

Read Proverbs 1

"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent." Prov. 1:10

It was a really boring day during one of our artillery field trainings while we waited for a gun repair to be finished. Soon people started finding their entertainment for the day, and one of the guys in my section pulled out a Playboy. I hadn't thought anything about it, and then he asked if I wanted to see it. I said no, and he asked why. I said it was shameful to those women to show themselves that way, and that looking at it is sin. This guy worked his hardest to try to convince me that it wasn't sin, but it was art. It was simply the artistic expression of the photographers. I ended the conversation by saying, "Yeah, that's why that magazine gets bought up. For its artistic qualities." I had fought my battles with pornography as a teen, and I was well aware of the sin and guilt that was involved.

Christians sin, of that there is no doubt, but it is not supposed to be the norm in our lives. Sinners sin, referring to unsaved people, but that is the norm in their lives. You cannot expect lost people to push you towards godliness. Think about a time you were around lost friends and they pressured you to do something you weren't comfortable with. I can think of a few times with ease regarding these types of "friends". Sinners will always attempt to entice because they want to see you "loosen up" and they also want to feel less condemnation upon themselves. **What is the most important thing to remember when others are enticing us to sin? Solomon says that when enticement comes, just say no. You are the one who ultimately makes the decision, not those around you. They can mock and malign you, but they cannot force you to make the decision. If they attempt to, then that should be the last time you hang around that group. Are you granting the requests of sinners or of God?**

Read Proverbs 2

From those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; Prov 2:13

My artillery unit was out in the Wisconsin woods for training, and by some miracle I didn't have the night shift. At around 2 am, I felt the call of nature upon me, so I stumbled out of my cot and out of the tent still half asleep. Out of courtesy, we usually move away from places people walk so I really don't know how many steps I had taken. When I finished I turned around to see nothing but total blackness. It was the only time that I could remember literally not being able to see my hand in front of my face. So I stood perfectly still and waited. After a few minutes I began to notice a very faint green glow. We had a few glow sticks to light the trail from the tents to the command tent, and I spotted one. My panic soon left and I found myself back in my cot for the rest of the night.

Walking on God's paths of righteousness are like walking on that lit trail. You can't always see a lot in front of you, but you at least know where you are. But once you step off God's paths, you're fair game for Satan. Living a life of righteousness keeps us close to God and to direction for our lives. When we devalue the righteousness of God for our own selfish choices, it's like wandering in the dark. Eventually we'll pick up some bumps

and bruises for stumbling in the darkness of sin. When you come to your senses regarding your sin, just be still. Don't try to find your way back to righteousness, because you'll just mess it up more. Allow God to put you back on the path. God doesn't leave repentant people in the dark. He brings them to the light. **What path are you walking on right now? Are you on a path of righteousness where you can see where you're going? Or are you stumbling in darkness, unwilling to admit you need a course correction? Too many Christians are stumbling around instead of walking in confidence.**

Read Proverbs 3

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight Proverbs 3:6

I tried out for baseball over a winter in high school and we were all given a strength and workout schedule. It had all sorts of reps and exercises with the machines in the weight room. Honestly, I had no idea what any of it said. I had never been in a weight room, and it seemed that everyone in there were well aware of what they needed to do. So I would watch someone and then when they finished I would do what they did, never really knowing if I was doing it right. I didn't ask any of my friends or even the coaches for help, because I decided I could just figure it out myself. Instead I just gave up working in the weight room, and I didn't get any arm strength I specifically needed.

Have you ever needed direction, but decided to do it yourself? I think that often we feel embarrassed to ask for help, especially in areas where it might be assumed that we know what to do. People usually ask questions about how to pray and read the Bible in private more than in a group. If there is an area of your life that needs straightened out, you don't need a self-help book to do it. You need to acknowledge that the Lord is in control of your life. I've learned what I should do by trusting Jesus when I didn't know what to do. Whether it was a situation or a job position, I always reminded myself that I need to acknowledge that Jesus had a plan for this situation long before I ever knew about it. **Often when we fail to acknowledge Jesus, our paths become crooked as we run around trying to do our best. This is a similar idea to yesterday, but one that Solomon is clearly building on. What areas of life do you need to give up control to God? You're attempting to handle them, but they cause you worry and trouble sleeping (v.24). Acknowledge that God has a plan, and let Him carry it out. Your job is to wait for instructions, not to give them out.**

Read Proverbs 4

Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Prov 4:25

When I say I "ran track" I mean that they didn't cut anyone that tried out. So I went to practice and tried pretty hard, but I wasn't very fast. There were times I would be starting out a short sprint and would be in the lead, but then I'd start looking around and behind me. You cannot look back without slowing down, no matter how fast you are. Instead of concentrating on my own running, I'd start looking at those who were running around me. Even at the Olympics, you'll still see a runner here and there who can't help looking back.

These runners rarely find themselves anywhere near the medal stand when it's all over, because they failed to concentrate on just their performance.

In this passage, we're encouraged to keep our eyes fixed ahead of us. It reminds me a little of Paul's later writings to keep pushing towards the goal. The idea is that God has a plan and purpose for us, and that we won't find it looking at other people's actions. Stop looking around to figure out what you can get away with and still be better than many of those around you. Working with teens, it's hard to tell teens that boyfriend/girlfriend relationships are a waste of time when they see them all around and see them everywhere.

A married adult may begin to contemplate an affair, and then go through with it when they see someone else who was able to marry their new squeeze and drop the old. Looking around only causes us to become discontent and worthless for the moment that God has us in right now. How many of those Olympians have trained for four years, only to lose because they were undisciplined and didn't just run with their eyes straight? **How many Christians have had defeats in their lives because they failed to keep moving forward? Don't look back on any of your unsaved life. You are a new creature, and you need to leave the sin of your past alone. I mean don't go back to any sin you've already worked to leave behind, and don't go back in guilt over something Jesus has forgiven and freed you of. Don't examine yourself against those around you, but against God Himself. You will always find yourself lacking, and therefore in need of continuing forward. Be aware today of how many times you "look around" spiritually.**

Read Proverbs 5

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. Prov 5:18

I've been pretty big into watching American Idol this year, which I don't always do. One of the interesting contestants to me is Kris Allen. He is very young, very humble, and very talented. They showed a video of him going back home and performing in front of tens of thousands of people and all these girls were screaming for him and trying to get his attention. The whole time, his wife was there next to him. They are very young and haven't been married very long. I commented to my wife that I hope she doesn't have insecurity issues. Hopefully her husband won't give her any reason to have such issues either, but I wondered if that might be difficult for her over the coming months of his stardom.

This chapter is a warning, but it shouldn't be considered for men only. We live in a world where the bonds of marriage are meaningful at the moment, but seem to lose their luster over the years. Instead of making efforts to improve their own marriages, people instead start looking around for something better. This isn't your lawn mower that's been giving you trouble and needs replaced...it's your spouse! This verse is a reminder to rejoice in the wife (spouse) of your youth. For my wife and I that definitely rings true because we were 21 when we got married. Perhaps you were older than that, but remember how young he/she made you feel? Remember how much fun you used to have? **Make a determination to keep the fun alive in your marriage, because a new marriage will not make things better. It will leave a scar with you that will remain until you die.**

Make the effort with the person you gave the promise to. And if someone who's in a marriage begins to flirt with you, make it very clear that you respect your promises as well as the promises of others. Have you been flirting or even romantic with someone other than your spouse? Quit it! Live like Christ. He doesn't throw us to the curb when we enter into a relationship with Him. Let us live the same way with the spouse that we chose.

Read Proverbs 6

Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers Prov 6:13

A constant area of confusion for me when I played baseball was trying to remember the signs. My first couple of years playing, we had all kinds of signs we had to remember for swing, take, bunt, and steal. I remember being on first base one time when a coach gave me the steal sign. I was thinking, "Are you kidding me? Have you ever seen me run?" My last couple of years playing ball, my coach's rule was simple, "Do what you want at the plate." So we would always have a player standing down at third base to be the coach there, and we would give signals to the batter. But it was all junk. If anyone tried to figure out our signals, it would be impossible, because we were just touching ears, noses, caps like crazy and it didn't mean a thing.

Solomon is giving so much sage advice in this chapter, it's really hard for me to come down in one spot, but this verse stood out to me. It's warning of people who aren't really making their intentions clear. They don't shout out their actions, but they wink, signal with their feet and point with their fingers. These people are doing evil and doing their best to cover it up. The counsel for the Christian is this: if you have to hide what you're doing, and it's not to keep an anniversary present hidden, you're probably doing something wrong. If your boss instructs you to do something unethical for your "benefit", you have to say no. If you have things going on you can't share with your spouse for reasons of deception, you need to change course. **Sometimes we are tempted by the secretive things that we believe we can accomplish without others knowing. But, Solomon warns that these people will be broken "suddenly" and when they least expect it (v.15). Are you doing things in work, school or life in general that you are being deceptive to others about? The Lord works in the open while Satan works in secret, and if you are working in secret then you have some problems you need to address immediately. Make the choice to live a life that is wide open to the world, otherwise the life you're trying to hide will be seen soon enough.**

Read Proverbs 7

My son, keep my words and treasure my commandments within you Proverbs 7:1

I've talked about my kids disobeying rules, but there has been a new development in this area. They hear the rules, but for some reason they think a new day means that they have to be told all the rules all over again. God's mercies may be new day by day, but my rules are not! So for a while I was making the mistake of repeating myself on them before I realized that my kids have to start remembering the rules. They have to look at a situation

and react to it based on the rules that they know continue to stand. It's still a long road, but we are beginning to see some progress.

I've known Christians who seem to forget God's rules for their lives at times. God doesn't repeat Himself over and over, because His words are written down in a book. They can be accessed at any time, if we choose to do so. While this chapter talks about a real woman who was causing this man to fall, I think it can also relate to any sin. The man walked down the street in such a way as to run into this woman. He knew what would happen, but he still went for it. We sometimes spout off some pretty righteous rules in front of others that we feel absolutely confident on from God, but then when we're all alone we can forget those rules. Remember that God's rules never change. Sometimes our stance on them can; I've changed some rules in my life because I realized I had become as legalistic as a Pharisee. That wasn't me changing God's rules, but applying them as God desires. **Are you making extra efforts to find sin? Are you giving rules to others, but ignoring them for your own life? Wisdom is knowing the right thing to do AND doing it. Anyone can know what they should do, but choosing the righteous choice isn't always easy.**

Read Proverbs 8

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate. Prov 8:13

I remember looking down the aisle as my wife walked in during our wedding. I couldn't really see her because we had put these pew candles along the walkway. So I finally decided it was my wedding and if I wanted to move a little so I could see my bride walk down the aisle, I would. So I stepped over just a bit until I could see her. Whew! She took my breath away. As she walked down the aisle I started thinking about the failed marriages of my parents. My step-dad was in my wedding after all. But, I knew that I had a complete willingness to forsake all others for her. She was better than I deserved, and has continually proven that to me for these years that we have been married to one another. I chose to love her, and reject the sin of ever loving another in the same way.

To fear the Lord means that we love Him. We love Him for who He is, and for his forgiveness and work in our lives. As a result of His great work, we fear and respect Him because we know of the work that He has invested in our lives. But if we are to love God, we are to hate evil. To love God is to love what is good, and to reject what is not. We cannot be willing to accept evil with good. They are like oil and water and they do not mix. However, they can be contained within the same container. You can live a pretty good life for God, and still love evil. It causes you at moments to live like you did before Jesus. You do what you want, when you want, without thinking about any consequences. **Do you hate evil, or do you invite it? Sin is evil, and while we try to change the words at time (bad choices, unfortunate mistakes) sin is evil. Are you choosing evil on a regular basis? Are you allowing a continuing evil to reside in your life where it has no place? When you chose God, you chose to forsake the world. You chose righteous, eternal things over sinful, temporary ones.**

Read Proverbs 9

Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, reprove a wise man and he will love you Prov. 9:8

In my years of youth ministry I have learned many important lessons, but one of the most basic is in regards to dealing with teenagers who are disrespectful. In my first year, I simply walked out of a room one time when I was teaching. It wasn't the best idea, but I didn't want to blow up at them. Finally over the years, I learned to just give the silent treatment. If I have a couple of kids who just won't shut their yaps during my bible study, I just stop talking and casually look up, down and all around, never looking at the person who's causing the disruption. Eventually the other teens in the room will tell them to be quiet. It serves two purposes: it keeps me from being the "bad guy" who is just so mean to them and it encourages the teens to take care of an issue amongst themselves.

There is real wisdom in this verse. If you reprove a scoffer, he's more likely to hate you than love you. The word for scoffer literally means "one who carries on". You can attempt to reprove, which means you judge that the person is doing wrong so you tell them, but it's very unlikely that the scoffer will thank you. On the other hand, a wise person will accept it. A scoffer is all about attention, so you telling them to stop drawing attention to themselves is like asking a fish to breath on land. **Are you quick to correct a scoffer? Are you the one who carries on too much? How do you do it? Don't attempt to embarrass a foolish person, because they will likely turn the embarrassment right back on you. Make sure you have support in what you say, so that the words might be heard. It's not impossible to turn a scoffer into a wise person. And don't allow your respect for a person to keep you from pointing out a problem in their lives. I would respect a friend more who told me my fault, than one who kept it a secret from me.**

Read Proverbs 10

When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. Prov 10:19

I was counseling a married couple once who were having some pretty major problems. When I would ask one of them a question, the other would try to answer based on their perceptions. This happened a couple of times, and I finally said, "You two have to learn to be quiet." There is nothing wrong with communication, and all couples need it. But, they were talking for no real reason, and as a result there were hurtful words flying all around their home that were not only hurting themselves, but also their children. Using more words rarely convinces people of anything. Using the right words and choosing them carefully has the better impact.

God is pretty clear here. The more you talk, the more you're likely to say something that is hurtful or untrue. You just can't avoid it. Politicians often get slammed for comments they make, but there is such an expectation that they should be able to speak to any subject at a moment's notice that gaffes are to be expected. We are also told that he who restrains his lips is wise. Even lately in my life as I've been amongst people, I've had a

story that fits into the conversation. I find myself thinking, "Is this story really that great, and do I really need to share it anyway?" I know I've shared Lincoln's quote before, but it is my favorite, "Better to be silent and to be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." **Do you talk too much? Do you think about the words you use, or do they just fly right out? Don't be the person who claims they are unable to control their words. If your mouth is stronger than your brain, then you need to do some mental exercises for sure. Ask God to help you to watch your words. Ask for wisdom so that you will know when and what to speak.**

Read Proverbs 11

The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. Prov 11:25

A church in Texas recently changed the way they do their offering time. As the plates come around, if you have a need, take out what you need. So the parishioners give cash, and people who need it take it. They aren't coming short of the money needed to run the church, and have given away half a million dollars. The pastor who was interviewed had a great quote, "For people to be generous givers, they have to first learn to be receivers." Many that had taken out in a time of need, then gave when that time had passed so they could bless others. What a tremendous example of Christian stewardship.

Some pastors have told me this won't work. You just can't monitor it closely enough. However, people in church are asked a lot of, and given little in return. We need to take care of the needs of those in our church body, so that they will understand what it is to receive as well as the blessings of giving. Receiving help from others over my lifetime has always caused me to be quick to look for an opportunity to help others. So we have a two-fold application for us today: **Are you in need, but unwilling to receive? If you have asked for God to supply, then you need to be willing to receive it however He gives it. It may be anonymously or through a face to face gift, but remember that the Lord is behind it. And remember all those times that God has blessed you and taken care of you? What are you doing to be used by Him in the same way in someone else's life? If you're not excited about giving, you haven't done it. It's a tremendous truth: God can do all the ministry of the world by Himself without lifting a finger, yet He includes us in the process to allow our fingers to touch the people He loves so much. Be a receiver. Be a giver.**

Read Proverbs 12

Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight. Prov 12:22

When I was growing up I heard names like Clemens, McGwire, Bonds, and many others who just put me in awe. They were the most tremendous baseball players of their day, and I had many baseball cards that spouted off the stats of each man. Now as an adult so many of my childhood baseball heroes have fallen. All three of these men have been found out as cheaters, who also lied repeatedly about what they had done. That's why as a current baseball fan, I appreciate Albert Pujols. He is a Christian, which he proclaims

readily, and he has called on Major League Baseball to test him everyday for steroids. He is dealing faithfully, and doesn't have to lie to maintain his reputation.

This verse says that lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. I remember the first time I heard that word in church. I didn't know what it meant, but it didn't sound good. God hates lying so much because it comes down to one of the simplest characteristics of God: God is truth. So as believers, when we lie, we are falling short of the call for us to "be holy as God is holy". God has never lied to you, and He wants you to deal faithfully and truly. We all have a lie that has gotten us into trouble because we kept it going and helped it grow. When we deal faithfully, or truly, we are His delight. It may cause us embarrassment to admit the truth at times, but just getting it out of the way instead of lying about it will save us trouble down the road. **As a man who spent much of his early life as a lover of lies more than truth, let me just encourage you to leave the lies behind. Don't tell the little lies to your spouse or parents. Be a person of honesty, because losing that trust in either of those relationships is just horrible. Are you a delight or an abomination to the Lord by the way you speak? The wonderful thing about God, is that He will forgive the abominations of a repentant person. Ask Him to remind you to be a truthful person. Don't ask Him to help you be truthful because that's your decision. But, asking for the reminders is a prayer I believe God answers.**

Read Proverbs 13

There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing; *another* pretends to be poor, but has great wealth. Prov 13:7

America is a country of pretenders, which is always discovered during credit and housing crunches. Many people have been pretending they were rich, and holding nothing back from themselves with the use of credit. Now, many of those people have nothing and consequently they want us to feel sorry for them. In contrast, I heard a pastor tell of a man named Bill in his church. Bill wore the same kind of clothes everyday. Not the same ones, but the same kind. He had a nice trailer and was always helpful and kind to many in the church. When Bill died, his will left his MILLIONS of dollars to his family and church. He pretended to be poor, mainly so that people would deal with him as a person and not a wallet.

Many people pretend to be something they're not. There is both a real financial aspect to this, as well as a spiritual one. There are some who pretend to be rich, but their wealth is only the tangible stuff that gets fought over after they die. These people will stand before God with nothing to show for their lives. All of their things will be left behind and unable to make an impression on God. Conversely, many that were deemed poor by the standards of the world, will stand rich in Jesus Christ when they stand before the Father in eternity. They lived on earth while waiting for Heaven. **Do you pretend to be wealthy in material things? Do you spend with your credit card in order to make a favorable impression on certain people? Do you go to church and pretend to be ok, but often wonder what will really happen to you on your judgment day? The Bible is clear that if you give your life to Jesus and ask Him to save you, that He will (Rom. 10:9-**

10, 13). Don't attempt to be someone you're not. Be who God created you to be. If He needed you to be like your neighbor across the street or your co-worker down the hall, He would have made you that way.

Read Proverbs 14

There is a way *which seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Prov 14:12

After living in our new home for a year, I decided to try a new route home to avoid traffic. I feel like I have a pretty good sense of direction, so instead of taking the guaranteed route home I took the unknown path. It all seemed very poetic; "In front of me were two roads, and I took the one less traveled." Well, I soon realized why it was less traveled. I didn't have a clue where I was. There were no road signs, and no identifying markers of any kind. I finally made a turn South because that's the general direction to my house. I still had to guess several times, but finally got home. I turned a 15 minutes trip into one that lasted over an hour while I tried to stumble across back roads to get home.

I don't think there's anything wrong with doing a little exploring from time to time, but I became flat out lost because I thought I could find a better route to get me home. That's what Proverbs 14 is saying to us here. There are ideas that pop into our heads that sounds totally right, but if we would take a second to square it with Scripture, the issues behind our ideas would soon be revealed. God isn't referring to different routes home, but He's referring to when you know God's will, or path, for your life and decide to follow a different one completely. You'll end up like I was on those back roads: wasting time, unsure where to go, and wondering why you did it in the first place. Those are terrible feelings as a Christian, because you are keenly aware that you made a decision apart from God. **There are lots of things I'd like to see happen in my life right now, and I could make the decision to go for them. However, apart from God there is no guarantee of success or joy on the other end of those decisions. Ignoring God's will is sin. For the lost sinner, a lifetime of self-decision leads to death forever in Hell. When we accept Jesus, we give up that life. Are you thinking and talking through the big decisions coming up in your life, or are you praying through them? Are you waiting for men to tell you it's all right, or are you waiting for the ok from God?**

Read Proverbs 15

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Prov 15:1

Email arguments rarely end well. Because it's easier to type and hit send than to speak to someone face to face, I've seen some very hurtful words come across my computer screen. I learned after just one such encounter, that responding to this type of email with a similar email only breeds more emails! I could have looked for ways to put out the fire, but instead I only fueled it.

We've got to stop justifying the harsh words we use sometimes. Yes, maybe we were speaking the truth, but if it made the other person feel like we just punched them in the

gut, maybe we need to evaluate if it was necessary. A man who's having an affair should have his sin addressed because it's true, kind (it shows we care about him and his family), and it's necessary (sin shouldn't be ignored). I've mentioned that we often try to justify our sins after the fact, and that goes for our careless words. We just know they had it coming, and they needed to hear the truth. But if your intention is to stir up anger, that's probably all you'll accomplish. **Do you have someone that the argument just won't seem to stop with? What is your intention before your conversations: to win and argument or to improve a friendship? Your words will likely be remembered before your actions, so choose them carefully today. Is it true, kind, and necessary?**

Read Proverbs 16

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. Prov 16:18

One of my favorite stories on pride is that of former heavyweight boxer James Tillis. He was going to begin fighting out of Chicago so he traveled from his home town of Tulsa to start his new and exciting life. Tillis says, "I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago and stopped in front of the Sears Tower. I put my suitcases down and I looked up at the Tower and said to myself, 'I'm going to conquer Chicago.' When I looked down, the suitcases were gone."

Who are you better than? There are people at work, church, school, sometimes even just random people you see at the mall that you are just sure that you're better than. As a Christian I am not better than the most sinful lost person. The only difference between us is Jesus. I cannot take credit for any of my gifts or abilities because they have all come from God. **Everything I can do is because God has allowed it, and He can remove any of those abilities at anytime. Are you trusting in yourself or God? Trusting in God will allow Him to lift you up for His purposes. Don't rely on your strength because it is insufficient. In what relationships is pride coming out in your life? Think carefully on that. There are people that have a completely different impression of you than you would imagine based on how highly you think of yourself. Think on your conversations today, and how you portray yourself to others as you talk.**

Read Proverbs 17

Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife. Prov 17:1

I think some of my happiest times in life are when I was poor. Certainly I would have liked to have more things, but the difference money made in our household as a teenager really stands out to me. When we didn't have much, it seems we were closer as a family. We did the fun things together, even if it was just hanging out at the house. But as our family's financial situation improved, we became more distant. Parents were gone more, siblings were gone more, and we found more things to distract us. Eventually our house became one with plenty of food, plenty of stuff, and plenty of strife to the point of a divorce.

There is nothing wrong with having things and there is nothing wrong with being poor. For the believer, in either circumstance, I can tell you firsthand that God provides. The full house is a reference to the priests during the Old Testament feasts. Often the sacrifices for those feasts would be stored in the home of the priest, and as a result a lot of it would spoil or be damaged while it sat around. I'm sure it caused difficulty in the house of the priest for his wife and children as they had to walk around and care for all of this stuff that was invading their home. **Is your life too cluttered? Some families that say they don't ever talk have allowed too many entertainment distractions to come in, or have allowed their children to just be too busy outside the home. Look around at how you can simplify your life. I'm glad we don't have cable TV anymore, because I often just become a prisoner to it, and it certainly caused strife when I chose the TV over talking with my wife. How can you simplify in order to bring greater joy into your home, and also to allow you to be able to better hear the voice of the Holy Spirit when He speaks?**

Read Proverbs 18

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe. Prov 18:10

I came across a recent story of a woman who was riding her bike in the mountains, when she was suddenly attacked by a mountain lion. The woman immediately cried out, "Lord Jesus, save me!" The lion clamped his huge jaws around the woman's head, when other bicyclists showed up. They began throwing rocks at the lion, until it finally gave up its attack and fled. The woman was taken to the local hospital and is recovered from her injuries just fine. She said that crying out to Jesus wasn't some instinctual thing; she knew that He was the only one that could save her in the situation.

Even the name of the Lord is a strong tower. He is mighty, but so is His name. God warned Israel against using it in vain, and we know that there is no other name but Jesus by which we can be saved from our sin. In a desperate moment, crying out to Jesus would be appropriate. The verse here tells us that we can run into that name and be safe. Not saved, but safe. We don't have to wait until a moment of desperation to call on the name of the Lord. We can call on Him in praise and thanksgiving, and then when those moments come, we already feel that closeness with Him. **Are you calling on the name of the Lord? Are you doing so on a daily basis, offering up thanks as much as you are presenting requests? There is no other place to go for refuge that will give you the sense of peace and safety as the name and presence of the Lord will. Stay close even when the world says you can take a break from God.**

Read Proverbs 19

Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death. Prov 19:18

Working with teenagers for several years, I have seen many desperate parents trying to get their teens to listen to them. At this point, the bad parenting has been going on for 13 years, so it's hard to unlearn in a day what was learned over such a long period of time. If these parents had cared about their behavior when they were young, disciplining them as

teenagers would have been a lot easier. However, that doesn't mean that a teenager can't be turned around. I've seen parents become new Christians and to begin to immediately make big adjustments in their relationships with their children that quickly paid off.

Many parents of difficult teenagers seem glad to have them out of the house at graduation. To me that's ignorant, because they know that their son or daughter is not making wise choices. Do they expect that will change now that these children are moving out of their home? I would hesitate to say that these parents desire the death of their children, but they certainly are happy to have them around less. **If you are the parent of a difficult child (that should cover 99.3% of all children), never count them out. If you will show them love and at the same time, firm rules they know will not change, you can make a difference in the life of your child. Discipline is not a bad thing, but it is a God-ordained way to remind your child of your authority in their life, and their responsibility to obey that authority. Don't punish to make them to satisfy your anger or frustrations, but do so in the hope that this reminder will bring your child to be more like Jesus. I pray that the discipline I bring to my children causes them to see the fruitlessness of sin.**

Read Proverbs 20

Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD. Prov 20:10

My children have lately been attempting to get a reaction by telling which family member they love the most. Sometimes it's picking one of their siblings, or saying which parent they love the most. When they first started doing this, I asked them if they knew which kid I loved the most? After letting them wonder for a moment, I told them that I love them all equally. God has given each of them something that is unique about them, and because they are my children I love them all. They seemed a little confused by this concept at first, but I think they know understand that I really mean it.

At the time of Solomon's writing, there wasn't a standard of money that could be constantly used. So precious metals or trading goods were weighed in order to make a fair transaction. When someone decided to weigh down their scale or use some secret method to come out ahead, that's abominable to God. He desires that we would deal fairly with all people. This doesn't just mean financially, but that we would treat people equally in general. I watch people at church talk. There are some that get your attention when they talk to you, and then others who you try to walk away from immediately after the conversation begins. I know there are people in this world who's personalities are annoying, but does that mean they don't deserve your attention? **Have you been treating some people as less valuable than others? Jesus never does this, because His love is perfect. Have you been cheating people in the area of your finances? Are you withholding what you owe to someone else? When we choose to deal unfairly with people, we represent Jesus poorly. Then unbelievers begin to say, "He/She doesn't act any better than I do."**

Read Proverbs 21

It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman. Prov 21:19

I can still remember learning the lesson in my mind. I was a senior in high school, and I was thinking about what it would be like to be married some day. I was in a high school with plenty of girls, and there are always those that everyone noticed right away because their beauty made them stand out (just like my wife did). However, I had an epiphany one day. I realized that I was evaluating these girls based on short-term reasons and not considering how we might get along. What good would it do me to marry a beautiful girl who didn't believe in Jesus? There would come a point that the relationship would be a nightmare instead of a dream.

I think it's funny that Solomon brings up the subject of living with a difficult woman, not just once but multiple times. Solomon had many wives, which doesn't appear to have been approved by God, but it seems that in having so many wives he was getting the punishment he deserved. I caution guys (and girls) not to get into a relationship based on surface impressions. A woman can become contentious when she sees a relationship is not what it once was. She desires the same attention in marriage as she did while you were dating. A guy who thinks getting married to a beautiful woman will solve all his problems, will be quickly brought down if he didn't marry for other reasons as well. **Are you in a non-marriage relationship right now, and God has revealed it's not His plan for you? Then you need to end it. Don't worry about how the other person will take it, if you know that you're not supposed to be in the relationship at all. Ultimately, listening to the Lord will be in the interest of both parties for the long-term. And if you are in a marriage relationship with a contentious person, YOU need to make the effort to eliminate the bitterness. You probably already know what you can be doing to ease the situation in your marriage. Divorce is never the answer, but living a life of selfless love with your spouse can change the atmosphere of a household in quick order.**

Read Proverbs 22

A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, favor is better than silver and gold. Prov 22:1

I don't like my name. I don't mean the first one, because Heath is golden. The uniqueness of that name has gotten me far in life (except in Kindergarten when "Heathcliff" was still on TV). However, my last name doesn't really mean anything. It's not the last name I was born with, and I took it from one of my step-fathers. I thought his marriage to my mother would last until death, and he was like a father to me. But, when their marriage dissolved I knew how a divorced woman must feel. Here you are stuck with the name of someone that things didn't work out with. For years, it's been one of my greatest regrets, and one of the things I wished I could go back in time and undo.

Having a good name is important. I don't mean "Rockefeller" or "Trump", because the value of a name isn't what's in your bank account, but what people think of when they

hear your name. Do they think of someone who has integrity, or someone that they wish to avoid? My last name is one that has been a hurt to many people over the years. When I think of it, I think of unfaithfulness. However, my wife and I have decided to make this name uniquely our own. When people think of our Tibbetts family, we want them to think of a family that lives for Jesus Christ. We want our children to grow up and continue to make this family name something to be proud of, and a name that people trust. **What about your name or the name of your family? Are people drawn to it, or do they seek to avoid you? Do you realize that a contact with just one person can be a contact with several as that person describes you to others? Are you described as a selfish or a selfless person? When I think of each of my wife's name, or my children's, or a friend, there is usually a word or two that comes to mind. Let us be aware of the impact we make. When people think of us, let them be led towards Jesus.**

Read Proverbs 23

Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly; Prov 23:31

I absolutely love the church I'm serving in, however it's the first church that I've ever been in that considered drinking to be acceptable. As I read the Bible, I can't see that it absolutely says do not drink, and as a result I'm trying not to be a Pharisee on the subject. At the same time, as a result of some people drinking, there have been consequences and results in their lives that I haven't dealt with amongst believers who totally abstain from alcohol. I've never had any alcohol in my life that ever tasted good, so for people to drink it they must have conditioned themselves to do so. The Bible is clear that wine and alcohol is not to be played with.

There has never been an alcoholic who never had a drink. It can only become a habit when someone makes the choice to put it in their life. I like the way that another pastor put it on the subject of alcohol, "You'll never be bitten by a snake you don't play with." If you drink alcohol, there is a possibility of drunkenness, and if there's a possibility of drunkenness, there is a possibility of being out of control of your decisions. My children are all under 8 years old, but they have figured out what being drunk is from different movies or shows we watched. When we explained to them what alcohol can do, they all said they wouldn't drink it. I pray they don't. **How do you handle alcohol? Are you partaking of it with confidence that you know when enough is enough? The Bible warns us about ignoring the dangers. Don't have pride and believe that you can drink more than another person without being affected. Have you ever asked God what He wants you to do on the subject?**

Read Proverbs 24

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles Prov 24:17

How could an enemy become a friend? I've seen two people who couldn't stand one another later become friends. The reason was often due to the compassion of one person.

I've seen enemies brought together because one of them suddenly experienced a tragic health crisis, death in the family, or job loss. It's amazing how our petty differences can be put aside when we remember that our enemy is a real person, loved by God, and looking for people to support him or her.

Proverbs says that we should not rejoice when our enemy falls. That's the premise of the movies we see and the TV shows we watch. We keep watching so that we can see the bad guy get his comeuppance. But if we find ourselves glad on the day that a lost person stumbles, then we are not living with the mind of Christ in us. Remember the rich young ruler of Matthew 19? When asked by Jesus about keeping the commandments, the guy said he had always kept all of them. I'll bet that people around this guy thought he was a jerk. He probably thought he was better than people around him, and some people were happy to hear about how Jesus set him in his place. But, Jesus loved this man and wanted his restoration through repentance. **Think about the person that you currently have a big problem with. Are you hoping for a resolution with this person, or their downfall? Are you praying for their salvation, or could you care less? Be honest with yourself, and try to remember how other Christians saw you before you were saved. Lost people act lost, so let us show them compassion and care.**

Read Proverbs 25

Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of great men; Prov 25:6

America loves inventors. One of the great inventors of our nation was Samuel Morse, who invented the telegraph. Because of him, no longer did messages require days or weeks of overland horseback riding or slow undependable trains. Because of him, messages shot down the telegraph wires with speed that was before unthinkable. Morse is not held in high regard amongst inventors, mainly because of his humility. He received many honors for his invention, but didn't feel that he deserved them. Morse said, "I have made a valuable application of electricity not because I was superior to other men but solely because God, who meant it for mankind, must reveal it to someone and he was pleased to reveal it to me."

I know few people who have the humility and humble spirit of Morse. When they have an idea, they want everyone to know it was theirs. The idea doesn't even need a valuable application, but they want people to know it is theirs. This is a problem in most professions. People are searching for recognition over service. Everywhere I look, people are attempting to climb ladders. It used to just be in the corporate world, but has even spread to the ministry where ministers take churches they don't want so they later get churches with greater stature. **Do you live your life for the recognition of man? Is your desire that you would be known or that Jesus would be known through you? I have learned that where ever I am, that's the place that God desires for me to be. My hope is that I am used to the fullest capacity, always mindful that anything I receive credit for, comes by the abilities I have been given by God. The only reason I can speak or write is because God has given me a voice and working hands. So who's**

attention are you seeking? The unwavering faithful eye of God, or the fickle attention of man?

Read Proverbs 26

Answer a fool as his folly *deserves*, that he not be wise in his own eyes. Prov 26:5

I remember for many of my formative years in school, hearing the teacher say, "There are no stupid questions." So people would start asking every dumb question they could think of. I know the intention was so that we would not hesitate to ask a question that we really needed an answer to. But by the time I got to high school, I cringed when people raised their hands. Not everyone takes high school seriously, but I often thought, "She already told us the answer to that question!" It seems that many people feel they are smart for asking a question, instead of critically thinking so they can answer their own questions.

Do you realize that not every question is valid? If you're at work and someone asks you a question about a product you sell, that is valid. If you're talking about God and someone asks you, "Can God make a rock so heavy that He can't lift it?", that is an invalid question, because the answer is meaningless. I used to spend too much time trying to answer these questions, and I finally realized these people didn't want an answer. They didn't want to know any more than they already did, and they hoped their question would cause me to question all my answers on God. We are to love people, even those who's personalities are grating to us. But, we do not have to validate their foolishness. **How do you respond to foolish questions? Do you waste too much time trying to make the person feel like they didn't ask a dumb question? Think about why a person is asking you the question they're asking you. Are they looking for an answer, or trying to prove their superiority? When you start your day, ask God for wisdom to answer situations you aren't even aware of yet. The proverbs are all about wisdom and they were written by a man who asked God to make Him wise. Perhaps we should make the same request today.**

Read Proverbs 27

Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Prov 27:17

I remember the first couple of pocket knives I ever had. One was very small and had maybe an inch and a half blade. Of course as a little boy, I used it as a sword and tried to cut anything and everything with it. Eventually it became dull so I threw it away. I had another knife that was better quality sometime later, and I used it in the same way. Eventually I threw it away too. Soon after this I met someone who was sharpening a knife. I didn't know they could be sharpened, but he took this old dull knife, and could use it to cut just like new. I felt really dumb for throwing away those old ones. They weren't useless, they just needed sharpening.

We all need sharpened. I think of how dull we become to spiritual things by the middle of the week sometimes. When you're sitting in the sanctuary, it's easy to see your failures and make promises to God, but the proof of the conviction is how we act when we leave that place. The iron that sharpens us is solid Christian relationships. When you have no

one to talk to about your spiritual life, it probably is rarely mentioned. But a good Christian friend gives us the opportunity to have a dialogue and discuss questions of the faith back and forth. They provide accountability for us so that we stay sharp and ready for use, instead of dull and useless for work. **Do you have believers around you keeping you sharpened for kingdom use? Are you a sharpener for other believers? It simply means that you encourage people in their faith, and that you challenge each other to live more obediently to Jesus today than you did yesterday. Ask God to show you where you need sharpened, and seek out those people who will be a refining influence on your life. A great place is the Sunday School or small group ministries of your church where you can build relationships in a relaxed setting.**

Read Proverbs 28

He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination. Prov 28:9

In one of my high school history classes, we had a kid named Frank. My teacher's favorite statement when discussing a subject was "Let's be frank for a moment." Frank would look up for a minute and then the joke was over. Frank never listened to anything that was being talked about and just talked to his friends in the class. I remember seeing Frank go up to our teacher one day because he didn't know how to write a recently assigned paper. Mr. Balsman said, "Do you know why the others all know what they're supposed to write and you don't? Because they were listening." Frank wanted to know something he could have learned if he had been listening at the appropriate time.

God wants us to listen to Him. If there is anyone who is not wasting His breath when He speaks, it's the Lord. He certainly speaks to us during our prayer time through the prompting and conviction of the Holy Spirit. However, I have gained a great deal by listening to Him through the words of the Bible. I have been reading and been convicted, encouraged, and inspired by the words that God has written down. The verse indicates that we should be listening to God, and if we are not, why should we be praying? How hypocritical is it for you to talk to God and expect Him to listen, but you don't pay attention to His words that are available during the entire day? There is no excuse for not reading the Bible daily, because you have all day to do it. **Are you listening to the words of God or just asking Him to listen to yours? I heard a pastor once say, "If your quiet time has been shortened, and you don't know if you should read the Bible or pray, read the Bible. It's more important for you to hear from God than for God to hear from you." This points completely to the idea of selflessness. When we read the Bible we show we are concerned with doing the will of God in our lives. When we pray without reading the Bible, we indicate we are more concerned with Him doing our will for that day.**

Read Proverbs 29

Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law. Prov 29:18

Unmotivated high school seniors really get my goat. Working with teens for so many years, I'm constantly talking to them about personal responsibility, especially in the area of their education. I try to make it clear that you can't start planning on going to college when you're a senior. Your grades from your freshman year are just as important as your senior year. Yet I see so many kids who get to that last year of high school and are completely unprepared for life after high school. They just look like they're wandering around with no idea what they're supposed to do or even what they want to do.

Christians need to be people of vision. Through prayer and bible study, you should have an idea of what you should be doing with your life. And not just your possible occupations, but what you should be doing with your day-to-day life. Do you have goals for your job? Do you also have goals for your spiritual life? Do you desire to resist sin and pray with passion? It's interesting that the verse ends by saying that you'll be happy in keeping the law. When a person has no vision or goal for which they are striving, they will probably miss many aspects of their relationships with Jesus Christ. And when you find yourself ignoring the across the board commandments of Scripture that are for everyone, happiness will not come to your doorstep. Only guilt and disappointment can be found there. **Do you have a vision for who you're supposed to be? God does, and He wants you to know it. God doesn't play hide-n-seek with His will for your life, because then you would be unlikely to find it. He reveals what is needed to those who ask? Ask God to make it clear who you are supposed to be today, tomorrow, and for the future.**

Read Proverbs 30

Every word of God is tested; he is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Prov 30:5

The Bible as we know it has existed for about 1700 years. In that time, it has faced much criticism. Attempts have been made to get rid of it and silence the message of God's standards, yet the Bible remains the best selling book in the world. However, despite being the best-selling, I'm not sure that it's the best read book in the world. People could take the opportunity to read it, especially in a nation like ours where it is legal to do, but it seems people owning one and people reading one are two different things.

Any word that God says is tested, which literally means it's been tested as in a fire. Precious metal can be tested by being melted to check for impurities before reshaping them into the form that is needed. God's Word has been through the fire. People have been told that it will be dangerous for them to have a copy, and yet people continue to risk their lives for the words of God. God's words are pure and they are trustworthy and they are even a shield. **When we live our lives according to the Bible, our lives are protected. We are prepared for the sins that can destroy our families and even our very lives. People seem to forget that the Bible is a protection for us. We have the opportunity to know what God wants us to know, but we have to pay attention. Like Dr. Rogers said, "Every time God says 'Thou shalt not', He's saying 'This will hurt you'. Every time God says 'Thou shalt', He's saying 'This is good for you.'". If you ignore God's word, even for a short time, you are ignoring the protections of God.**

Read Proverbs 31

She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Prov 31:26

It's hard for me to say much on this subject, because I have a Proverbs 31 woman for a wife, and she has been the greatest joy God has given me on this earth. I'm not saying that all women are bad, but in my time of watching my wife and sister, I have noticed that there are certain women they are drawn to. A woman who just talks in every circumstance doesn't seem to draw many hearers. But women like Mary Anne, Sherri and my wife seem to draw women because they don't just talk to be heard. They talk to speak to the specific situations going on in a person's life, and how that situation sits in light of who God is.

If you are a woman, do you speak wisdom and kindness? Not just in public to those around you, but in private to your family and your closest friends? Do you build people up or do you tear them down? A most excellent woman is one of dignity (v. 25), and she cares about the impressions others have of her because those impressions also reflect on the God she serves and the man she loves. If you are a man who is unmarried, look for a woman who speaks with a purpose. My wife considers herself a rambler at times; however the times that she thinks she has been rambling have often settled me on a particular course of action. If you are a man who is married, and you don't see wisdom and kindness coming from the mouth of your wife, pray for it. Wisdom and forgiveness are willingly granted by God, and you can pray that God will give her the wisdom to consider her words and not to just disperse them. A final note: it was a very important day when I realized that just because I have a story that relates to the conversation at hand, doesn't mean I have to share it. People are not all dying to hear every word you have on every subject. Wisdom and kindness opens people's ears.