



Faith Connections

Bible Study Guide

Summer
25

*The Wisdom of
Proverbs*

End Things

*What the Bible Says
About...*



Bible Study Guide

Contents

Summer 2025

Volume 48, Number 4

Perspectives: Wisdom 3

Unit 1: The Wisdom of Proverbs

- 1** Jun 1 **The Gift of Wisdom** 4
(Proverbs 1:1-7; 2:1-8)
- 2** Jun 8 **Wisdom's Invitation** 8
(Proverbs 1:20-23; 10:27-32)
- 3** Jun 15 **Guard Your Heart** 12
(Proverbs 4:20-27; 5:1-5)
- 4** Jun 22 **Wisdom for the Workplace** 16
(Proverbs 6:6-11; 11:24-28; 22:1-4)
- 5** Jun 29 **Wisdom and Social Responsibility** 20
(Proverbs 16:8-12, 18-20; 24:23-26; 31:8-9)
- 6** Jul 6 **Speaking Wisely** 24
(Proverbs 25:11-15; 26:17-28)

Unit 2: End Things

- 7** Jul 13 **The Day of the Lord** 28
(Zechariah 14:1-9, 16-21)
- 8** Jul 20 **The Second Coming** 32
(Acts 1:6-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
- 9** Jul 27 **Is the End Near?** 36
(Matthew 24:3-8; 29-37)
- 10** Aug 3 **Being Ready** 40
(2 Peter 3:1-14)

Unit 3: What the Bible Says About . . .

- 11** Aug 10 **Politics** 44
(Matthew 22:17-21; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7)
- 12** Aug 17 **Neighbors** 48
(Leviticus 19:16-18; Psalm 15:1-5; Ephesians 4:25-27)
- 13** Aug 24 **Family** 52
(Colossians 3:12-21)
- 14** Aug 31 **Sharing Our Faith** 56
(Isaiah 49:5-6; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 20:20-24)

Article: What Is this World Coming to? 60

Key Verse Memory Back Cover

Adult Bible Study Guide is one of several Faith Connections companion products, a themed suite of resources designed to help adults discover what it means to be holy people in today's world. To order, call 1-800-877-0700.

Mike L. Wonch

Editor

Cover Photo: © iceman photo/Shutterstock.com

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version* (NIV). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations marked † are the author's own translation from the original languages.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

From the *New Revised Standard Version*, Updated Edition (NRSVUE). Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

We believe in the full inspiration of the Scripture and encourage the comparison and use of several translations as part of the discipline of Bible study.

Bible Study Guide is published quarterly by The Foundry Publishing®, P.O. Box 419527, Kansas City, MO 64141. Copyright © 2025 by The Foundry Publishing®. Canadian GST No. R129017471.

Perspectives

Wisdom

Over the course of my life I have made some wise decisions, such as where to go to college and marrying my wife. As equally true, I have made some unwise decisions, such as buying a pair of parachute pants in the early 1980s (look it up). Take a moment and think about wise people you have encountered. What made these people wise in your opinion? Now, think about unwise people you have encountered. What makes them unwise in your opinion?

Throughout our lives we need, seek, and rely on wisdom. For example, young adults might need wisdom in career choice, new mom and dads might seek wisdom on how to parent, middle-aged people might rely on the wisdom of a financial consultant for sound retirement planning, and older adults may seek the wisdom of family and friends regarding issues that arise in the final years of life.

Keep in mind, seeking good wisdom and receiving good wisdom are two different things, depending on where and from whom you are seeking the wisdom. That is, we may seek the advice and guidance of others, but that does not mean the wisdom they share is sound. Even when seeking the wisdom of someone we trust and respect, we must always keep in mind that human wisdom is just that, human. This doesn't mean we shouldn't seek out the guidance from others (Proverbs 12:15). However, we often look to others first and foremost, rather than looking to God for true wisdom.

Granted, God's Word doesn't tell you specifically to marry a certain person, or accept one job offer over another, or make a specific financial decision. Yet, you can "trust in the LORD with all your heart," not depending "on your own understanding," but seeking "his will in all you do," trusting "he will show you which path to take" (Proverbs 3:5-6, NLT). Through His Word, prayer, divine providence, and godly counsel from mature believers, God can and does give us wisdom and guidance.

During this quarter, we will be examining the wisdom in Proverbs, what the Bible says about end things, and explore what Scripture teaches about politics, neighbors, family, and sharing our faith. As you read and study each week, seek God's wisdom, for "the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6).*

May God bless you as you study His Word this quarter!

MIKE WONCH

Editor

*Check out "Get Wisdom" on page 63.

June

1

THE GIFT OF WISDOM

God gives true wisdom to those who pursue Him.

THE WORD

PROVERBS 1:1-7

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
²for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight;
³for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair;
⁴for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—
⁵let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—
⁶for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.
⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

PROVERBS 2:1-8

¹My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,
²turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—
³indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
⁴and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

KEY VERSE

⁶For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

⁷He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
⁸for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

ENGAGE THE WORD

THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE

Proverbs 1:1-7

Verse 1 is Proverbs' Hebrew title, asserting Solomon's authorship, not of every saying, but of much of its content. Solomon did succeed his father David as "king of Israel"; from the beginning, he was known for the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom that here he urged the young to pursue (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 4:29-34; 10:1-9).

The first paragraph (vv. 2-7) introduces the book. Its Hebrew text—all of them verb and noun forms—encompass almost the whole constellation of Hebrew terms denoting knowledge, instruction, understanding, wisdom, guidance, discretion, and so on. In addition, three other nouns rightly characterized as moral and ethical terms (NIV's "right and just and fair," v. 3) are here firmly identified as wisdom terms. The range of words for wisdom in Hebrew means more than just knowledge—though it does not mean less.

The common error of discounting and/or ridiculing "book learning" does arise from a valid recognition that data alone is not understanding, not discernment, and not wisdom. Something more is needed. Solomon named this "something more" in verse 7a: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." A better translation of the first phrase is, "The reverential awe of Yahweh." God does not want us to be terrified in God's presence, but simply to recognize that God is God. Together with all else, God created and sustains us. Understanding and acknowledging that, we are ready for the further knowledge that equips us for—and can lead us on to—understanding, wisdom, and the other godly traits Solomon notes here.

Even the "simple" (v. 4) may gain the knowledge,

Did You Know?

The most basic meaning of “wisdom” (Hebrew, *hokma*) in Scripture, is “the art of being successful, of forming the correct plan to gain the desired results” (J. D. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary* [Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1982], 1255). Given that the goal of life is to be faithful to God, true wisdom takes on the added meaning of that which guides us in successfully living holy lives.

THE GIVER OF WISDOM

wisdom, and so on, that begins with reverence for God; likewise, the “young,” “wise,” and “discerning” (vv. 4-5)—all who will accept, receive. In contrast, “fools” (the morally lax or evil), because they “despise wisdom and instruction” (v. 7), cannot receive these good gifts.

Proverbs 2:1-8

In this first paragraph of chapter 2, Solomon returns to the truth that all wisdom comes from and is centered in God. Here, he frames it as a series of three “if” clauses climaxed and concluded with a “then” clause, a classic form in the development and expression of a logical argument. One important emphasis in the “if” clauses is that acquiring knowledge and wisdom is not passive. Rather, he says, “If you accept . . . , turning . . . and applying your heart . . . if you call out . . . and cry aloud . . . if you look for it . . . and search for it . . .” None of these suggest a merely passive reception of wisdom. Each posits an explicit, even a vigorous and exhaustive, pursuit of the wisdom and knowledge God delights to give when we are ready and able to receive them.

The first “if-clause” (vv. 1-2) is a conventional expression of both biblical and extra-biblical wisdom literature. Fathers/teachers expect their children/students to “accept” (receive) their “words,” and to “store up” their instruction(s). Also, by definition, a competent wisdom teacher of integrity moves beyond “merely” imparting the kind of knowledge represented by data—as important as a solid, comprehensive foundation of many kinds of data is to the acquiring of true wisdom. “Turning your ear . . . and applying your heart” (v. 2) is one way of expressing the attitude and the effort needed to understand the importance of, and the relationships between, various kinds of data. But, “wisdom and . . . understanding” go much further—they require acknowledging and asking of God, the Source.

The second “if-clause” (v. 3) expresses the need for

Think About It

In every field, even (honest) experts acknowledge that their ignorance exceeds their knowledge. No one can claim total knowledge of all the basics, much less the complete understanding and wisdom of advanced instruction and experience. The humble, honest student who learns early on that “the LORD gives wisdom” (2:6a) is well-begun on the path of wisdom. Such a one can freely ask and freely receive, then confidently act upon the wisdom God imparts.

what we may call intensity on the part of the learner-recipient of these gifts—here named as/represented by “insight . . . and understanding”—that come only from God. To “call out . . . and cry aloud” is to desire with all one’s being.

The third “if-clause” (v. 4) acknowledges that this desire cannot be only mental or emotional. It must and will extend to going wherever to find and get this “hidden treasure,” the wisdom that comes only from God. Of course, the “silver” here is metaphorical, but searching for, and receiving, God’s wisdom is as all-consuming of one’s whole being as mining for silver, but infinitely more rewarding.

Verse 5, the “then-clause,” brings the student/reader back to the final paragraph of Proverbs 1, with which we began: “The fear of the LORD” is the beginning of “knowledge.” Verses 6-8 reveal secondary, but still important, “pragmatic” results of diligently seeking wisdom from God. In this world wracked by human sin and evil, only God “holds success in store for the upright.” Only God is a “shield”; only God “guards . . . and protects.” True, on a difficult or even a dangerous path—we may think of “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4, KJV)—God’s “faithful ones” do not always experience this immediately. However, taking life’s journey as a whole, Solomon’s instruction to his child/student is both true and reliable: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,” and “The LORD gives wisdom.” In light of this, we may ask God for wisdom with confidence.

REFLECT

In what ways can you seek God’s wisdom today?

JOSEPH COLESON is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Nazarene Theological Seminary, author of *Genesis 1-11* in the *NBBC*, and co-author, with Sarah B. C. Derck, of *Song of Solomon* in the *NBBC*.

June
8

WISDOM'S INVITATION

God desires that we avoid the heartache of poor decisions and invites us to enjoy life as He intended.

THE WORD

PROVERBS 1:20-23

Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;

²¹on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech:

²²⁴⁴How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?

²³Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

PROVERBS 10:27-32

KEY VERSE

²⁷The fear of the LORD adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.

²⁸The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.

²⁹The way of the LORD is a refuge for the blameless, but it is the ruin of those who do evil.

³⁰The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land.

³¹From the mouth of the righteous comes the fruit of wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be silenced.

³²The lips of the righteous know what finds favor, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.

ENGAGE THE WORD

LADY WISDOM INVITES ALL TO LEARN

Our introductory session emphasized two realities: 1) Knowledge and wisdom begin with reverential awe for God; 2) God is the ultimate Giver of knowledge and wisdom. Today, Solomon, speaking for God in the voice of “Lady Wisdom,” invites us to seek the wisdom that comes from God.

Proverbs 1:20-23

Verses 20-21 assure the hearer/reader that God’s wisdom is free, and open to all who will receive it. “Out in the open . . . in the public square . . . on top of the wall . . . at the city gate”: No public setting of any ancient Israelite town is omitted. Moreover, “outside”—meaning, “not within the walls or courts of any home or other building,” i.e., “not secret”—eliminates and disallows any idea of private or “elite” religious knowledge or revelation. Solomon declared God’s gift(s) of wisdom universally available; God shuts out no one.

In and of itself, to be “simple” (v. 22) is a morally neutral condition. The Hebrew root basically means “[to be] open,” like a clear tract of land ready to receive whatever its owner may plant. Just as land may be seeded with good crops, trees, or pasturage, or may be left to weeds, briars, and brambles, so the “simple” youngster may be receptive to either good or evil influences and teachings.

Deciding to remain “simple” is not a neutral choice, however. To reject knowledge and/or the acquisition of skills because, for example, the effort is too strenuous is to set oneself on the dangerous downward path of “mockers” and “fools” (v. 22).

The preventative for the simple, and the remedy even for the mocker and/or the fool along on the path to destruction, is to “repent” (v. 23). The Hebrew root means simply “turn around,” “go back.” On the map it is obvious. For example, a traveler wanting to go to Denver from Kansas City will not get there by driving

Did You Know?

The Book of Proverbs is an inspired anthology of Hebrew wisdom. This wisdom, however, is not merely intellectual or secular. It is mainly the application of the tenets of a revealed faith to the tasks of everyday living. In the Psalms we have the Hebrew's hymnbook; in Proverbs we have a manual for daily righteousness (*Job through Song of Solomon* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1967], 455).

THE RIGHTEOUS HAVE A FUTURE

east on I-70 toward St. Louis. If, for whatever reason, one starts out that way, it does no good to pretend it will all turn out right because of “perseverance.” The only remedy is to “repent”—turn around, retrace I-70 back to Kansas City, and continue westward until reaching Denver. Though perhaps not quite so obvious, it is the same with wisdom: One does not arrive at “wisdom” on paths of wickedness and other follies. If one does start out that way, only repentance—turning around, then going forward in the opposite and correct direction—can bring one to knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and maturity. Lady Wisdom’s “rebuke” is only the wake-up call. All who accept her rebuke then can receive and profit from her “thoughts” and “teachings,” as our second passage demonstrates.

Proverbs 10:27-32

Four of our six verses specifically call those who seek and acquire God’s wisdom, “righteous.” Four verses call those who don’t, “wicked.” Both the bent toward righteousness, and that toward wickedness, are distinct and recognizable—increasingly, we may add, as one grows older and/or those within a long-term group grow closer.

These verses, respectively, depict the righteous as long-lived, joyful, secure in God, planted permanently, wise, and receiving deserved favor. By contrast, the wicked die early with dashed hopes, experience ruin and exile, and find themselves silenced because of their own perversity.

Two sets of observations are in order. First, this passage is a good summary of the standard “Deuteronomic perspective” of much of the Bible: *Live a righteous life before God, and life will go well. Live a wicked, or even only a foolishly careless life, and the future will be hazardous, or even non-existent.* Now, taking all of life—and especially including eternity—as long, as broadly, as deeply, and as largely as we can, all this is true.

Think About It

The first half of each verse, 10:27-32, notes a “benefit” accruing to those who receive the gift(s) of God’s wisdom. Taking them individually, how is each (e.g., joy, v. 28) both a natural part of, and a bountiful natural result of, the wisdom God gives? Putting it another way: Why should it be “natural” to live by the guidance of God’s wisdom?

CONCLUSION

But the Bible, and life itself, also affirm that in the short term, life is not always so rosy. Job’s disasters come to mind, as do other psalms of lament. Jesus himself addressed this in Luke 13:4, with His rhetorical question of the 18 killed by a tower collapse in Siloam: Were they “more guilty” than Jerusalem’s other citizens? Of course, too, Jesus’ own death demonstrates that suffering is not proof of wickedness.

Psalm 73 points the way out of this seeming contradiction. The psalmist discovered, just in time, that the prosperity of the wicked is only temporary (vv. 18-19, 27); by its very nature, wickedness and its results cannot last. In addition, humans were not created for a life measured in years, or even in decades. Live with eternity in mind, as Lady Wisdom counsels, and eternity will vindicate and validate the Deuteronomic wisdom of these proverbs, together with all her good instruction.

As we reflect on our own life experience, we must consider where we have followed—or perhaps have not followed—wisdom’s invitation to the essentially “good life” of the righteous. We must be aware of areas of our life where we can act with greater wisdom as we walk in faith.

Just as Solomon intended his wisdom teaching for the instruction of his son (1:8) and other young persons, so we are encouraged to help others acquire the wisdom God has given us through our own lifetime of learning. We must look for ways to help others—family, church family, friends, acquaintances, workmates—understand and receive God’s good gift(s) of wisdom.

REFLECT **W**ho in your life could you help to understand and receive God’s good gift of wisdom?

June

15

GUARD YOUR HEART

Living wisely requires disciplining our hearts and minds.

THE WORD

PROVERBS 4:20-27

My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words.
²¹Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;

²²for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.

KEY VERSE

²³**Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.**

²⁴Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

²⁵Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.

²⁶Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.

²⁷Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

PROVERBS 5:1-5

¹My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my words of insight,

²that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.

³For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil;

⁴but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword.

⁵Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.

ENGAGE THE WORD

IN ALL YOUR WAYS, GUARD YOUR HEART

Proverbs 4:20-27

This first paragraph emphasizes that acquiring wisdom is not always easy; usually, it takes consistent commitment and effort. Wise parents know this, usually from their own life experience and, as here, support their children with words of encouragement and wise reminder.

Solomon counsels us to employ all our bodily parts and functions in pursuing and exercising wisdom: ears open (v. 20), eyes and feet straight ahead (vv. 21, 25-27), mouth/speech prudent and judicious (v. 24). As we have seen earlier in this unit, the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures consistently teach that we are material creatures. It follows that wise use of our bodies is a necessary part of growing in wisdom. However, Scripture also is clear that we are more than the total of our bodily parts and their functions; even perfect health and physical condition cannot produce or guarantee wisdom.

Verse 23 names the human heart as the center: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Most English versions render Hebrew *leb* as "heart." This is correct; both nouns identify the organ that pumps our blood. However, it also is insufficient. Beyond its "literal" designation, in English "heart" often refers to emotions and attitudes, while we usually use "mind" (or brain) to speak of thinking or other intellectual matters. English sometimes sources decision-making, will, and determination in the heart, sometimes in the mind. For example, the question, "Are you deciding with your heart, or with your mind (brain)?" makes sense in English. In biblical Hebrew, though, this is a nonsense question—*leb* means both "heart" and "mind."

How do we know this? Deuteronomy 6:5 reads, "And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your *leb*, and with all your *nephesh* (NEH-phesh; 'life'), and with all your *me'od* (meh-ODE; 'strength,' or even 'resourc-

Did You Know?

The primary meaning of *zarah* (zah-RAH), the noun we are translating “strange woman,” is that she was not the wife or fiancée of the young man Solomon addressed; in terms of marital intimacy, she was a “stranger.” Married or unmarried, prostitute or not, she was not his wife. She was off limits to him, and he to her.

**ESPECIALLY, GUARD
YOUR HEART FROM
ADULTERY**

es’).” Mark 12:30 is Jesus’ quotation, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life/soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”[†] Both New Testament Greek and modern English need two words, “heart” and “mind,” to convey the full meaning of Hebrew *leb*. Solomon’s advice, “Guard your heart” (4:23), in English means, “Guard your heart and your mind.”

Here, too, is evidence that Solomon knew everyone encounters tests of integrity and fidelity. Sometimes, these are temptations to perversity and corruption arising out of our own hearts (v. 24). Sometimes, they approach from without; then, the best prevention often is to think ahead, and avoid places and contexts where one is likely to encounter strong temptation—“Give careful thought” (v. 26); “Do not turn” (v. 27).

Proverbs 5:1-5

Solomon began this paragraph (5:1) with the same lead sentence as 4:20 above. The words given there as a general instruction he now focused on the specific issue of adultery with “the strange woman” (5:3; a more apt translation than “adulterous woman”). In most of today’s world cultures, if not also in ancient Israel, this caution is equally valid and valuable for women and girls regarding the “strange man.” Adultery is not the subject only of this paragraph, much of chapters 5—7 also discusses it. Adultery is indeed a serious error and sin, and Solomon’s wisdom is excellent counsel for the young person beginning to encounter and feel its enticements.

More is needed, however. Jesus defined adultery as more than just the overt sexual act with someone other than one’s spouse. Adultery also is the inward nourishing of desire for that intimacy, whether or not one acts on it (Matthew 5:27-28). The underlying meaning of the English verb affirms Jesus’ teaching here. To “adulterate” is to dilute a pure (unmixed) substance by adding (mixing in) something else. Salt added to a

Think About It

Many segments of our permissive culture treat adultery as not all that serious, at least if no one (e.g., spouse or children) “gets hurt.” However, even if adulterers have no other family, even though an affected spouse may walk away and marry again, adultery is not a “victimless” sin. At a minimum, both marriage partners are deeply wounded in many ways. Solomon’s advice still is sound today: Do not bring any “strange” woman (or man) into the intimacy of your marriage.

sugar bowl adulterates the sugar. Water added to milk adulterates (and weakens) the milk. In the same way, one who marries, then acts (or even thinks) out of sexual desire toward another, commits adultery. Even before any overt action, the desire (lust) for another dilutes the love for one’s spouse. Adulterous thinking, unchecked, leads to adulterous actions and, ultimately, to the destruction of the love for, and marriage to, one’s spouse. Solomon and Jesus agree: We cannot reasonably expect any other outcome, and that alone makes adultery unacceptable.

This first warning about the “strange woman” acknowledges her many attractions (v. 3), but also looks ahead, as the son/student cannot yet, to the end of her path—death and the grave (v. 5), with deep misery along the way (v. 4). Every wise and loving parent or teacher would desire to warn a beloved young person away from that path, and that end. Every young person receiving this wise preview of the whole course of adulterous and other promiscuous relationships—so dangerously attractive initially and on the surface—is on the path of wisdom in embracing Solomon’s instruction and avoiding the glittering enticements of the “strange” woman or man.

The sad and ironic tragedy of Solomon’s later life was his own abandonment of this wise counsel; perhaps he convinced himself that it did not apply to him because of his royal circumstances and responsibilities. According to I Kings 11:3, he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Whether Solomon wanted to or not, he could not have celebrated wholly the love of any of these women, without thinking of and comparing her with at least one of the others.

REFLECT **W**hat current challenge does Solomon’s instruction, “Guard your heart,” bring to mind? How might his advice help you meet this challenge successfully, and come out stronger for it?

June

22

WISDOM FOR THE WORKPLACE

*As believers, we must set an example
of godly wisdom in the workplace.*

THE WORD

PROVERBS 6:6-11

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!
⁷It has no commander, no overseer or ruler,
⁸yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.
⁹How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up
from your sleep?
¹⁰A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—
¹¹and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an
armed man.

PROVERBS 11:24-28

²⁴One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds
unduly, but comes to poverty.
²⁵A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will
be refreshed.
²⁶People curse the one who hoards grain, but they pray God's
blessing on the one who is willing to sell.
²⁷Whoever seeks good finds favor, but evil comes to one who
searches for it.
²⁸Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will
thrive like a green leaf.

PROVERBS 22:1-4 KEY VERSE

**¹A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be
esteemed is better than silver or gold.**
²Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of
them all.

³The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

⁴Humility is the fear of the LORD; its wages are riches and honor and life.

ENGAGE THE WORD

A PROVERB FOR EVERY AGE

Proverbs 6:6-11

In Israel's agricultural environment, the ant was so common it usually did not attract attention. Yet, if for no other reason than childhood fascination remembered as an adult, everyone had seen the ants' incessant summer labors to provide the colony's winter food. For most procrastination-prone or marginally lazy persons in honor/shame cultures such as Israel's, avoiding low opinions of family and neighbors prompts at least an appearance of willing work. The sluggard—the one failing to learn from childhood either the satisfactions or the rewards of work, and unmoved by embarrassment or shame—Solomon advised to learn from the ant.

Learn what? First, the ant “has no commander, no overseer or ruler” (v. 7). All human societies in Israel's purview were structured hierarchically; that the ant could function without such leadership was a marvel. In effect, Solomon was saying, “Even if you can't see why you should work with human direction, at least imitate the ant and work diligently, anyway!”

To be efficient, effective, and productive, timing is important. For the ant, the busiest season is summer. Ancient Israel's agricultural work had a year-round rhythm. Its busiest seasons were plowing and planting grain fields in late fall, then the several harvests, beginning in early spring and continuing (with some down times) into mid-autumn. The ant must gather in summer; winter is too late. Likewise, an Israelite farmer neglecting the grain harvests would have put his family on the path to certain poverty and possible starvation (v. 11). So crucial was the grain harvest that normally each community's entire able-bodied

Did You Know?

God did not establish work as a “curse,” as many people think from misreading Genesis 3:17-19. Rather, God placed the first human “in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (2:15), well before the first human sin. Honest work is a blessing, not a curse.

population worked to reap, thresh, and store it as quickly as possible. The sluggard resisting this practical wisdom was advised by Solomon to at least learn from the ant!

In regard to rest, Solomon was not saying do not sleep at all (vv. 9-10). He was warning against the excessive sleep of the sluggard, the chronically lazy. Even the traditional afternoon nap is not forbidden; just don't extend it into the evening and neglect the rest of the day's work.

One reason for this excellent advice is its practicality. For most people in the ancient world, neglect of work assured poverty, or worse (v. 11). Though, today, in ways most ancients could not have imagined, economic poverty still is real for many. There are many who, for a myriad of reasons, and despite best efforts, barely have resources for monthly housing, food, and so on.

THE GENEROSITY PARADOX

Proverbs 11:24-28

Our first response to this section of observational instruction may be that it is counterintuitive: Generosity toward others increases one's material resources? Preserving and safeguarding what one works for brings one “to poverty” (v. 24), causes one to fall (v. 28)? Does this not contradict 6:6-11, the lesson from the ant we just have considered?

The answer is, “No.” These passages are contrasting, not contradictory. Each of us needs to work, but sometimes our own work and its results are not enough. From time to time, each of us needs material help, a helping hand, or both. The stingy miss out on all the benefits of generosity, tangible and intangible.

HONOR IS GOOD; REVERENCE IS BETTER

Proverbs 22:1-4

With most of the book of Proverbs, our passages today share what biblical scholars often call the “Deuteronomic perspective” (see Session 2), expressed succinctly, “Do good and you will do well,” or “The right-

Think About It

The Christian financial broadcaster and writer Dave Ramsey says one important purpose of working diligently and wisely to accumulate wealth is to be able to give part of it away, wisely and generously. How is this reflected in our session passages today?

teous/innocent prosper; the wicked suffer.” Generally speaking, especially in the long view, this is true. The Bible reminds us that adversity, suffering, and sorrow also are part of life. But the temporal reality of evil and suffering does not cancel the greater, and eternal, reality of good.

Verse 1 speaks truly, then. We may possibly conceive of circumstances where having a good name, a good reputation, would not necessarily reflect well on a person. But that is the exception. Most often, a good name arises from being good, from doing well by others; if one must choose, that is better than possessing great wealth. Understanding this, the true value of generosity is reaffirmed from a new perspective.

We may see verses 2-3 as two sides of the same coin. Verse 2 is a statement of wise discernment; all humans are equal before God, because God made us all. Verse 3 affirms another reality; we are not equal in our powers of discernment. Some of us are prudent, some, simple—here, meaning simply not prudent in some (perhaps even in any) given circumstance.

The reality of all this should move each of us to humility (v. 4). Before all else, true humility is “the fear of the Lord,” understood as “the joyously reverential awe of Yahweh.” The affirmation of wages (or “reward”) is a reminder that while life is (or should be) primarily relational, it also is often transactional. Whether working for wages formally in a workplace, or working without monetary pay, the true wages of the righteous worker, for and before God, are riches (sometimes material, sometimes not) and honor and life.

REFLECT

In your own setting, what could the generosity of Proverbs 11:24-28 look like?

JOSEPH COLESON

June

29

WISDOM AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

God's wisdom calls us to seek justice for all people.

THE WORD

PROVERBS 16:8-12

Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.
⁹In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.

¹⁰The lips of a king speak as an oracle, and his mouth does not betray justice.

¹¹Honest scales and balances belong to the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making.

¹²Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.

18-20

¹⁸Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

¹⁹Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

²⁰Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.

PROVERBS 24:23-26

²³These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good:

²⁴Whoever says to the guilty, "You are innocent," will be cursed by peoples and denounced by nations.

²⁵But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come on them.

²⁶An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.

PROVERBS 31:8-9

KEY VERSES

⁸**Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.**

⁹Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

ENGAGE THE WORD

IN EVERYTHING, RIGHTEOUSNESS MATTERS

Proverbs 16:8-12, 18-20

Verse 8 expresses a key not only to every permanent success, but also to every permanent failure. In all circumstances and all conditions, to have or to gain a little “with righteousness” is better than to possess or attain “much gain with injustice.” Often despite short-term appearances, but with no permanent exceptions, this axiom is absolute. From children cheating at play to dictators attempting genocide, both the weak and the powerful routinely flout this fixed moral principle, but sooner or later each is stopped by it. Most learn, at least partially, from their failures. However, too many experience disaster and ruin—refusing to yield, they press on.

That God is serious about righteousness and justice is confirmed here by reference to the duty of kings to uphold and administer justice (vv. 10-12). Human kingship was not God’s original purpose for Israel, but when God acceded to Israel’s request for a king (1 Samuel 8:22), that did not absolve Israel’s rulers of the kingly responsibility for equal justice for all God’s people. Even pagan kings who did not recognize God as God understood justice for their people to be one of their primary responsibilities.

Too many of Judah’s and Israel’s kings subverted justice during their reigns. Still, these verses indicate that the later collectors of Solomon’s proverbs did not therefore stop taking for granted that every king knows if he fails to administer justice for all his people, he fails as king, even if he succeeds at everything else. Consider verse 10: The king’s “mouth does not betray justice”; verse 11: “Honest scales and balances belong to the LORD [Yahweh]”—the king was God’s agent in ensuring the accuracy of these instruments of justice in the marketplace; verse 12: “Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righ-

Did You Know?

Hammurabi, king of Babylon (in today's southern Iraq) about 1792-1750 BC, is the best-known ancient lawgiver after Moses. In his famous Code, Hammurabi claimed to be acting as agent of the gods, who required him to shepherd his people wisely and justly. Even today, much in his Code commends respect, demonstrating that justice is a timeless concern for all peoples.

JUSTICE IN LAW STRENGTHENS A PEOPLE

teousness." Given the later Judean kingdom's admiration for the "Golden Age" of David and Solomon, verse 12 is an especially forceful way of asserting the truth that righteousness and justice are paramount.

We should note that verse 18a often is misquoted. It is not, "Pride goes before a fall." A more "literal" translation of the verse, interesting on several points, is, "Before shattering/crushing [comes] pride, and before stumbling/falling, haughtiness of spirit." In the context of justice, we are considering today, "pride" and "haughtiness" include intentional disregard for the justice due to others, especially to those of "lesser" position than our own and extending even to respect and consideration, which are the God-given right of every person created in God's image.

Verse 19 reminds us that, in any age, practicing these principles may be difficult and costly. While to share "plunder with the proud" may seem profitable, it can be so only in the short term. In the long view of God's purposes, it is "better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed" (more literally, "the humble, lowly, and meek"). By their nature, ill-gotten gains are transitory, but justice and its rewards endure.

Proverbs 24:23-26; 31:8-9

To this point in our session, in today's common social contexts, it would be easy to focus on individual and/or "private" interactions, and neglect considerations of justice in the law and other public contexts. If we have done that, though, these two short passages bring us back to the legal and public concerns for justice first established by God in the Torah.

Verses 23b-24, "To show partiality . . . denounced by nations," is an iteration in Israel's Wisdom Literature of this foundational legal principle first set forth centuries earlier in various passages in the Torah (Pentateuch). When we reflect on partiality, for example, we often think first of unjust judgments for the rich and influential, rendered in their favor either simply be-

Think About It

“Material prosperity and its accompanying power are prerequisites to pride. Morally, the most common manifestation of pride is oppression of less-fortunate people. Spiritually its root sin is disregard for God or defiance of him. The leading self-delusion of proud people is their false security in themselves and their resources” (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* [Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998], 662).

cause of their station in society, or because they have the resources to bribe those charged with dispensing justice in legal matters. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 warns against injustice done for these reasons, also employing the word “partiality” (v. 19). In both passages, the Hebrew is the same idiomatic phrasing, “You shall not recognize/show regard for the face” (i.e., do not be partial by judging in favor of anyone because of kinship, friendship, social station, or the offer of a bribe).

On the other end of the social spectrum, God’s standards of justice also forbid partiality in favor of the poor. This is implicit in the two passages just noted, but Leviticus 19:15 is explicit; it expressly forbids “partiality to the poor,” as well as “favoritism to the great.”

By our creation in God’s image, each of us understands and feels—deeply and almost always immediately—injustices done to us or to those dear to us. If presented with “just the facts” about some injustice done by John (or Jane) Doe to Jane (or John) Doe, most people can see who was in the wrong and (often) even what could make it right. Yet, each of us has followed our first parents in turning from God, and almost always that includes trying to self-justify even when we know we have acted unjustly toward others. That is why Proverbs 31:8-9, the words of King Lemuel taught to him by his mother (v. 1), were critical guidance for that ancient arbiter of justice, and remain so for us today: “Speak up for . . . the poor and needy.”

Justice, to be justice, must be administered equally to and for every person. In our present-day, believers have both the privilege and the responsibility of promoting and defending justices that foster the comprehensive well-being of all who are created in God’s image.

REFLECT **H**ave some in your own congregation or community experienced injustice? If so, how could you work with them to obtain justice?

JOSEPH COLESON

July
6

SPEAKING WISELY

We must allow God to guide our speech.

THE WORD

PROVERBS 25:11-15

Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a ruling rightly given.
¹²Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is the rebuke of a wise judge to a listening ear.

¹³Like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him; he refreshes the spirit of his master.

¹⁴Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given.

KEY VERSE

¹⁵Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

PROVERBS 26:17-28

¹⁷Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own.

¹⁸Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death

¹⁹is one who deceives their neighbor and says, "I was only joking!"

²⁰Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.

²¹As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife

²²The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.

²³Like a coating of silver dross on earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart.

²⁴Enemies disguise themselves with their lips, but in their hearts they harbor deceit.

²⁵Though their speech is charming, do not believe them, for seven abominations fill their hearts.

²⁶Their malice may be concealed by deception, but their wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

²⁷Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them.

²⁸A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

ENGAGE THE WORD

WISE WORDS HEAL

Proverbs 25:11-15

In verses 11-12, every just legal ruling (v. 11) is like—is more valuable, even than—decorative “apples of gold in settings of silver.” But, even in the world of ancient Israel, good and wise advice was not always easy to hear and accept if it included rebuke and/or correction. Our modern western proclivity for feelings above all else only makes receptive listening (“a listening ear”) more difficult, the advice or correction more likely to be heard as offensive and be rejected, however kindly offered. This is one reason (among others) to weigh any word of correction before speaking. Corrective advice or direction sometimes is needed; it is more likely to be heeded when the listener hears kindness in the speaker’s voice, tone, and attitude, and knows him/her as a person of love and integrity.

“Love and integrity” are highlighted also in verses 13-14 by way of the contrast between two vivid metaphors. A snowstorm when harvesting barley or wheat would be disastrous, but “a snow-cooled drink” for thirsty reapers could be a reasonable understanding (v. 13). Reapers would have welcomed such a treat, and “welcome drink, welcome message” is the point of this metaphor. A messenger accurately reporting good news is an example of refreshing, restorative, and beneficial speech—the kind of word we should deliver whenever possible.

The contrast in verse 14 could hardly be more stark and vivid. Israel’s Mediterranean climate was/is

Did You Know?

“Gossip plays a significant role in formulating people’s long-lasting opinions of those talked about. Attitudes based on gossip, however, are often wrong, leading to unfounded prejudices and hostilities toward people, even by those who were formerly friends. It is difficult for those who have been misjudged to overcome such unfounded prejudice” (*NBBC: Proverbs* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2016], 284).

FOOLISH WORDS HURT

MALICIOUS WORDS DESTROY

characterized by a winter rainy season and a summer dry season. Winter “clouds and wind” that passed over without dropping rain (or snow) nearly always were a cruel disappointment. To have someone thought to be both trustworthy and committed to one’s well-being promise gifts, then not deliver on the promise, was (and is) equally hurtful. Even our “good” words are good only if we follow through with integrity in our actions.

Proverbs 26:17-22

Most of us do not actively resist speaking good to people, or well of people; we may need only to pay more attention, to make our positive speech a habit that encourages and helps more people, more effectively. On the other end of the spectrum, most Christians understand that to speak evil of others, or to speak with deliberate desire to hurt or destroy them, is to speak “un-Christianly.” The “middle ground” here is the greater problem. We can paraphrase verse 17, “If it doesn’t concern you, don’t get into it.” Restraint can be hard, but we know it usually is wise.

Verse 18 is more vividly translated, “Like a madman who shoots firebrands, arrows, and death . . .” Sounds dangerous, doesn’t he? Equally dangerous is the one (v. 19) who deceives a neighbor, then—after the damage is done—seeks immunity from consequences, claiming “I was only joking!”

Verses 20-22: “A gossip . . . a quarrelsome person . . . a gossip.” James 3:1-12 reinforces both the images and the truthfulness contained in these verses. For whom this is a serious problem, it would be a mistake to ignore it. The good news is that God’s Spirit is able and willing to help us overcome even these common destructive behaviors.

Proverbs 26:23-28

Most earnest Christians, even those of us who need to watch our tongues as we just have noted, are not

Think About It

Do you agree that wise and kind words can heal, that careless and foolish words can hurt, and that malicious and evil words can destroy? If you do agree, how could this help you mature in the holiness of your speech toward your family? Toward friends, neighbors, and coworkers? Toward fellow church members? Toward anyone you may encounter?

naturally or normally inclined to speak deliberate evil about others, nor do we intend their harm or destruction through our words. This final section, though, reminds us that even in this we ought not to assume our immunity from all temptation to evil speech and its deadly results.

Christ-followers, though, are more likely to suffer from evil speech and its consequences, than to initiate and spread it; hence, the strong statements urging us to vigilance and discernment. Jesus taught: “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16, NRSVUE). The Bible nowhere teaches us to be naïve; discernment and holiness should go together.

Our verses here have in common their emphasis on one of the central trademarks of evil. Evil on the outside looks completely different than evil on the inside. Evil consistently is malicious, malevolent, and hateful, but also—and just as consistently—it is deceptive and secretive, always attempting to hide or disguise its true nature and its real aims until it thinks it is too late for its intended victims, that they have no possible way of escaping the destruction it intends for them.

In the inherent goodness of God and of God’s creation, we are blessed that often the Evil One and his minions miscalculate and act too quickly. They overestimate their own cunning and strength and underestimate the wisdom and strength of God, God’s creation, and God’s people. Essentially, this is the meaning of verse 27. As we have noted before in this unit, short-term appearances can be deceiving. Evil can appear to be winning, disasters can appear to be final, but in the end, righteousness prevails: “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it.”

REFLECT **H**ow serious am I (are we) about disciplining my (our) speech, toward God and for the benefit of God’s people, and away from malice, evil, and harm to others?

July

13

THE DAY OF THE LORD

*God promises a hopeful future in which
He will rule absolutely.*

THE WORD

ZECHARIAH
14:1-9

A day of the LORD is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls.

²I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. ³Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. ⁴On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. ⁵You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

⁶On that day there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness. ⁷It will be a unique day—a day known only to the Lord—with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light.

⁸On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter.

KEY VERSE

⁹The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

16-21

¹⁶Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁷If any of the

peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain. ¹⁸If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁹This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles.

²⁰On that day holy to the LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. ²¹Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Zechariah 14:1-2

DAY OF RECKONING

Zechariah prophesied about a future for Jerusalem with major suffering, but also amazing deliverance by God. In Zechariah 14:1-2, he speaks of a day of reckoning, a clash of all nations against Jerusalem, with a description that sounds eerily like the world events we have seen within the last few years. This passage, however, is not meant to bring fear, but hope to the faithful because God will miraculously deliver Jerusalem. Zechariah's prophecies take place about 520 BC when the Jews have returned from Babylon after 70 years in exile. They are a warning to the people not to repeat their forefathers' sins.

The events as described by Zechariah currently remain unfulfilled and are echoed in the book of Revelation, especially chapters 21 and 22. He speaks of a world-wide siege against Jerusalem, a battle unlike any the world has ever seen. Nations will gather, planning to plunder and conquer Jerusalem. Yet, Zechariah doesn't leave the people in despair. He offers a glimpse of the promise of God to His faithful ones.

THE LORD WILL PERSONALLY DEFEND HIS PEOPLE

Zechariah 14:3-9

In verses 3-9, Zechariah prophesies that the Lord

Did You Know?

“Day of the Lord” is found throughout the Old and New Testament, indicating the time of judgment and accountability for the evil ones and the time of deliverance for God’s faithful people. In this term we find both warning and hope, a characteristic of prophecy in the Bible.

ULTIMATE VICTORY: ENEMIES BECOME BELIEVERS

himself will personally defend them. He will split the Mount of Olives, allowing for a protected path of escape, there will be an unearthly twilight, and living waters will gush forth, transforming the desert into an oasis of divine presence. This apocalyptic language was Zechariah’s way to express God’s absolute power and His unwavering commitment to His people.

As we face the trials of our own, whether personal or global, Zechariah’s prophecy confirms the truth: God is not far. He is present, even in our own darkness, and He will intervene in ways beyond our comprehension. While others may perceive God as distant and uninterested in us, believers know and have experienced His personal care and love.

Zechariah 14:16-19

The victory, however, isn’t solely defined by this apocalyptic deliverance. In verses 16-21, he declares that survivors from all nations will make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem year after year to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This annual festival celebrated harvest time and the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years. It especially emphasized the provision of water and blessings for the faithful. Amazingly, here Zechariah says that the faithful will come from all nations, not just the Jews! The victory is so complete that those who were enemies of God are now part of the faithful worshippers of God and receive God’s blessings.

The New Testament tells us that on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:37-38). Jesus’ purpose, as God’s in Zechariah 14, was not just to defend His people, but to gather all people into His community of provision and blessing.

Abundant life, symbolized by “rivers of living water,” is also for us. In a very real way, the turning of all na-

Think About It

John Wesley used the phrase “optimism of grace,” which meant that believers live with hope because of the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives and situations. How can we communicate this hope to a world that is racked with fear right now?

HOLINESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

tions to worship the one true God, spoken about here, is our heritage. We are part of the “nations” Zechariah was talking about.

Zechariah 14:20-21

Zechariah’s prophecy, verses 20-21, emphasizes the pervasiveness of God’s holiness in this utopian future where God is worshiped by all nations. Even everyday items, like horse bells and cooking pots, will be inscribed with “Holy to the Lord.” This signifies that everything will be brought under His Lordship, and all aspects of life will be dedicated to His worship. This resonates with the promise of Revelation 21:3-4, where God will dwell with His people, and “every tear will be wiped away.” Even the seemingly insignificant details of our lives can be transformed by His presence.

How do we apply this prophecy to our daily lives? As we live our lives in this world that is full of pain and suffering, we have a choice. We can live in fear, focusing on the destruction we see happening, or we can choose to hope in God’s promised victory. Zechariah’s prophecy urges us to hope in God’s provision by living a life that pleases God. Therefore, let us live with optimism, not pessimism. For even as the world seems ruled by anger and greed, Zechariah’s prophecy echoes: “A day of the LORD is coming!” (14:1).

REFLECT

Holiness in everyday life is part of the promise in Zechariah’s prophecy. How can we make holiness, both purity and love, a part of our everyday lives?

C. JEANNE ORJALA SERRÃO is Professor Emerita of Bible and Intercultural-Studies at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. She is an ordained elder and author of several books, including the commentary on *James* for the *New Beacon Bible Commentary Series*.

July

20

THE SECOND COMING

Believers have hope for today because we know Jesus will return.

THE WORD

ACTS 1:6-11 **T**hen they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

KEY VERSE

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹**“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”**

**1 THESSALONIANS
4:13-18**

¹³Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet

the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

ENGAGE THE WORD

DISCIPLES GAZING UPWARD

Acts 1:6-11

As Jesus ascends, His disciples have one question: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). They were still looking for a messiah that would free them from the occupation of Rome. Even though they had been with Jesus for 1-3 years, they still did not understand that the kingdom of God transcends borders and earthly timelines.

Jesus’ response gently reminds them that ultimate concerns are not temporal: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (Acts 1:7). Instead, He emphasizes His and their eternal purpose: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The disciples’ focus, Jesus says, should not be on “when,” but on being His witnesses through a life dedicated to sharing the gospel with the whole world. According to Acts 1:8, it begins with sharing the gospel with those who are like them, then the Holy Spirit leads and empowers His disciples to move on to people who are not exactly like them, and then to the ends of the world.

There are three important points that we pick up from this passage in Acts. First, when Jesus returns is not as important as how we live our lives now. While we may not want people to scrutinize our lives, that is exactly what Jesus is telling His disciples to do—be witnesses, examples of Holy Spirit empowered followers of Christ. Secondly, we are not expected to fulfill Jesus’ commands in our own strength! We are to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon us. This means that we are to be completely surrendered to Christ and willing

Did You Know?

The end times, according to Jewish tradition, began with the coming of the Messiah. Paul and the early Christians understood that they were already living in the “end times” because Jesus was the Messiah.

“WILL BE CAUGHT UP” AND REUNION

to obey Him. Thirdly, Jesus didn’t just die for His own people, the Jews; His vision was for the whole world.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Paul addressed the concerns of the Thessalonians who grieved for Christian friends who died. The Thessalonians thought that because their friends had died before Jesus’ return, they would miss the second return of Christ. The pagan culture of Thessalonica was consumed by death, the afterlife, and burial rituals, but did not believe in resurrection. This concern carried over into the church, so Paul had to take some time to explain the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in terms that the Thessalonians could understand.

There are many different interpretations of 4:13-16, but one of the best uses the example of a common occurrence, the arrival of an important political figure to the city of Thessalonica. Paul assures them: “We do not want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13, NRSVUE). He then uses a cultural example of the “appearance” or arrival of a very important person to the city: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The announcement of the VIP, which occurred outside the city gates, was accompanied by heralds shouting out who was arriving, perhaps even instruments like a trumpet. Then the most important people in the city would walk out of the city gates first, followed by the rest of the people, to welcome the VIP into the city. Paul indicates that, rather than being forgotten, their friends who have died are the most important people of God’s kingdom on earth: “The dead in Christ will rise first” (4:16). They will have the privilege of going to meet the returning Christ, even before the living do: “Then we who are still alive and

Think About It

While curiosity can be helpful, speculation about things we can't know for certain can be time wasting. Think about how all the time spent discussing how and when Christ would return, that has filled thousands of books and Bible studies, could have been time spent with people who needed the transformation of God's love in their lives.

remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

While the earthly VIP would be coming from another city, the imagery here, of meeting Christ in the air, reflects the understanding of Him coming from heaven. So, the living will also go out to meet the Lord, but the meeting place will be between heaven and earth as Christ's destination is earth for His second coming.

The verb "will be caught up" (*arpazo*) in 4:17, while a common verb, is only used here in relation to Jesus' second coming. A whole theology has been built on the Latin translation of this one phrase. However, we must be careful not to move the focus of the passage on the living who suddenly exit the earth; Paul's stated focus and the focus of the passage is on what happens to the dead Christians for whom the Thessalonians were grieving. Paul explained again to them about the resurrection of the dead, an extremely difficult concept for the Greek mind.

Paul's words offer comfort and certainty: "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18). The grieving Thessalonians were comforted by the fact that their dead loved ones were not forgotten and that there would be a grand reunion upon Christ's return to earth. This should also be our words of comfort to those who have lost loved ones in Christ.

REFLECT Why didn't Jesus share the how and when of His return? What would be the purpose of not sharing this information?

JEANNE SERRÃO

July

27

IS THE END NEAR?

*We must live with eyes wide open
in anticipation of Christ's return.*

THE WORD

**MATTHEW
24:3-8**

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

⁴Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains.

29-37

²⁹“Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

³⁰“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

³²“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it near, right at the door. ³⁴Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³⁶“**But about that**

KEY VERSE

day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

ENGAGE THE WORD

As the disciples are marveling at the beauty of the temple from the Mount of Olives, they are shocked when Jesus predicted its destruction. He urges his disciples to live with “eyes wide open” in anticipation of His return.

THE BEGINNING OF “BIRTH PAINS”

Matthew 24:3-8

Here in Matthew 24, the disciples respond to Jesus’ prophecy by asking: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). Again, in the tradition of the prophets, Jesus does not give a date, but an imagery of signs: wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines, pestilences, and false prophets. These, He warns, are the beginning “birth pains,” used metaphorically for great suffering (Matthew 24:4-8). He goes on in verses 9-28 to describe the personal and human suffering of God’s people.

Much of the destruction and suffering described by Jesus has happened over and over in history. While history echoes these warnings, Jesus cautions against mistaking every difficulty as a sign of the end. He says, “Such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (Matthew 24:6).

So, what is the purpose of this discourse? Jesus doesn’t want His disciples to fear the end times, but He does want His disciples, and us, to live like a faithful watchmen, with eyes scanning the horizon, not paralyzed by fear, but with the hope of Christ’s return and a quiet urgency to spread the gospel.

SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS

Matthew 24:29-31

This urgency finds its most apocalyptic expression in the verses that follow: “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and

Did You Know?

The setting for the “Olivet Discourse” on the end times—which is found in different versions in Mark 13, Matthew 24–25, and Luke 21:5–38—was a recent visit by Jesus and His disciples to the temple in Jerusalem.

the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29–30).

These verses use the Jewish apocalyptic language found in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the intertestamental Jewish literature. Apocalyptic language grew out of, and is closely associated with, prophecy. So its imagery is meant to affect its readers emotionally, striking fear into the hearts of the enemies of God, but hope in the hearts of His people.

They speak of cosmic upheavals marking the culmination of history. Also, in the tradition of the prophets, Jesus offers a word of comfort: “He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Matthew 24:31). For the faithful, the end times are not about fear and destruction, but about reunion and redemption.

HOW DO WE LIVE?

Matthew 24:32–37

So, how do we live without known deadlines? As if Jesus should return tomorrow! Matthew, in chapters 24–25, alludes to events in the Old Testament (Noah) where for the unbelievers the flood came suddenly, but for Noah and his family, they had been preparing for the flood for quite some time and even warning others about it (24:37–39). He also appeals to natural events, like the coming of summer (v.32). We often think of the second coming and the “Day of Judgment” as complete surprises. But Jesus tells us that these things are apparent to those who are awake and listening to the Lord and the signs of the times.

As people of God, we may not necessarily voice what exact trends and events are bringing about the end times, but we can certainly see the cultural shifts of our society and how we need to be the

Think About It

Birth pains is used metaphorically often in the Bible to describe intense pain or persecution. It is a pain that is known by all people, although only experienced by women. But this kind of pain is also anticipated; the woman knows it will come, although she may not know exactly when. It also ends in the birth of a child. So, this metaphor is a good one for the prophecies we find in the Bible.

hands and feet of Christ in our world. Later, Jesus tells the parable where the master came before he was expected (Matthew 24:45-51) and a parable when the bridegroom came later than expected and the five foolish virgins ran out of oil for their lamps before he came (Matthew 25:1-13). We don't know the hour, but we can prepare ourselves, do ministry, continue to nurture our faith, and live lives full of good works (see 2 Peter 3:1-14).

We can see the urgency in sharing the gospel with those whose lives are aching for transformation, knowing that time is precious. We don't simply watch others engage in ministry; we roll up our own sleeves and get involved. We don't live just in the comfort of our own salvation, but for the expansion of God's kingdom, knowing that every person transformed by the love of Christ is a victory against the encroaching darkness.

In conclusion, the Olivet Discourse on the end times is not an invitation to morbid curiosity about the details of the end times, but a call to action. It's a reminder that history marches on, the signs are unfolding, and our response matters. Therefore, let us live with our eyes wide open, hearts full of hope, and hands extended in service. While the exact timing of Christ's return remains a mystery, one thing is certain: He is coming, and when He does, may He find us faithfully doing the ministry He has entrusted to us.

REFLECT There can be various motives for sharing the gospel with those who have not heard or understood the power of transformation through the love of Christ. Why do you think the urgency coming out of the prophecies we have heard in Matthew 24 is a good motive?

JEANNE SERRÃO

BEING READY

August

3

We must live every day in preparation for Christ's return.

THE WORD

**2 PETER
3:1-14**

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ²I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

³Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will

bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

KEY VERSE ¹⁴**So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.**

ENGAGE THE WORD

SCOFFERS AND THE PATIENCE OF GOD

2 Peter 3:1-9

In the final chapter of his second letter, Peter takes up the issue of the second coming of Christ and the apocalyptic expectations of the "Day of the Lord."

Peter addresses the "scoffers"—those who mock the promise of Christ's return. These scoffers seem to be professed believers who have grown tired of waiting for Christ to return. (While it is bad enough that unbelievers persecute them, these friends of Peter are also dealing with former believers who mock their faithfulness to the gospel.) These people arrogantly think they know that nothing will change since it has not since the beginning of creation. Peter sees these scoffers as those the believers had been warned about in the past, and they would appear in the last days. What we need to remember is that both Paul and Peter believed they were living in the last days, since Jewish tradition considered the last days to begin with the coming of the Messiah.

What the scoffers had forgotten was that while life seems to have gone on without apparent intervention by God, God was the one who spoke creation into existence. And, they had forgotten the lesson of Noah and the flood. What God had created and, in His patience, had tolerated for many years, He was also willing and able to destroy. So human beings live at the mercy of an all-powerful, but patient God. These scoffers were mocking a God who was merciful and patient, but also capable of annihilating them and they had no clue.

Did You Know?

Peter's readers were in a very precarious position because they were the first Jews living in Gentile communities and they were Christians living in the minority expat group of Jews. So not only were they persecuted and mocked as Jews, but they were also persecuted by their fellow Jews for accepting Christ as the Messiah. No group of Christians was more scrutinized for their lifestyles and behavior.

DAY OF THE LORD

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE?

Christians today run the risk of this mindset when they try to live their lives in their own strength. We forget that God has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to do the ministries He has for us. We live with this miracle of creation in our own lives, but often forget it until we encounter a crisis.

In answering directly the accusations of the scoffers, Peter reminds us, and his ancient readers, that with God, "a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (v. 8). His patience, far from weakness, is an act of profound mercy, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

2 Peter 3:10

Yet, this patience shouldn't lull us into complacency. The day will come, "like a thief in the night," a sudden and inescapable reckoning. The idea of a thief in the night is also found in Jesus' teachings (Matthew 24; Luke 12) with the sense of something happening unexpectedly but could have been avoided with watchfulness. The suddenness of Jesus' coming would be a surprise for the scoffers since they expect things to continue as they "always have." The verb, "will come (*hexei*)," is placed at the beginning of verse 10 to emphasize the certainty of Christ's return.

Peter uses the apocalyptic language we have come to know through the other passages we have studied. The heavens will melt, elements will vaporize, and the very fabric of creation will be consumed by fire. Considering the image of a "thief in the night," this is not a message of terror for Christians, but a call to keep watch. Since the world itself is impermanent, we should prioritize eternal things. Not only is this world passing away, but everything that was done in this world will be under the judgment of God.

2 Peter 3:11-14

In light of this "day of the Lord," Peter asks, "What

Think About It

The Day of the Lord in the New Testament carried the idea of judgment, as it did throughout the Old Testament, and is a terror for those who are unbelievers. In the New Testament, for believers, the key idea is a “New Heaven and a New Earth” where we will live with God forever (Revelation 21).

kind of people ought you to be?” (v. 11). This last section of 2 Peter is an instruction manual for how the believers were to live in the middle of persecution, both from outsiders and former believers. But Peter’s letter isn’t merely a historical document, it’s a lesson for us. We too face scoffers, distractions, and the tempting pull of earthly priorities. But God calls us to live prepared, not with fear, but with confident hope. Echoing Peter’s instructions, here are some practical ways to embrace this call:

- *Live an exemplary life of prayer and worship:* Cultivate a deep, personal relationship with God. Let your prayers be filled with anticipation for His return and intercession for those who haven’t yet experienced His grace.
- *Embrace a life of holiness:* Align your actions with your beliefs. Be a living witness to God’s love and righteousness in your community.
- *Share the message of hope:* Be an ambassador of Christ’s return. Engage in evangelism not out of fear, but out of the overflowing joy of knowing the promise of His return is certain.

Every day we live is a gift, an opportunity to prepare for that coming reunion with friends who have died and the Christ we are actively walking with today. Let us not be found sleeping when the trumpet sounds, but standing firm, hearts energized with love and hope, ready to welcome Christ, and enter the new creation He has prepared for us.

Remember, the life we live matters to God. He desires holy, blameless lives reflecting peace and connection with Him. As we face an unknown future, let us embrace the urgency of now, living each day in preparation for Christ’s return.

REFLECT | In what way are you living in readiness for Christ’s return?

POLITICS

August

10

Christians should be good citizens of their communities, states, and nations, while remembering that their allegiance is always owed to God first.

THE WORD

MATTHEW
22:17-21

Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

KEY VERSE

²¹**“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.”

ACTS
5:27-29

²⁷The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!

ROMANS
13:1-7

¹Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ²Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴For the one in author-

ity is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

ENGAGE THE WORD

GIVE TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S

Matthew 22:17-21

Matthew 22:15 describes an interaction Jesus had with a group of Pharisees. These sly religious authorities began the conversation with flattery: "We know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" (v. 16). Perhaps they did not actually believe what they just said. Nonetheless, they spoke the truth! Jesus always taught God's way truthfully. Then, the Pharisees quickly set their trap by asking if Jesus and His disciples should pay taxes to Caesar.

Jesus approved of paying a fair share tax to the government. Yet, a quick read of Jesus' response might lead us to think that Jesus only responded to the imperial tax question. However, a more careful analysis of His words reveals a far more powerful, yet subtle, message. While we should pay our government taxes as citizens of this world, we have a far greater responsibility to God. Love God "with all your heart and . . . soul and . . . mind" (22:37). The Roman Caesar claimed to be a god. He was not. Only God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit deserve our worship, praise, and service.

Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees teaches us that God wants us to participate as citizens in this world. We vote, pay taxes, and attend community events. However, our primary allegiance remains to God and His kingdom.

Did You Know?

A Roman silver denarius had the image of Emperor Tiberius or Augustus on it. The inscription named the divine Caesar as a son of god. Jews considered this sacrilegious since no human can be God.

WE MUST OBEY GOD

Acts 5:27-29

The disciples experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and lost no time in hitting the streets with God's good news. Jewish religious leaders acted swiftly to muzzle their mouths in hopes of silencing their message. Religious authorities arrested and jailed the disciples more than once (Acts 4:3; 5:18). Incarceration could not silence Jesus' followers (5:20) and they continued to proclaim the gospel message to everyone who would listen.

Jewish leaders convened the Sanhedrin—"the full assembly of the elders of Israel" (5:21). When they sent officers to the jail to escort the disciples to appear before the Sanhedrin, they found the disciples not in their jail cell but in the temple court preaching about salvation through Jesus Christ, the risen Savior.

The charges brought against the disciples were true. They had defied the orders of Jewish leaders to stop telling people about Jesus. How could they deny it? Everyone in the temple court saw and heard them. Peter identified a clear priority for Jesus' disciples then and now when he proclaimed boldly to the Sanhedrin, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (5:29).

Peter did not imply that believers should always disregard religious or civil directives by those in authority. Rather, he established a hierarchy of responsibility for us. When placed in a bind by conflicting demands, as the disciples were in today's text, believers must always place their primary allegiance and obedience with God. That is the clear priority.

Believers often find themselves in the bind of competing allegiances between cultural norms and the clear message of the Bible and/or the corporate conscience of Christian orthodoxy. Peter reminds us that it is not complicated: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" It's as simple as that.

SUBJECTS OF AUTHORITY

Romans 13:1-7

Paul instructs his readers about Christian love

Think About It

Paul makes practical application of his message by calling readers to:

- Obey governing authorities (vv. 3-5).
- Submit to your conscience (v. 5).
- Pay your taxes along with all other civil responsibilities (vv. 6-7).

through governmental and civic responsibility. He helps explain what Jesus meant about being in the world but not of it. Christians have debated this topic throughout the past 2,000 years of church history. Should believers live as citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) and withdraw from the life of culture and society? Or, should believers seek ways of serving Christ faithfully while shining the light of Jesus through daily living in culture and society and working with God in His mission in the world? Romans 13 offers helpful responses to these questions.

Paul says we must obey governing authorities and the law of the land. God is a God of order. He seeks to maintain civil order through governments, authorities, and laws that promote divine justice and fairness for all citizens. Therefore, Christian believers must obey the law and government authorities as they respond in Christian love.

Paul's call to submission to governing authorities does not mean that God has ordained every form of government and every leader in our world today. Many forms of government and their leaders oppress their citizens and rule in evil and corrupt ways. Paul teaches that God has established the idea of civil authority as a way of maintaining peace with citizens. He describes the way God intends for civil authority to operate in daily life. God desires that government leaders should be "God's servant for your good" (v. 4). God ordains civil government and its leaders to function in ways that looks after and nurtures its citizens.

No civil government is a law unto itself. All governments, all laws, and all civil leaders remain accountable to God and His justice. He is the supreme authority.

REFLECT | In what ways are you viewing politics through a biblical lens?

FRANK MOORE is retired General Editor for the Church of the Nazarene.

NEIGHBORS

August

17

The Bible challenges Christians to be godly neighbors in what they say and do.

THE WORD

LEVITICUS
19:16-18

Do not go about spreading slander among your people.
“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD.

¹⁷“Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

KEY VERSE

¹⁸“**Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.**

PSALM
15:1-5

¹LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?

²The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart;

³whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on others;

⁴who despises a vile person but honors those who fear the LORD; who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind;

⁵who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

EPHESIANS
4:25-27

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold.

ENGAGE THE WORD

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

Leviticus 19:16-18

Leviticus 19 presents a holiness code that God expects His children to follow. It begins with the overarching directive, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (v. 2). That sounds like an impossible command, doesn’t it? God is the Almighty, holy sovereign of all reality; we are mere creatures living in a world filled with sin. Is God being unrealistic in calling us to a holy lifestyle? No! As we surrender our free will to His divine will and direction, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live the life to which He calls us. The verses in today’s text contain direction both for what to do and what to avoid.

Verse 16 instructs us not to slander others. That is, don’t spread gossip about others to your friends, no matter how amazing or thrilling the stories might be. It also means we are not to imply negative actions of others by things we say or details we omit which leaves the door open to assume the worst in people. The first part of the verse refers to the stories we tell about others; the second part of the verse refers to our actions which might put their lives in danger or cause them physical harm.

Verses 17-18 instruct us to avoid allowing hatred toward another person to fester in our hearts. Such hatred will manifest itself in sinful ways as gossip, seeking revenge, and holding grudges. Verse 18 ends with one of the two greatest commands found in both the Old and New Testaments, “love your neighbor as yourself.” Treat others as well as you care for yourself. Or, as Jesus said, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). That is the mindset and lifestyle of a good neighbor.

A BLAMELESS WALK **Psalm 15:1-5**

The psalmist framed this psalm around the actions of a person who would be welcome and feel at home on the holy mountain in Jerusalem where first the

Did You Know?

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul called believers a new creation: “The old has gone, the new is here!” In Ephesians 4, Paul described this transition as putting off old clothes and putting on new ones. In verse 31 he said “get rid of” in the aorist tense, which means once and for all. Believers do not vacillate back and forth between holy and sinful lifestyles. They leave the sinful life behind and serve God as a new creation.

tabernacle stood and where Solomon later built the temple. From that mountain the person could enter the tabernacle or temple and worship God. That person walks blamelessly in life. Blameless does not mean perfect or flawless actions. It means being genuine and honest in the way we live for the Lord and treat others; it simply means doing the right thing in relationship with God and others.

The psalmist does not leave us guessing about what we are to do or not do in our relationships with one another. Someone who lives a blameless and righteous life:

- Tells the truth (v. 2).
- Does not gossip about others (v. 3).
- Does not act wrongly toward others (v. 3).
- Does not ruin the good name of others (v. 3).
- Does not honor or idolize sinful people (v. 4).
- Does not accept bribes (v. 5).
- Honors those who fear and love the Lord (v. 4).
- Keeps their word even when it costs them (v. 4).
- Lends money to the poor without interest (v. 5).

The person who treats others in these ways not only has God’s approval to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), but also cannot be shaken spiritually when the strong winds of life’s circumstances and adversities blow against them. The difficulties of life can break the spirit of an individual or destroy faith. But, the one who lives a blameless and righteous life with others remains firmly planted on the unshakable rock of God (1 Peter 2:4). That summarizes the life of a good neighbor.

SPEAK TRUTHFULLY Ephesians 4:25-27

Paul begins this passage with the important word “Therefore...” That word points us back to verses 22-24 where he says salvation in Christ teaches us “to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires . . . and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Think About It

Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan to teach us about being a good neighbor. Jewish listeners considered the idea an oxymoron since they did not believe Samaritans were good. In the story, two Jewish religious leaders failed to assist the wounded traveler. The Samaritan, on the other hand, assisted him with compassion and love. People in the world will know us by the way we put God's love into action.

Paul gives specific directives about what we are to do and not do, especially as we live in relationship with others—our neighbors.

Believers in Christ have already put off telling lies; now they are to put on telling the truth (v. 25). Paul is reminiscent here of Zechariah the prophet who instructed those in his day to “speak the truth to each other” (8:16). Paul refers here not just to other believers or neighborhood friends, but to everyone with whom we speak. We never want to give non-believers a reason to doubt the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers because we set a bad example with untruthful speech.

Verses 26-27 remind us that anger is a common human emotion. From the elementary school playground to the highway crowded with busy drivers, people sometimes get angry with one another. Christians and non-Christians alike know the potential of angry reactions to the words and deeds of those who frustrate us. However, Paul cautions that believers must not allow anger to lead to sin. We read that Jesus cleared the temple in His *righteous* frustration with what merchants did to the house of worship (Matthew 21:12). However, our frustrations are often more personal than righteous, so we must heed Paul's warning to take immediate control of anger and not allow it to fester and prompt us to respond sinfully toward others. Paul says we must resolve any anger by the end of the day. Why? Because if you don't take quick control of it, we will give the devil an opportunity to prompt us to sinful actions. Speaking truth and surrendering anger to God helps us live as good neighbors.

REFLECT Consider the ways you can be a Christlike neighbor this week.

FAMILY

August

24

*The Bible challenges families to be safe, loving places
for every member of the household.*

THE WORD

**COLOSSIANS
3:12-21**

KEY VERSE

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.** ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

¹⁸Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

²¹Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

ENGAGE THE WORD

CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Colossians 3:12-14

Paul begins by reminding readers of their standing with God. He has chosen them to be the people of God in this current age the same way He chose Abraham and His descendants to be His special people throughout the Old Testament age. As they live in relationship with Him, He declares them to be holy and makes them holy. They live in right standing with God and exemplify holiness of heart and life not by following a prescribed list of rules, but by living in constant communion with Him. Our God is a holy God and He desires holiness from His children (Leviticus 19:2). In a world so devoid of genuine loving connections, Paul reminds believers that they are dearly loved by God.

How do we live like Jesus in our pagan culture? Paul offers specific moral instruction about the way Christians live for Christ in a world filled with alternate religions, worldviews, and lifestyles. God wants believers who are “in Christ” to offer the world examples of Christlikeness by showing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and especially love. Christ lived these virtues in His earthly ministry. He wants His followers to imitate Him. Paul gives particular attention to the last two virtues. He reminds us that we should forgive others of any wrong done to us because Christ has forgiven us of all of our sins. He then ties the entire list of Christian virtues together with his call for love.

The love of Christ in their hearts not only empowers all of the virtues in Paul’s list, but it is also the bond that unites the diversity of believers in the church. Everyone kneels on level ground at the foot of the cross. Paul highlighted this in verse 11 where he said, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.”

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

Colossians 3:15-17

At the last supper with His disciples, Jesus said,

Did You Know?

Paul refers to believers as “God’s chosen people” (Colossians 3:12). Many have misunderstood this to mean that God decides the eternal destiny of some to heaven and others to hell. The Bible does not intend divine election to mean that at all. In both the Old and New Testaments we learn that God’s plan of salvation comes through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. God promises that all who trust in Christ will be saved!

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). Paul encouraged the Colossians with a reminder of Christ’s peace in verse 15. Just as Jesus promised, His peace steadied them through all of the difficulties of living as believers in our sin-soaked world.

God’s peace frees us to worship Him with thanksgiving. We live constantly thankful for all of His spiritual blessings through our relationship with Him and with one another in our community of faith. The message of Christ dwells in believers and constantly expands into a deeper understanding of Him, our salvation, and spiritual development. That message then overflows in the ways we instruct and encourage one another, worship in song, and live lives of gratitude to God. In fact, everything we do and say becomes an act of worship of our loving Lord.

Colossians 3:18-21

God established the home and family as one of the primary structures for human existence in our world. Once sin entered the picture, God’s ideal for the family became distorted. However, Paul reminds us that husbands, wives, and children who accept God’s gift of salvation in Christ can experience God’s transforming power so that they live together in their home environment more like God’s original plan.

We approach this passage of Scripture with the awareness that Paul described family relationships in terms understood by Jews steeped in Hebrew tradition and Gentiles from Greek and Roman traditions. Western culture in the 21st century may think somewhat differently than these ancient cultures. However, the Bible is God’s Word and teaches us divine principles that hold true for every society in every age. Paul explains God’s original plan for humanity in these ways:

- Jesus Christ, God’s Son, humbled himself to the will

Think About It

God cares deeply about the stability and nurturing environment of Christian families for two important reasons. First, God wants all of the relationships between husbands, wives, and children to help one another flourish in loving ways. Second, He wants the love of earthly parents for their children to remind us of how much He loves us and how much He wants us to look to Him as our heavenly Father.

of God the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3; Philippians 2:6-8).

- Husbands should humble themselves to the leadership of Jesus Christ and love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. The pagan world knows nothing about such self-giving love that Christian husbands have for their wives (1 Corinthians 11:3; Philippians 2:6-8; Colossians 3:19; Ephesians 5:25).
- Wives are to submit to their husbands “as is fitting in the Lord.” Wives are to serve Christ by voluntarily cooperating with their husband. Submission does not imply any inferiority or degradation of the one who submits, but as humble cooperation with one (husband) who is motivated by sacrificial love and guided by holy character (Colossians 3:18; Galatians 3:28).
- Children should obey and respect their parents (Colossians 3:20).
- Fathers have a special responsibility in the way they love, direct, and encourage their children to model Christlike virtues. Earthly fathers should live in ways that positively represent God our heavenly Father.

Love and peace is God's design for the family. Children expressing respect for parents. Husbands and wives having mutual respect for one another, both serving the other. Husbands, wives, and children: God gives us a clear picture of His desire for the family as we see the self-giving love of God within families.

"Submit to *one another* out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21, emphasis added).

REFLECT Take time this week to consider what it means to be Christlike in your relationship with your family.

FRANK MOORE

August

31

SHARING OUR FAITH

*We are called to share the good news
of the gospel with others.*

THE WORD

ISAIAH
49:5-6

And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—

⁶he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

MATTHEW
28:18-20

KEY VERSES

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

ACTS
20:20-24

²⁰You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

²²“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

ENGAGE THE WORD

THE HEART OF GOD

Isaiah 49:5-6

God blessed the prophet Isaiah with spiritual insight into the future destiny of the Hebrew people. God also gave the prophet images of the coming Messiah and the Suffering Servant. Most importantly, Isaiah saw glimpses into the heart of God. Today's passage of Scripture offers insight into the ministry of the Suffering Servant and the heart of God.

We now know that the servant Isaiah wrote about who carried out God's mission in the world was Jesus Christ. Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus referred to the mission the Father sent Him to earth to complete. For example, Jesus said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

We see into the heart of God in verse 6. God said it would be "too small a thing" to send His servant to earth to offer salvation only to the Hebrew people. God's bigger vision included His servant offering salvation by being "a light for the Gentiles" so He could "bring my [God's] salvation to the ends of the earth." Jesus fulfilled that mission as He ministered to Gentiles (Matthew 28:21-28; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:1-42).

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus, our risen Lord, met with His disciples one last time before returning to His Father. With the pain and humiliation of the cross behind Him, Jesus celebrated with His disciples and commissioned them to join in God's mission to the world. That mission encompassed proclaiming the good news of new life in Christ to every person on the earth. Beyond that proclamation, Jesus commissioned His disciples to baptize "them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and to teach "them to obey everything I have commanded you" (v. 19).

Think About It

Jesus officially began His public ministry with baptism in the Jordan River. When He came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and the Father declared, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Jesus completed His earthly ministry by commissioning His disciples to make other disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The New Testament does not use the word “trinity,” even though the concept is clearly present. To this day, believers continue to gain new insights into this holy mystery of one God in three.

Teaching new disciples the commands of Jesus served two purposes: to learn what to believe along with how to live as a disciple of Jesus *and* to make disciples themselves. These new disciples would learn that Jesus’ yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). They would learn to understand and follow Jesus’ teachings like those found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Beyond that, they would become disciples who make disciples as they join in the mission of God to reach the ends of the earth with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not commission His disciples then send them on their way to accomplish God’s mission on their own. He loved them too much for that. He promised His continued presence in their hearts and lives: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (v. 20). Jesus’ disciples did not understand how the presence of Jesus could encompass them until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled them (Acts 2).

The “Great Commission” of Jesus is as relevant to our faith today as it was when Jesus first challenged His disciples with it. On the one hand, sharing our faith with others is an act of obedience to the commands of Christ. On the other hand, sharing our faith is a loving response to a loving God who teaches us to love the people around us enough to share His soul-saving message with them.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL

Acts 20:20-24

The book of Acts outlines the way the Holy Spirit led Jesus’ disciples to give their lives to the mission of God. Acts 20 gives one example of a disciple fulfilling God’s mission. In his farewell message to the Ephesian elders, Paul summarized his past ministry. He said he preached and taught both in public settings and privately from house to house. His message was always the same whether he spoke to Jews or Gentiles.

Did You Know?

God gave the prophet Isaiah amazing insight into the coming Messiah. As a result, Isaiah gave us the most complete picture we find of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. More than 35 references tell us about His birth, family, mission, titles, and characteristics.

He called for his listeners to repent of their sins and exercise faith in Jesus Christ.

In verse 22, Paul shifted his thought from reviewing his past ministry to the direction the Holy Spirit was leading him in the future. Paul knew he would face hardship in the days ahead as he followed the Spirit's leading back to Jerusalem. He did not dread it, however. He came to terms early in his ministry with the reality that sharing the gospel almost always brought hardship. Life on earth for Paul did not mean pursuing self-interests or hobbies. It meant completing the call God placed on his life to further the mission of God in sharing the good news of salvation in Christ.

Paul's example has challenged millions of Christians in numerous countries, cultures, and languages around the world across 2,000 years of church history. With Paul, they form the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) who challenge us to continue our participation in the mission of God to the world.

God calls us to carry on the ministry of evangelism through preaching, teaching, praying, and every other means the Lord blesses us with to reach others for Christ. The Holy Spirit has been faithful to reach you with the good news through His faithful disciples who shared with you; the Spirit invites you to join in sharing that news with others.

REFLECT | In what ways can you share the good news of the gospel with others?

FRANK MOORE

What Is this World Coming to?

Actually, it is looking good, from what we hear Paul saying in Romans 8. He says that the whole creation is waiting eagerly for the time when it will experience God's redemption (v. 19). He goes on to express the astounding hope that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (v. 21).

Creation Will Not Be Left Behind

It is clear from Scripture and our observation of the world that all is not well with creation. As Paul puts it, the whole creation is under bondage to decay and "has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22). Throughout human history, there have been many natural catastrophes, ravages of war and disease, environmental disasters due to human exploitation, and unspeakable suffering due to oppressive social institutions and ruthless dictatorships. The effects of a fallen humanity are visible everywhere. Creation has been "groaning."

Nevertheless, the world that God created has a bright future. It will not be destroyed. It will not be annihilated. It will not go up in smoke. In spite of the bleak picture of the present, God intends to redeem not only human beings, but all of creation. In fact, John Wesley goes so far as to argue in a sermon on Romans 8:19-22 that the redeemed creation will even surpass the original creation:

The whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigour, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they ever enjoyed . . . What, if it should then please the all-wise, the all-gracious Creator to raise them higher in the scale of beings? What, if it should please him, when he makes us "equal to angels," to make them what we are now,—creatures capable of God; capable of knowing and loving and enjoying the Author of their being?*

What Paul says in Romans 8, then, has immense theological implications. It means that the world will not be "left behind."

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Not only Paul, but all of Scripture expresses the hope that someday God will redeem all of creation. Even the flood narrative in Genesis affirms that God will remain committed to creation, in spite of God's catastrophic judgment on sinful humanity. God declares, "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans . . . As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gen. 8:21-22). "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth . . . Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth" (9:13, 16).

Other Old Testament texts likewise envision a day when God will bring about a renewal of the whole creation. The book of Isaiah is particularly replete with such a hope. Isaiah's grand vision is that God will not only bring exiled Israelites back to their homeland, but also that other nations will gather in Jerusalem and fully participate in the worship of the one true God. "And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, . . . these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer" (Isa. 56:6-7). "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth" (65:17). "The wolf and the lamb will feed together" (v. 25; cf. 11:6-9). "And I . . . am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory" (66:18).

This Old Testament tradition of a renewed heaven and earth is picked up in various places in the New Testament. A saying of Jesus in Matthew 19:28 makes reference to "the renewal of all things." On the other hand, several texts in the New Testament state that heaven and earth will pass away (Mark 13:31 and parallels in Matt. 5:18 and Luke 16:17; Heb. 1:10-12). Second Peter 3:7-12 seems to expect a cosmic fireball that will destroy everything, when "the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (v. 10). However, even in this passage, there is the expectation that the fiery destruction is only a prelude to a renewed creation. Thus, verse 13 states, "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

Perhaps the clearest example in the New Testament of a renewed

and redeemed creation outside of Romans 8 is in Revelation 21. In this final vision of the book, John sees “a new heaven and a new earth” (v. 1). The city of God, the New Jerusalem, has come down from heaven. The dwelling of God is with human beings on this redeemed earth (vv. 2-3). God says, “I am making everything new!” (v. 5). Nations and kings will continue to exist in this redeemed world, except that now they will conduct their affairs in accordance with God’s ways (vv. 24-27).

Even though Paul’s cryptic statement in Romans 8:21 does not spell out the details of this cosmic redemption, elsewhere in his writings he gives us some hints. Paul’s most significant statement on this future hope is in 1 Corinthians (15:22, 24-26, 28, 53-54), where he counteracts the Corinthian Christians’ doubts about a future resurrection for believers.

He envisions that the redemption of creation will involve the subjugation of all enemy powers to God, “so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). This will mean that the perishable and the mortal will give way to the imperishable and the immortal. Death will no longer threaten redeemed creation.

Christ Victorious

The most important aspect of this cosmic redemption is the role of Christ. It is through Christ that this final victory over enemy powers will be accomplished. Paul celebrates this supremacy of Christ in several poetic texts in his letters, most notably in Philippians 2:10-11, Colossians 1:19-20, and Ephesians 1:9-10.

Christ will in the end become the head of all creation. The process has already begun in Christ’s resurrection, and it will someday reach its climax, so that finally, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

*John Wesley, Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” from *The Sermons of John Wesley*, 1872 ed., Thos. Jackson, ed. (as posted at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/sermons/060.htm>, The Wesley Center Online, Wesley Center for Applied Theology, sponsored by Northwest Nazarene University, July 11, 2007.

JIRAIR TASHJIAN retired professor of New Testament, Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, OK

Get Wisdom!

Wisdom in Proverbs is truth for living. When the writer of Proverbs says, “Get wisdom” (4:5), it is an encouragement to come to grips with the realities of life. Wisdom is not just something that you know, it is something that you do. The wise person is the one who knows what is right and does what is right.

Wisdom Is Personified

In the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, you will not find the clever sayings that characterize most of the rest of the book. Instead, the writer speaks of wisdom as a person.

*Wisdom calls aloud in the street,
she raises her voice in the public squares;
at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
in the gateways of the city she makes her speech.*

(Proverbs 1:20-21)

Jesus did the same thing in the New Testament. Jesus said, “Wisdom is proved right by her actions” (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:35). Here Jesus confirms again that wisdom is not just what you know, but also what you do.

Paul takes this personification even farther when he refers to Jesus as “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). It is when you are in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by His indwelling Spirit that life makes sense. Ultimately, the wisdom of God can only be experienced in the person of Jesus Christ.

During your study of Proverbs, you are encouraged to begin each day with the words of Psalm 139:23-24 as the prayer of your heart:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

—Psalm 139:23-24

You have the assurance that God will faithfully reveal to you how to line up your life with His Word.

Key Verse Memory

Committing God's Word to memory is an important goal for Christians of every age. To assist you in this worthy objective, we have suggested three key verses for memorization. Select one verse to memorize each month or memorize one verse of your choosing for the quarter.

Key verses for Summer 2025:

Proverbs 2:6

2 Peter 3:14

Matthew 28:19-20

COMING NEXT QUARTER

FALL 2025

Unit 1: Living into God's Promises

God delivered the people out of Egypt, leading them toward the promised land. During this unit, we will not only examine how God prepared His people to enter the promised land, we will also discover the ways God leads people today to claim His promises for their lives.



THE FOUNDRY
PUBLISHING



AS-JJA25