared. But verses 10 & 11 especially get my attention. The strong fortress God provides is compared to the false security that wealth brings. "The godly run to him (the name of the Lord) and are safe." (V10b) The Lord is not mentioned that often in this Book, but nonetheless, he is the foundation of wisdom and the one who supplies our needs. As I have mentioned already, the importance of the tongue is woven into many of these verses (4, 8, 9, 13, 17, 20, & 21). However, I think my favorite verse is 24, "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Some people suggest that they are your friend, but their loyalty is an inch deep and their love is based on what they can get out of the friendship. The difference between real friends and false friends must be discerned well. But when you have a reliable friend who is close and loves at all times, you have an incredible gift. Meaningful friends make life meaningful. I think of two close friendships from God's Word: Jonathan & David (1 Samuel 18:1-4), Jesus & Peter. The later friendship is really a gift to Peter. If I could only have one very close friend, I would choose Jesus. His spiritual affirmation and constant support are better than any human friendship could provide. How is your friendship with Jesus going?

DAY 19 – Proverbs 19

As with most of these chapters, this gives us a heavy dose of commonsense. Twice the author mentions laziness. The life of a wise person is governed by discipline. Being lazy is the opposite of discipline. Verses 15 & 24 challenge the lazy person. Verse 24 is actually humorous even though it is serious. “Lazy people take food in their hand but don’t even lift it to their mouth.” This reminds me of Paul’s instruction about young women who destroy their reputations with idleness. “They get into the habit of being idle and going house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to.” (1 Timothy 5:13, NIV) This could have been inserted in the Book of Proverbs, for sure. Proverbs affirms the diligent life which is a life directed by wisdom. Again, I really like it when Proverbs points to the Lord, “You can make many plans, but the Lord’s purpose will prevail.” (V21) Add to that verse 23, “Fear of the Lord leads to life, bringing security and protection from harm.” And finally, verse 25 defines being wise as one who is quick to listen and ready to change if necessary. A simple rebuke will get a wise person’s attention but the simpleton needs harsh treatment and even flogging. How much discipline do I need to receive before God gets my attention? Am I quick to respond? The mocker often has a hard heart and will not listen to wisdom but only harsh correction. Am I teachable? Would people say that I am stubborn? What practical commonsense did you receive from today’s reading?

DAY 20 – Proverbs 20

Oftentimes when I am reading Proverbs I read until something catches my eye. It didn’t take long as verse 1 is worth noting. Now and then we might think that our challenges are unique to us as 21st century people. But this first verse was true then and is still true today; alcohol is addictive and can lead us to go astray. There is obviously a lot behind that statement; that is, much heartache and destruction from the mood-altering drugs that affect so many lives. The next stopping point for me is verse 7. Integrity in my life can lead to blessing my children; this is an important principle for me to remember. Many times, I have thought of my children in regard to what I would do or not do. The unrighteous choices of my life can be handed down as the Scripture clearly tells us that the sins of the fathers can affect the lives of children to the 3rd or 4th generation of those who disobey me (Exodus 20:5). The promise in verse 7b is most important, “Blessed are their children who follow them.” Verse 18 reminds me that decisions made in isolation can be influenced by my own selfish desires but the counsel of others can help me be objective. “Plans succeed through good counsel; don’t go to war without wise advice.” I trust the input of those wise men and women around me. It has saved me much heartache. Verse 22, “Don’t say, ‘I will repay evil...,’” is a very strong New Testament principle about trusting in the justice of God. This guidance is clearly found and elaborated on more thoroughly in Romans 12:17-21. Jesus is the main example of not retaliating. He was treated wrongly and darkness was all around him yet he did not defend himself or stoop to their evil ways. Finally, I appreciate the message of verse 29 which values the contribution of both young and old. The word “splendor” describing old age is refreshing to me in a society that often undervalues the aged. Old age can represent experience, maturity, wisdom, and even holiness from God because of the extent of one’s journey in the Lord for many years. Since most of you who are reading with me are older, please take encouragement from God’s affirmation that confirms the value of older age. What verse or verses stood out to you in this chapter?

DAY 21 – Proverbs 21

Another approach to reading Proverbs is to notice a theme and do a little research to better understand that theme. In verses 9 & 19, Solomon mentions the challenge of living with a quarrelsome wife. I haven't noticed this subject in Proverbs except for Solomon's warnings to stay clear of another man's promiscuous wife in the early chapters. But Proverbs 18:22 says, "The man who finds a wife finds a treasure, and he receives favor from the Lord." This tells us that finding the wife God has for a Christian man is a gift. But choosing wrongly can have dire consequences. Too many men and women overlook the signs that suggest marriage is not a good choice for you in this case. Proverbs 19:13 says, "A quarrelsome wife is as annoying as constant dripping." Wisdom is very important for marrying the right person. Marriage can be an incredible gift or a frustrating journey according to Proverbs and Solomon should know since he had so many wives. The godly principles of courtship, the sin of premarital sex, family approval, and taking it slow have been discarded in our day. Marriage will continue to be a relationship of heartache for many because of it. As long as we do it our way, marriages will struggle. God invented marriage. In the context of the Christian community, couples can better honor God, receive wise counsel, and begin marriage well. I chose one topic in this chapter; what is another theme that stood out to you? What did you learn?

WEEK 4

I am not sure you will notice the difference in these proverbs compared to our previous readings since chapter 10. However, most Bible interpreters believe that these chapters are a collection of wise sayings from wise people. At the same time, many believe that the previous chapters were also more of a collection of proverbs rather than every one of them from Solomon. Nonetheless, these continue to speak to us about practical aspects of life and we do well to follow them.

DAY 22 – Proverbs 22

Several of you have questioned the importance of interpreting these proverbs. Can I take these statements literally as if they were a guarantee? What do you think? Verse 6 is fairly familiar to many of us. “Direct (train) your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.” What do you think about that promise? I bet you or someone you know feels let down by that statement because their child is an adult and wants nothing to do with God or his ways. Well, does that make this proverb a sham? Maybe we are viewing the wise sayings wrongly. What if we think of these proverbs as principles to live by rather than promises that guarantee us something if we do them?! I think of the proverbs as principles to live by and I believe they come true the majority of the time. Verse 4 also says something that has been a bit confusing to people. “True humility and fear of the Lord lead to riches, honor, and long life.” I might add my interpretation by saying “true riches.” Like what Jesus referred to as “treasures in heaven.” In fact, Jesus did not have worldly wealth or receive honor from most people and did not have a long life on earth. But I have found that God loves to bless humble people and wants to elevate those who fear him. This is a principle of life not a promised guarantee. How does that way of interpreting these proverbs sound to you? Verse 17 begins a section that most Bibles add headings with, “Saying 1, Saying 2, ETC.” After an introduction and the announcement of thirty sayings in verse 20, verse 22 represents the first saying of thirty. Many of these sayings have already been shared in the book so this might be considered the top 30 proverbs. But I am not sure that is the best way to think of it. Verses 22 to 29 give us sayings 1 through 5; which one catches your eye? I noticed verses 22 & 23 which remind us of God’s heart for the weak and needy. He also wants us to be compassionate toward the oppressed and the poor. This theme is mentioned at least 6 other times in the Book of Proverbs. How has today’s reading in chapter 22 touched your heart and mind?

DAY 23 – Proverbs 23

Most of these sayings express a more thorough message about wisdom and what it looks like. There is a small discrepancy in the numbering of sayings. This is surely not important. Saying # 12 is the shortest but it could be the most significant. “Commit yourself to instruction, listen carefully to words of knowledge.” Saying # 19 is easily the longest and it has to do with alcohol addiction. From verses 29 to 35, the wise author warns the reader of the foolishness of overindulging with alcohol. We continue to read these proverbs because they speak to us so well and provide a modern-day warning for us in many practical areas. Over-eating, greed, stinginess, lack of counsel, instruction, parenting, bad company, parental advice, sexual sin, and alcoholism are topics in this one chapter that gives us thirteen wise sayings about life. Tucked away, in an almost unnoticeable place, it says in verse 11, “For their Redeemer is strong...” he will defend you even when others try to accuse you or cheat you out of what is rightly

yours. Again, we don't read about the Lord's role in our lives very often in the Book of Proverbs but he is always there. You might have to look more closely and remind yourself that the foundation of wisdom is the Lord. Which practical topic might help you from this chapter?

DAY 24 – Proverbs 24

Many of these sayings are re-emphasizing topics we have already read in this Book, that is why they may seem familiar to you. The definition of wisdom fills the pages of Proverbs which is the theme as we begin this chapter. The NLT identifies the person in verse 12 who knows all, as God. It says, "For God understands all hearts, and he sees you." This is Saying #25 and it challenges us to do the right thing because God knows everything, nothing is hidden from him. I appreciate the word about perseverance in verse 16, "The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again. But one disaster is enough to overthrow the wicked." This is a common proverb about falling and getting right back up. "I might be down but I am not out!" Verse 22 concludes the 30 sayings which we began in chapter 22, but this chapter continues with more wise sayings. These sayings are similar and have been thought of as an addendum to the first 30 with five more. These topics are wise judgment, honesty, prudent planning, bearing false witness, and the last five verses on laziness. The comparison of laziness and being diligent is repeated throughout this book. "Lazy people don't even cook the game they catch, but the diligent make use of everything they find." (12:27) I think the positive trait of diligence is the opposite of what we read in verses 30 to 34 today. Proverbs is not afraid to poke fun at lazy people. They are sarcastically compared to a door that swings back and forth (26:14), and their empty excuses are associated with made-up stories (22:13). How do you respond to the strong message about diligence or even the idea of self-discipline? How would you rate yourself concerning this subject?

DAY 25 – Proverbs 25

During the reign of King Hezekiah, 250 years after Solomon's reign, wise men collected these additional proverbs that are attributed to Solomon. These will have a similar ring to them as in the previous chapters and that is why they are connected to Solomon. The first 8 verses point to the role of the king which makes sense because we attribute these to Solomon. Verses 11 & 12 deserve a closer look because they remind me of James 1:19, "You must be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." Timely advice means wise judgment and valid criticism can positively warn one who is willing to listen. This is also a repeated theme in Proverbs, of course. Speaking truthfully is something we should do and is also helpful for us to receive. Verse 20 is one of the most interesting proverbs I have read in the book. It seems to mean that when someone is down and discouraged, the last thing they might want or need is a jovial person singing and dancing around them. "Singing cheerful songs to a person with a heavy heart is like taking someone's coat away in cold weather or pouring vinegar in a wound." (V20) For me, it refers to being insensitive and ignoring the person's pain. This approach is not comforting, right?! How do you understand the message of this verse? Romans 12:20 quotes verses 21 & 22 from our reading today. This subject has surfaced a few times in Proverbs. I already had you read Romans 12:17-21 but if you need to take a look again, it would be worth your while. The idea is that compassion toward an enemy is more effective than anger and obviously more effective than retaliation. The last verse is one that I remember because of the importance of self-control as it is included in the fruit of the Spirit. A person who lacks self-control is vulnerable in many ways. Diligence, determination, self-control,

hard work, perseverance, etc. are all highlighted in Proverbs as the outcome of living wisely. Do you agree? What stands out to you from this chapter?

DAY 26 – Proverbs 26

The unique outline of this chapter actually utilizes at least four topics from the folly of fools (verses 1-12), to the demise of the lazy (verses 13-16), to the danger of our words (verses 17-23), to the cover-up through pretense (verses 24-28) ... all of these are presented in a negative light. This is a chapter of warning. These poor behaviors will backfire. "If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead" seems like an appropriate summary of many of the proverbs in chapter 26. Which aspect of foolishness caught your eye? Verse 9 warns us that the foolish person may try to appear wise by reciting a proverb but the message is twisted and the proverb is used incorrectly. Be aware! (vv7&9) I mentioned laziness two days ago because it is a repeated theme in this book. A lazy person may try to use their words to defend themselves but they can't be trusted. This points to the topic of our words with verse 23 getting my attention, "Smooth words may hide a wicked heart, just as a pretty glaze covers a clay pot." But verse 25, which is similar to verse 23, might be the most convicting to me as I can even be tempted to say things in a way that makes me look better than I really am. In fact, someone might totally irritate me but I will pretend to be nice. "They pretend to be nice..." (V25) Putting on a false front seems like an innocent thing but people-pleasing can lead to a swallow Christian life. God knows all things and nothing is hidden from him. Let's endeavor to live an authentic life as we forgive people, release grudges, mean what we say, and honor God with our lives. Amen!

DAY 27 – Proverbs 27

Verse 17 has always been a theme for me because it affirms the value of close friendship and mentoring. I will not get "sharper" all alone; I need the input and support of another (others). "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend." Both tender and tough love are the best ingredients for a healthy friendship. Verse 6 has a similar message, "Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy." Verse 5 could be included in this idea. But the section that got my attention is all about hard work in verses 23 to 27. Your livelihood needs your continuous attention because so much is at stake. The idea of harvesting brings in an abundance at one time but it doesn't last forever. Planning and preparation are essential because "riches don't last forever." (V24) Also, the wise author is reminding people that tending flocks and fields will benefit the next generation (V24b). This is a message about stewardship and goes back to the creation story. "The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it." (Genesis 2:15) He also gave Adam the responsibility to name the animals. The gift of work is affirmed by Solomon in Ecclesiastes. "So, I saw that there is nothing better for people than to be happy in their work. That is our lot in life." (Eccl 3:22) Even work apart from what you produce is meant to bring a sense of enjoyment. What did you discover in your reading today?

DAY 28 – Proverbs 28

As I often do with Proverbs, I read through the chapter once and then slowly read it again and keep my eye out for what pops up. The NLT translates verse 9 this way, "God detests the prayers of a person who ignores the law." Other translations begin with the idea of turning a deaf ear to the law first. The idea is

that our character matters. If we ignore the Lord and his ways but still want him to answer our prayers that is thought of as “hypocritical,” right? In James (the N.T.), we read about confessing our sins before we pray for God’s help (James 5:15-16). What is in our hearts & minds can impede our prayers. Verse 13 has a similar idea to confessing our sins. David expressed this very truth in Psalm 32:1-5. When he tried to hide his sin, he had great anguish in his heart. But when he confessed his sin, there was forgiveness, relief, and healing. Finally, verse 26 reminds me of Proverbs 3:5-6 which is a life-changing truth that you and I can live by: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” (NLT) Also, the proverb of 28:26 reminds us that the counsel of others can be used by God to help us. When we rely on ourselves, we are foolish. Wisdom comes from above and also through the advice of godly people. I have shared with you three specific insights that challenged my faith this morning and reminded me about how important my connection to the Lord needs to be to live a life of wisdom. What verse(s) or insight(s) did the Lord bring to your mind through the reading today?

WEEK 5

I imagine that your reading through Proverbs has surprised you. Is there any more relevant wisdom in all the Bible? I think the Book of James is packed with wisdom and it is clear that Ecclesiastes gives us ideas that are deeper and filled with wisdom. But we have been showered with wise sayings all month. It has been better than any of us expected it to be, I'm sure. Three days left with some very wise words remaining...

DAY 29 – Proverbs 29

We are rapidly winding down our journey through Proverbs. Hasn't it been better than you might have expected?! Proverbs 29 has a similar feel to many of the chapters with some repeated topics for emphasis. Many of these statements are of the comparison variety. The good man will prosper but the wicked person will waste their money. What topics are catching your eye? There are several warnings about being stubborn, angry, undisciplined, proud, people-pleasing, and the lack of parenting as well. Self-control is a topic I have faced since I was a youth. I was prone to be impulsive. Verse 11 says, "Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back." A mature person manages their life even when stressful situations arise. The fruit of Spirit includes "self-control" as the last quality listed. We have read about the importance of self-control throughout this Book. I appreciate the reminder because I can be vulnerable to overreact. Wisdom is peace-loving, gentle, pure, full of mercy, and reflects peace instead of worry or tension. My "go-to" definition for wisdom is found in James 3:17. What have you learned about wisdom and how might you know if you are growing in wisdom? Did any of these wise sayings get your attention? How so?

DAY 30 – Proverbs 30

What do you think of this chapter? I bet you are thrilled by it because of the uniqueness of Agur's message. This chapter has several points of interest for me. But the most practical one and also the most memorable one for me is given in verses 8 & 9. The saying I notice is mentioned second after the request to protect him from lying. It is a prayer asking for not too much and not too little. Obviously, there are pitfalls to being wealthy and being poor. Agur wisely wanted to avoid either one. Have you ever prayed this kind of prayer? I want you to know, I have. I really have. And, I believe God has answered that prayer because there is wisdom in such a prayer and there is also humility. Plus, I can help answer that prayer by giving God's resources away so that I live with "just enough to satisfy my needs." (V8) The next thing I noticed and you did too, is the literary device of listing three things; no, make it four, which is repeated five times. Each of them seems unique with things that don't satisfy, things that amaze, things that cause one to tremble, things unusually wise, and animals that are stately. These sentences are more than a list, I think of them as a riddle of creativity and contemplation. My favorite grouping is the things that amaze. I find them intriguing and uplifting because I basically agree with his conclusion. The eagle to very special and the snake moves along the ground seemingly without effort and a ship at sea always seems majestic to me, plus the love of a man for a woman. (Verses 18-19) The wise author is viewing aspects of life and wording each one with a poetic twist of mystery and inspiration. I felt inspired by this chapter because I thought of it as wise words about the things God has created. The Bible tells us the creation speaks in Psalm 19 which has a strong sense of wisdom in it. "The heavens proclaim the glory of God. Day after

day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known.” (Verses 1-2) What thoughts do you have after reading this chapter in Proverbs? How might God be speaking to you through it?

DAY 31 – Proverbs 31

This is the last day of July; congratulations! You are no doubt wiser on this day than you were on July 1st, right?! This is a fantastic way to conclude Proverbs with a tribute to women and the possibilities of how God can use a woman to make a huge difference. Previous to the message about virtuous and capable women are the words to King Lemuel from his mother. This makes the whole chapter about the wisdom and potential of a godly woman. There is no other information in God’s Word about King Lemuel but the warning he receives could be valuable for any man. The teaching encourages him to control his lust for women and for alcohol. Those pitfalls have ruined many a man. But I think verses 10 to 31 are indeed special. It is helpful to know that this section is a Hebrew acrostic poem with each verse beginning with a successive letter in the Hebrew language. This is an important piece of information because it helps us realize that there are many different characteristics of virtue rather than a composite of everything a godly woman should achieve. Do you understand the difference? Which characteristic(s) have you noticed in women you know? How does this speak to you, if you are a woman? The summary in verse 30 seems especially significant; let’s see if you agree. “Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised.” This statement connects with how the Book of Proverbs began in 1:7. “The fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Did you notice how consistent the virtuous woman is in today’s reading? Her discipline is one of her greatest qualities. The Apostle Paul told Timothy that God would help him by the Spirit to be disciplined, which is a very important quality. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but (the Spirit) of power, love, and self-discipline.” Discipline seems to be a primary characteristic in Proverbs. What qualities are you remembering from this month’s readings? I looked at a list of themes in this Book and counted 54 different aspects of wisdom. We have benefitted from our devotional reading in Proverbs. May the Lord bless you with his wisdom!