

WINNING WISDOM



Achieving Success
God's Way.
A Study on Proverbs.

Week 1-12

WRITTEN FOR COACHES

**COACHES
OUTREACH**

Foreword: Challenge to all coaches

Do you find yourself becoming excited over the opportunity to hear a talk from a winning coach on his “secrets to success?” Do you go with the hope of absorbing some of their coaching wisdom? Where do you figure their “winning wisdom” comes from? Would you be surprised if I told you that ALL winning wisdom which ALWAYS applies, comes from the Bible book you are about to study.

However, like any book in the Bible, you only get out of it what you put in. Sound familiar? If you want to be a coach that thousands will talk about long after you’re gone, THIS is the Bible book you should commit to. We rarely experience things that live up to their guarantee. Proverbs does. Studying Proverbs guarantees you the smarts to live effectively in a fallen world. It guarantees you the edge that helps you control your emotions and environment. It guarantees you the common sense to not be often fooled by anyone.

So coach, I hope that you won’t be waiting until the night before your study to get your lesson done. That is just ordinary, uncommitted effort. With extra effort to set aside at least 20 minutes a day, four days a week to think through these daily lessons, the three guarantees await you. When you commit to taking time to think through the lessons, you will be drawn to keep reading Proverbs for the rest of your life.



Tommy Maxwell
Executive Director, Coaches Outreach

Cover Photo Story: *Eric Liddell, the British runner and Christian whose story was told in the movie, “Chariots of Fire,” (a clip of which was shown during the opening ceremonies of the 2012 Olympics) declined to enter his 100 metre race in the 1924 Olympics in Paris because the heats were being run on Sunday, and his religious beliefs meant he would never run on Sunday. Instead he ran a race for which he had never trained. First he ran the 200, winning a bronze. Then, to everyone’s amazement he entered the 400 metre race and “ran them off their feet”, winning the gold in 47.6, and setting a world record.*

After his triumph, Eric Liddell returned to China, where he was born, to serve as a missionary and teacher. He lived in China with his wife and daughters until the Japanese invasion, where the true mettle of the man once again became visible. He sent his family to safety, but refused to abandon the Chinese people.

Liddell was interned in a Japanese camp, where he became the leader of the desperate men, women and children incarcerated there. When a prisoner exchange was made, he again refused to leave, sending a pregnant woman in his place. He passed away while still in the prison camp, 5 months before liberation.

It is impossible to predict the influence of a man or woman. Liddell’s inspiring example of courage and love continues to grow. It is estimated that there are between 50 million and 100 million Chinese Christians in China who have heard his story by word of mouth. Eric Liddell was a shining example of using “Winning Wisdom” to “Achieve Success God’s Way.”

Winning Wisdom

Achieving Success God's Way

A Study of Proverbs

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Coaches Outreach wishes to thank the coaches and spouses who contributed their true stories for publication. We also thank God for all the coaches and their spouses who minister daily in the name of Jesus Christ. Without you, Coaches Outreach wouldn't exist.

About Coaches Outreach



Coaches Outreach is a nondenominational para-church ministry that exists to encourage and equip coaches and their spouses in biblical truth.

WHY COACHES?

We believe coaches are the most dynamic youth ministers in America today. They are called by God and strategically placed in schools to minister to kids that many can't. An average coach will impact over 22,000 kids during a 25-year career. They do it in the classroom, the halls, and on the field. The future of America's youth is in the hands of these coaches; so they deserve and need our help.



OUR MISSION:

When this ministry began, coaches asked for help in two ways, "Help us stay strong in our marriages, and help us study the Bible." Since then, God has used Coaches Outreach to do just that. We strengthen coaches of conviction in two ways:



1) We encourage them through excellent Summer Marriage Conferences designed just for coaching couples. These weekend conferences feature excellent Bible teachers, inspiring musicians, and fun activities. We know how hard the coaching life can be; so we spoil you for a weekend. The cost of these conferences is subsidized by donors to make them affordable. Check our website to find a conference near you. Registration begins early each spring and conferences fill up fast.

2) We equip them through relevant, "hands on" Bible studies written just for coaches. The Bible study playbooks are FREE to any coaches participating in a CO study at their school, and are also free to coaches' spouses who request it. Call us today to start a Bible study. We'll help find a lay leader in your community and train him how to facilitate the study using our playbooks. We can start up a study at any school in America. It only takes one coach who wants one to start.

OUR HISTORY:

Founded by Tommy Maxwell, Coaches Outreach grew out of Bible study that started at the Texas High School Coaches Association in 1987. This study still meets to this day. The first Summer Marriage Conference was held in 1990 with 18 couples. Coaches Outreach continued to grow as a volunteer organization until 1996, when coaches decided it should become a fulltime ministry. They asked Tommy Maxwell to be its Executive Director in 1997.



Since then, Coaches Outreach has grown exponentially. Summer Marriage Conferences now occur in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Alabama, with hundreds of couples in attendance each year. Currently, thousands of coaches and hundreds of schools participate in Coaches Outreach Bible studies, with more added every spring and fall.

OUR FOUNDER:

Tommy Maxwell, Coaches Outreach Executive Director



A native Texan, Tommy earned a football scholarship at Texas A&M University, where he played both sides of the ball for Coach Gene Stallings and was part of the 1968 team that beat Bear Bryant's powerful Alabama squad in the Cotton Bowl. Tommy received All-Southwest Conference honors as a wide receiver and All-American honors as a defensive back and was inducted into the Texas A&M Athletic Hall of Fame.

It was while a student athlete at A&M that Tommy came to trust Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. Tommy graduated from A&M with his Bachelor's degree and was drafted in the second round by the Baltimore Colts. He enjoyed six years in the NFL, helping the Colts defeat the Dallas Cowboys in Super Bowl V, then playing for the Oakland Raiders and Houston Oilers. Tommy was coached by such legendary greats as Don Shula, John Madden, and Bum Phillips. Such a rich playing career left a lasting impression on Tommy.

After retiring from the NFL, Tommy enrolled at Dallas Theological Seminary where he earned his Master of Theology degree (Th.M.) in Old Testament studies. After serving as a senior pastor, Tommy served as the Senior Development Officer for DTS. In 1987, a group of coaches at the Texas High School Coaches Association asked Tommy to lead them in a Bible study. Years later, that small Bible study developed into a new ministry called Coaches Outreach. Helping coaches study the Bible for themselves is at the core of the Coaches Outreach mission. It's why the ministry has earned such a great reputation for encouraging men and women across the country be coaches of conviction. "It's the power of the Scriptures that showed me I needed a relationship with God, and still convicts me daily to never stop learning about the Lord and serving Him," says Maxwell. "That's why Bible study is so important. It's not just to learn facts, but to get to know the sovereign God of the universe."

Tommy and his wife Janice, live in Granbury, Texas. They have two grown daughters (Lezley and Lauren) and five grandchildren.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

If you are a coach:

First, consider starting a Bible study at your school using our *free playbooks*. They will help you grow closer to God and help your staff grow closer as well. Second, consider letting us spoil you and your spouse for a weekend during the summer. Check our website to see if a conference is near you. Third, we have free gospel tracts (see next page) designed in various sports themes. Contact us today to get some for your players. Lastly, if you know of other Christian coaches who don't have studies yet, spread the word.

If you are a retired coach:

We have a way for retired coaches to continue to make an impact. For retired coaches who have a heart to help in the Lord's work, we provide a ministry that's part time, flexible, and on an approved hourly pay basis. It's simple, fun, and meaningful. We've seen the Lord use retired coaches to impact their communities, cities, and states for Christ. If this interests you, please prayerfully consider contacting us today.

If you are a layman:

First, pray for your local coaches and support them in your community. Their calling is demanding and they need encouragement. Second, consider leading a Bible study. The books teach themselves; so we're not looking for Bible scholars—just someone to facilitate discussion. Studies meet for 12 weeks during fall and spring semesters. They're easy, fun, and incredibly rewarding. Third, please support us prayerfully, and consider doing so financially, as the Lord leads. You can help us help coaches.

The Gospel

Tracts don't save people; God does. The power of the gospel isn't based on the messenger; it's in the Spirit's work through the message. It's the Lord who opens people's eyes to see Him as the perfect standard of right and wrong. That revelation is what convicts people of sin and reveals their need for a Savior.

Below is an explanation of the gospel (good news) of salvation in Christ. It uses illustrations from football, and we have others related to other sports (and are writing more all the time). Contact us today to get some. They're free. Then be bold and give them out. God may use you as His messenger of grace to someone in need of Jesus Christ.

OFFICIAL RULES *for the Game of Life*



God created you and wrote the rules of the game of life. He is its only referee. He keeps our stats and He will hold us accountable for every play on earth. He is the standard for truth and perfection.

God is holy and perfect. We are not. Scoring a touchdown or forcing a turnover every quarter is great football, but God's standard would be the offense scoring a touchdown every snap and the defense forcing a turnover on every play. No matter how "good" we are, we can never measure up to God's standards because our life is full of dropped passes and missed tackles.

Fortunately, life is a team sport—God sent the only perfect player ever, Jesus Christ, to help us. He came to earth to save us from our own sinful selfishness. Jesus played the perfect game, but God lets us take credit for Jesus' stats so we can be with God forever. Jesus lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death on the cross to take away our mistakes. Jesus beat our opponents (Satan, sin, & death) so that we can share in His victory. He won the game on your behalf so you can be on God's team forever and live like a champion now.

First, you must acknowledge your errors and thank Christ for His efforts. Second, you must let Him be the coach of your life—you've been chosen to be on God's team! Third, stop worrying and start trusting God—you can't do one thing to make God love you more or less than He already does. God will never kick you off His team. Fourth, start studying Christ's playbook (the Bible), so you can play your best for Him.

On God's team, everyone is a winner. God gives each player His Holy Spirit, special gifts and talents to accomplish great things for Christ. Even when we mess up, He continually forgives us and chooses to see us as having "perfect stats" (without sin). God is the perfect coach with the perfect game plan. Follow it! Pray to God for forgiveness and share what Christ has done for you. If you accept Christ as your personal Savior, welcome to God's team!

It's time to
S.C.O.R.E.



This tract is one of many sports tracts designed by Coaches Outreach to communicate the gospel. They are great to give to players or even colleagues. These tracts are FREE to coaches, based on availability. Contact us today to get some!

GET OFF THE BENCH AND S.C.O.R.E.

Submit to God. He is the one true God who "created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). He deserves our respect and commands our service, and every person has to answer to Him for what they've done with their lives.

Come clean. *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ... and the cost of sin is death"* (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). Before you can join God's team, you must recognize your own failures and ask for forgiveness. Jesus said, *"Unless you repent you will all perish"* (Luke 13:5).

Open your heart to Jesus. Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). Salvation is God's free gift and it's through faith that we accept it. *"By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works"* (Eph. 2:8-9). Faith is believing and trusting in Christ alone to save you. Nothing but His sacrifice on the cross makes the forgiveness of sin possible.

Receive Christ as your Savior and Lord. *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Rom. 10:9-10). Put Him in charge of your life. *"Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to become my follower he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me'"* (Matt. 16:24). Our purpose in life is to serve the Lord.

Enjoy your new life in Christ! Jesus said, *"I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly"* (John 10:10). His game plan for us is simple, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind ... and love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matt. 22:37-39). A great way to love other people is to tell them about Him (Matt. 28:19-20).

Take time now to talk (pray) to God. He knows your heart. He cares more about your attitude than your words. If you need some help, try this simple prayer.

"Dear God, You are the one true God. I am a sinner and do not deserve to be in heaven with you. Thank you for sending your Son Jesus to die for my sins and give me eternal life. Take charge of my life and help me serve you daily."

If you've prayed this prayer or something similar, welcome into the family of God! Life as a Christian is not a sprint; it's a marathon. Thankfully, God gave us the perfect playbook to guide us in every situation—the Bible. Begin to read it. God's people are supposed to worship together. Find a church near you and get involved. Christ also commands us to be baptized. These are some of the first things you should do to let everyone know you're on the winning team.

How to Use the Playbook

Imagine a renowned coach of your sport saying to you, “For 12 weeks I’ll meet with you and give you my wisdom and insight.” Do you think you would grow as a coach? No question. That’s what the Bible is like—God Himself wants to tutor you. This playbook is a self-study of biblical truth, tailored to coaches and the issues faced in coaching life. But the book does no good sitting on a shelf. Benefits don’t come without effort.

This playbook is like a weight room. The effort you put into it determines the results you get out of it. If you use it to get to know God through Scripture, it will help you grow in the faith, refine your character, and improve your Christian leadership. It will help you grow as a Christian and a coach. It will also produce some great meetings and fun conversation with your fellow coaches. Take the opportunity to become a Christian coach of excellence!

- **DO THE LESSONS BEFOREHAND**

It’s a shame when player squanders great talent. The same is true when Christians never make time for God in His Word. This playbook makes studying the Bible easy through four short devotionals—each only takes about 10 minutes. You expect players to show up ready to play. Likewise, your study leader expects you to show up already having studied your playbook. Writing down your answers will help you think more about what God is revealing in His Word. It will also help you better remember that truth.

- **ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THOUGHTFULLY**

This playbook makes Bible study easy by using the simple, three-step Inductive Bible Study Method: (1) observation (what does the text say?); (2) interpretation (what does it mean?); and (3) application (how do I apply this in my life?). This study questions are designed to help you these three steps. Soon you’ll do them with ease.

- **USE THE STUDY NOTES**

At the end of each lesson are four pages of study notes to help you understand text. The study notes are a summary of research from commentaries and the original languages that provide interesting word studies, historical background, and theological insights. Though deep in scholarship, they are easy to read because they are full of illustrations from sports and coaching. If you read these notes you may learn more than even some pastors do about the book! Underline and highlight things from the notes that impacted you and share them with the group.

- **SHOW UP READY TO SHARE**

Each person is important to a group Bible study, so bring your thoughtful and honest answers to the table. These studies are not designed like a Sunday school class where one person talks and everyone else listens. They’re made to be group discussions. God has given every coach in the room different gifts, insights, and life experience to share with others. Don’t keep what God’s shown you a secret; share it.

- **ATTEMPT THE APPLICATIONS DAILY**

The application questions might be the most dynamic part of the whole study. They are specifically designed for the coaching life, so try them! You may find God orchestrating your life’s events to reveal Himself to you as never before. Give them and Him a legitimate shot to change you. Use the black box at the end of each lesson for you to write in a personal goal and keep track of what God is showing you during your months of study.

- **PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER**

The demands of the job lead most coaches to neglect prayer—their easiest way of getting help! It is vital to share honest prayer requests during this journey together. Prayer will knit you together in Christ and help you develop relationship and accountability. As Jesus modeled, prayer is an essential part of the Christian life.

ZERO WEEK: Warm Up (Review this as a group the week playbooks are handed out)

Introduction



It's 1857 and you're with the First Cavalry Regiment out on the Kansas prairie. You hear a rumble in the distance; it gets louder and louder. Whatever is making the sound is getting closer and it's obviously a force to be reckoned with. Then it appears—a brown strip stretching from one end of the horizon to the other. One of the huge Kansas buffalo herds, which could stretch for up to thirty miles, is charging right at you. What would you do? Major John Sedgwick, who was from Connecticut, didn't have a clue. They hadn't covered this in his classes at West Point. There weren't any trees to climb or boulders to hide behind. You couldn't outrun the buffalo, even on horseback, because the buffalo would outlast

the horses. You couldn't dodge them because the herd was too wide. You couldn't just start shooting into the herd because you'd run out of ammunition before you could kill them all. A stampeding buffalo herd can be pretty overwhelming and terrifying. When you face one, you'd better hope someone knows what he's doing. Fortunately for Sedgwick and his regiment, Captain Sam Sturgis was there. When Sedgwick asked him, "What will we do?" Sturgis replied: "Time is too precious for explanations now, Major. You'd better turn command over to me for a little while and I'll steer you through it."¹ Using a simple, but brilliant tactic, Sturgis rescued the regiment. Since coaches like to devise strategies, I'll let you think about it and see if you can figure out what he did. I'll tell you how he saved the regiment later (see week two, day four).

Life has its charging buffalo herds; it is filled with challenges and dangers. In sports usually speed and strength are not sufficient to win; you need know-how. The same is true in life. When we face its challenges and dangers, we are not equipped to meet them on our own. We need help in the form of know-how and empowerment. God provides the know-how through His word and the empowerment through His Spirit, who indwells all who have trusted in Christ as their personal Savior. For know-how, the Book of Proverbs is especially valuable, for its stated purpose is to give us wisdom that is essential to living skillfully and in a way that pleases God.

Why Should a Coach Study Proverbs?

If someone were to ask me: What book of the Bible is most directly relevant to coaches? I'd say, Proverbs. Coaching is filled with challenges, including:

- the challenge of competing against other highly motivated and competent coaches and athletes when there are only so many wins to go around,
- the challenge of teaching athletes the fundamentals of a sport and motivating them to push beyond their perceived limits to be their very best,
- the challenge of molding a group of individuals of various temperaments, skill levels, and backgrounds into a team that thinks and acts as a unit,
- the challenge of dealing with parents and critics in way that is professional, and
- the challenge of fulfilling your family responsibilities when you have a job that demands so much of your time and energy.

Facing these challenges requires wisdom—skill in living effectively and in a way that is pleasing to God. Proverbs is a manual on that—a manual given by God Himself. It takes the form of a father's advice to his sons. As we read Proverbs, we should read it at two levels. First, we should read the proverbs as if we are the "sons," receiving advice from God through Solomon. That advice, when embraced and applied, can make us wise—skilled at life and pleasing to God. We should ask: How does that proverb apply to me? How do I implement that wise advice in my life? After all, if we don't have our act together on the basic, rubber-meets-the-road issues addressed in Proverbs, how in the world will we be able to advise and help others?

Second, we should read the proverbs as if we were the "father," given the responsibility of teaching our children. Those of you who have children are trying your best to raise them properly; the proverbs can give you wisdom for that challenge and provide you with a training manual for parenthood. As a coach you have "sons" (and daughters!)—athletes who admire you and want to learn from you how to become a better player. As a Christian coach, you know that coaching is not just about developing athletic ability and winning games.

ZERO WEEK: Warm Up

You want to help mold the character of your athletes and see them grow into productive, successful citizens who have godly values. Most of the Christian coaches I have met would agree with Tony Dungy, when he says: “Success is measured in changed lives, strong character, and eternal values rather than in material gain, temporal achievement, or status.”² Most of you would buy into what Joe Ehrmann calls “InSideOut Coaching,” or the “transformational” model, pioneered so successfully by John Wooden and implemented so well recently by Tony Dungy. According to Ehrmann, transformational coaches “use their power and platform to nurture and transform players.” They “believe young people grow and flourish in sports in a way that is more liberating and instructive than can be achieved through almost any other activity.” Ehrmann makes this bold claim: “Outside of parenting there might not be a better platform than coaching to transform boys and girls into healthy and thriving men and women. A coach’s responsibilities include helping young people to confront and comprehend the toxic culture that is trying to seduce and shape them. Coaches have the power to teach and to affirm and to convey empathy and compassion. And, I believe, there may not be a more influential group of leaders in the world than transformational coaches.”³ For coaches who have this vision, Proverbs is a manual that shows them what kind of person they must be and gives them the values they need to model and teach to young, impressionable athletes. So, as coaches read Proverbs, they should be applying the truths to their own lives, but also asking themselves: How do I teach this wisdom to my players and help them apply it to their lives?

What’s Our Game Plan?

There is no way we can cover everything in Proverbs in a twelve-week study. So obviously we have to be selective. We will begin at the beginning and in the first two weeks cover the father’s advice to his sons in Proverbs 1:1—2:15. Here he sells his sons on the importance of godly wisdom, arguing that it is essential for success in life and that our response to wisdom determines our destiny. Having laid this foundation, we will then discuss topics that are particularly relevant for coaches. For these topical studies we will bring together various proverbs from throughout the book that best address the topic in view in any given week. The first three topical studies (weeks 3-5) will focus on attitudes, as we address the issues of anger, pride, and speech. We will see that (1) controlling your temper is a mark of godly wisdom, (2) God opposes pride and rewards humility, and (3) the wise control their tongue and use it to encourage others. From there we will move on to the important topics of work (weeks 6-7) and money (week 8). All of us struggle with keeping work and other important, God-given responsibilities in balance. Proverbs reminds us of the value of work and warns us to avoid the unhealthy extremes of being lazy and being a workaholic. Proverbs also teaches us how to have a proper view of material wealth, one that is balanced and reflects a long range, eternal focus. Human relationships are a part of life; developing healthy relationships is a challenge. In weeks 9-11 we will look at what Proverbs says about marriage, as well as other important relationships. We will see that (1) genuine sexual fulfillment is found only within marriage, (2) sober thinking is necessary when facing sexual temptation, and (3) the wise know how to relate properly to everyone, including friends, neighbors, enemies, and an especially dangerous group of people whom Proverbs calls “fools.” The wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) teaches us that we can learn important life lessons from observing the world around us, including the animal kingdom. In our final study (week 12) we will take a closer look at four of God’s creatures, which, despite their small size, display wisdom (Prov. 30:24-28) and teach us four keys to success and security. These are principles that coaches know, but I think you will enjoy reviewing them from a fresh perspective.

What Do You Need to Know to Read Proverbs Intelligently?

The Book of Proverbs was written a long time ago in a culture quite different from our own. It is inspired Scripture containing timeless principles, but it also reflects its original setting. To appreciate Proverbs fully, it is helpful to know some things about its background.

Who wrote Proverbs? According to the book’s heading, Solomon is the primary author of Proverbs: *The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel* (Prov. 1:1). Solomon ruled over Israel from 970-930 B. C. Solomon’s great wisdom was famous throughout the Near Eastern world (1 Kgs. 4:29-34). He composed 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs, and even produced manuals on botany and biology. God preserved some of that wisdom, the portion he wanted in the Bible, in the Book of Proverbs. The final two chapters of Proverbs are an appendix containing the wise sayings of two other individuals, Agur son of Jakeh (30:1) and King Lemuel (31:1).

ZERO WEEK: Warm Up (Review this as a group the week playbooks are handed out)

What is a proverb? In its most basic form a proverb is a short, insightful saying that is loaded with meaning and invites reflection and application. The Book of Proverbs gets its name from the fact that it is filled with these sayings. Some of these are purely descriptive, like 16:18: *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* The application is implied in such sayings, though not always obvious. For example, Proverbs 20:14 says: *"It's worthless! It's worthless!" says the buyer, but when he goes on his way, he boasts.* The application depends on whether you are a buyer or a seller, but in any case the observation gives important insight into how things operate down at the market. Maybe the point is: Don't be naïve! Other proverbs make the application for us, like Proverbs 20:13: *Don't love sleep, lest you become impoverished; open your eyes so that you might be satisfied with food.* The point is made for us: don't sleep and open your eyes. In other words, get with it and don't be lazy!

How is the Book of Proverbs arranged? The first part of the book (chapters 1-9) contains fairly lengthy speeches by the father to his sons. In a variety of ways, all of these speeches promote the importance of living by the principles of godly wisdom, which is compared to a woman. The speeches lay the foundation for the collection of shorter proverbs (chapters 10-29). In this section proverbs dealing with a common theme will occasionally appear together. But for the most part, the collection has a random feel to it, moving quickly from one topic to another and making verse-by-verse reading challenging. For this reason, teachers of Proverbs usually prefer to study this section of the book topically, bringing together the proverbs on a particular theme and then examining the various facets of a subject. Chapter 30 contains several lists. For example, 30:24 begins: *There are four things on earth that are small, but they are exceedingly wise.* The list then follows (vv. 25-28). The final chapter includes a brief lesson that King Lemuel's mother taught him (31:1-9), followed by a poem describing the virtues of "a wife of noble character" (31:10-31), who is the embodiment of Wisdom. She applies the principles of wisdom in a practical way as she goes about her daily tasks and cares for her family.

Are proverbs always true? This question has generated some debate among readers of Proverbs. Proverbs stating moral principles are always true, such as 23:17-18: *Do not let your heart envy sinners, but rather be zealous in fearing the LORD all the time. For surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.* Statements about God's unchanging character are certainly always true. For example, God always hates economic dishonesty (20:10). But some of the proverbs describing the realities of the world around us reflect what is typical without implying that there are never exceptions. For example, Proverbs 20:13 (quoted above) appears to guarantee that work will always pay off, while laziness will lead to poverty. However, what if locusts or an invading army swept through the land? In that case, even the hard worker was without food. The proverb assumes the norm and, based on this norm, gives a wise, general principle to follow.

How should we view the characters mentioned in Proverbs? When we read through Proverbs, we encounter various characters. They don't have proper names; instead they have titles or labels. The two most prominent characters are the wise person and the foolish person. The wise are not just intelligent or shrewd; they are morally and ethically intelligent. They fear God, are teachable, relate properly to others, and want to please God. The foolish are not just stupid; they are morally and ethically deficient. They do not fear God, reject wisdom, don't get along well with others, and want to please only themselves. Sometimes the fool is called by other names, such as scorner, scoffer, hothead, or sluggard. In short, the wise are the righteous; the fools are the wicked. Halfway between the wise and foolish is the naive person, who is usually young. The naive are not just inexperienced; they have a bent toward being foolish and will end up a fool, if they don't learn from the wise and don't embrace wisdom. During my life, I've known some truly wise people, even more died-in-the-wool foolish people, and a lot of naive people. But it may be simplistic to try to pigeon-hole ourselves or others. The fact is that most of us are a mixture. Some days I act and talk like the wise person, but other days I look and sound more like the fool or resemble the naive person. I might be 80% wise one day and 20% foolish, but then 40% wise another day and 60% naive or foolish. I might even change from hour to hour, depending on my circumstances, mood, etc. I might be wise in certain areas, foolish in others. With its model of the wise person, Proverbs shows us what we should be like and gives us a goal to shoot for. With its model of the fool it shows us what we need to avoid or change. Maybe in a way we're all naive. In any case, we desperately need God's wisdom to achieve success and win at life.

How Do We Apply Proverbs as Christians?

Christians living in the present (Church) age should read the Old Testament in the context of the whole Bible

ZERO WEEK: Warm Up

and apply its principles in light of the New Testament's teaching. When reading Proverbs, this is especially important in at least three fundamental areas:

(1) Proverbs promises the security of riches to those who are wise. Some TV preachers directly apply those proverbs for today and teach that God wants us all to be wealthy. However, as Christians we have to read this promise through the lens of the New Testament's teaching on riches. God sometimes chooses to bless his people materially so that they can generously share with others. But he does not guarantee material wealth as a consequence of wise and godly living in the present era. Many righteous followers of Christ around the world experience persecution and poverty. Jesus himself lived wisely and was the embodiment of wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24), yet he was relatively poor and encountered opposition. The basic principle of Proverbs is always true: God will bless those who honor him by pursuing godly wisdom. In the Old Testament era God's blessings often took more tangible, material form in this life, but in the New Testament era they come more often in a more spiritual form. Christians will someday experience rich material blessings, but for most that remains a hope, not reality.

(2) The Bible balances the truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God is sovereign in that he directs and controls all events. He is also working through all of our decisions, causing us to learn and develop into responsible individuals who bring him glory. Proverbs stresses human responsibility, urging us to make wise decisions. But Proverbs also makes it clear that one can never please God and live wisely without first fearing him. The New Testament reminds us that true wisdom comes from God (James 3:13-18) and that we need God's supernatural enablement to live obediently and wisely (Phil. 2:12-13). For Christians living in the Church Age, God has provided that enablement through his Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-17), who indwells each believer. So, when we as Christians hear the wise advice of Proverbs, we realize that we can achieve such wisdom only through God's power.

(3) In Proverbs wisdom is pictured as a woman who calls out to everyone, urging them to live by God's wise principles. As we come to the New Testament, we realize that Jesus is really the one who calls sinners to embrace God's wisdom. Jesus is the embodiment of genuine, godly wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24). In Matthew 7:24 he says: *Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. When the storm comes, this well-founded house stands firm* (v. 25). Jesus then says (vv. 26-27): *Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed.* As Lady Wisdom of Proverbs warned long before Jesus, one's response to wisdom determines one's destiny. Jesus repeats her warning, making it clear that a truly wise person, who fears the Lord, will hear and obey all that Jesus says. This begins by responding to his call to repentance (Matt. 4:17) and appropriating by faith the forgiveness he offers through his atoning blood (Matt. 26:27-28). Only in Jesus is one safe; those who reject him are doomed. So, when we as Christians hear the voice of Wisdom in Proverbs, we hear the voice of Jesus calling to us.

Memorizing and sharing proverbs

As Tommy Maxwell and I were planning this study, Tommy had a great idea that I want to share with you. He recommends that you memorize a proverb each week. What better way to start internalizing God's wisdom? To help you do this, I have chosen one proverb each week that really captures that week's theme. In one of the application sections each week I suggest that you memorize the proverb for the week and pray that God would give you the opportunity to discuss its relevance with an athlete (see, for example, week one, day three). Tommy and I are hoping that some of you may even choose to use these proverbs as slogans that you can share with your team, perhaps posting them in the locker room. Joe Ehrmann tells this story about Roy Simmons, his lacrosse coach at Syracuse University. Simmons came into the locker room at half time and his team, losing by four goals, was really down. Simmons wrote the numbers 118-24 on the board. Confused, the players asked what it meant. Simmons quoted Psalm 118:24: "This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it," and then told his team: "That's it, men. Win, lose, or draw; enjoy. Let's go back out there and play like you love the game and each other." They won that game. It became a tradition at Syracuse that year after year, before every game a player (Simmons never knew who) would write 118-24 on the board in the locker room.⁴ Maybe it had some effect; Roy Simmons' teams won six NCAA lacrosse championships. Maybe one or more of the proverbs we study could catch on as a slogan for your team or program.

Proverbs 1:1-19CHAPTER THEME**Godly wisdom is essential for success in life**

- Godly wisdom is like a multi-faceted game plan
- Everyone needs godly wisdom
- Godly wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord
- There is no shortcut to acquiring the benefits of godly wisdom

Proverbs 1:1-3

¹ The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

² To learn wisdom and moral instruction, and to discern wise counsel.

³ To receive moral instruction in skillful living, in righteousness, justice, and equity.

“Not until we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God’s holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours.”

- J. I. Packer

DAY 1: Proverbs 1:1-3**Godly wisdom is like a multi-faceted game plan****OBSERVATION**

1. What do the proverbs enable us to learn (v. 2)?
2. What do the proverbs enable us to discern (v. 2)?
3. What are the four areas of moral instruction that the proverbs address (v. 3)?

INTERPRETATION

1. How do you define “wisdom” (v. 2)?
2. What is meant by “moral instruction” (vv. 2-3)?
3. Define and explain in more detail the four elements of moral instruction (v. 3).

APPLICATION

1. Describe a wise insight you have learned this past year. How have you applied it practically to your life or your job?
2. Describe a piece of wise advice an older coach has given you that has proven true over the years and kept you out of trouble.

WEEK 1

Achieving Success God's Way: A Study on Proverbs

Proverbs 1:4-6

⁴ To impart shrewdness to the morally naïve,
and a discerning plan to the young person.

⁵ (Let the wise also hear and gain instruction,
and let the discerning acquire guidance!)

⁶ To discern the meaning of a proverb and a parable,
the sayings of the wise and their riddles.

*"The doorstep of the palace of wisdom is a
humble sense of ignorance."*

- C. H. Spurgeon

A TRUE COACHING STORY

When a new head football coach moved in, he demanded that I break down film on Sunday morning at 8:00 am. After two weeks of this, I decided to break down the film on Saturday night and report to work on Sunday at noon. The following Monday the head football coach tried to fire me in the principal's office. (I was the 8th grade football coach.) Standing my ground, I informed him that I wasn't going to miss church every week to do something I could do at another time. The principal supported me. I went on to be the only football coach in that new school's history to go undefeated for the season. I had 13 players. The head coach left the next year. I stayed on a few more, but eventually moved on to a bigger school. To this day, no one at that school has gone undefeated. God is God! Just saying!

DAY 2: Proverbs 1:4-6

Everyone needs godly wisdom

OBSERVATION

1. Who needs shrewdness (v. 4)?
2. Who needs a discerning plan (v. 4)?
3. What do the wise and discerning need (v. 5)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does it mean to be "morally naïve"?
2. Why do those who are morally naïve and youthful need wisdom (v. 4)?
3. Define and explain in more detail what is meant by "guidance" (v. 5).

APPLICATION

1. From your experience in working with young people, give some examples of what it means to be morally naïve. Are the young people you work with open to moral instruction?
2. According to Proverbs, what is the best thing you can pass on to your players and students, besides the normal "sports character traits" (perseverance, discipline, confidence, etc.)? Is it your intent to do that better after this study?

Day Three: Proverbs 1:7-9

⁷ Fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⁸ Listen, my child, to the instruction from your father,
and do not forsake the teaching from your mother.

⁹ For they will be like an elegant garland on your head, and like pendants around your neck.

Day Four: Proverbs 1:10-19

¹⁰ My child, if sinners try to entice you,
do not consent!

¹¹ If they say, “Come with us!
We will lie in wait to shed blood;
we will ambush an innocent person capriciously.

¹² We will swallow them alive like Sheol,
those full of vigor like those going down to the Pit.

¹³ We will seize all kinds of precious wealth;
we will fill our houses with plunder.

¹⁴ Join with us!
We will share equally in what we steal”

¹⁵ My child, do not go down their way,
withhold yourself from their path;

¹⁶ for they are eager to inflict harm,
and they hasten to shed blood.

¹⁷ Surely it is futile to spread a net in plain sight of
any bird,

¹⁸ but these men lie in wait for their own blood,
they ambush their own lives!

¹⁹ Such are the ways of all who gain profit unjustly;
it takes away the life of those who obtain it!

“Not until we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God’s holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours.”

- J. I. Packer

DAY 3: Proverbs 1:7-9**Godly wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord****OBSERVATION**

1. What is the starting point of genuine wisdom (v. 7a)?
2. What is a fool's response to wisdom (v. 7b)?
3. Wise parental teaching is compared to what two things (v. 9)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does it mean to “fear the Lord” (v. 7).
2. What attitude(s) or trait(s) would cause someone to despise wisdom (v. 7)?
3. What is the point of comparing parental instruction to a garland and a necklace (v. 9)?

APPLICATION

1. Describe a time when you had to take a stand and “fear the Lord” by following his standards, even though it may have been unpopular with a superior, a fellow coach, a parent, or a player. How did it turn out? What did you learn about God through the experience?
2. Recall a time from your coaching experience when another coach or a player despised wisdom. What were the consequences? What did you learn from observing this?
3. Memorize Proverbs 1:7 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

WEEK 1

Achieving Success God's Way: A Study on Proverbs

DAY 4: Proverbs 1:10-19

There is no shortcut to acquiring the benefits of godly wisdom

OBSERVATION

1. What word does the father use to describe sinners' attempts to influence his son (v. 10)?
2. What does the gang of delinquents intend to do? (vv. 11-14.)
3. How will they end up (vv. 18-19)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What is so enticing about the gang's plan (vv. 11-14)?
2. Characterize the gang's (a) attitude toward people and (b) their motivation (vv. 11-14).
3. Why does a violent life style prove to be self-destructive (vv. 18-19)?

APPLICATION

1. In your own words, list the principles you find in verses 10-19. Now choose one or two of these and explain how you can apply the principle(s) to your life and your job.
2. How can you as a coach help young people resist the temptation to get involved with the wrong crowd? Write down 2 ideas you could use in counseling a young person that you gleaned from verses 10-19.

God's Word teaches:

Godly wisdom is essential for success in life

- Godly wisdom is like a multi-faceted game plan
- Everyone needs godly wisdom
- Godly wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord
- There is no shortcut to acquiring the benefits of godly wisdom

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

Godly Wisdom is Essential for Success in Life

Introduction

Meriwether Lewis had many hair-raising adventures on his journey to the Pacific with his fellow explorer William Clark. One June afternoon in 1805 Lewis shot a buffalo. While he stood there admiring his success, a bear suddenly approached. Lewis raised his rifle to fire, then realized he'd forgotten to reload it. The bear attacked. Put yourself in Lewis' shoes. What would you do? Well, Lewis sprinted to a nearby river, waded into waist-deep water, and waited. The bear came to the edge of the water, but, fortunately, turned around and left when Lewis made a threatening gesture. Not convinced that gestures would work a second time, Lewis quickly reloaded his rifle. He wrote in his journal: "My gun reloaded, I felt confidence once more in my strength."¹ Lewis had learned an important lesson: When you wander into "beware of bears" territory, you'd better keep your rifle loaded!

Athletes and coaches know the importance of preparation and foresight. As golfer Vijay Singh once said: "Today's preparation is tomorrow's performance." As a coach, you know that success doesn't come by chance. To succeed, you have to prepare well, and preparation has many facets. The same is true in life. God tells us in the Bible, and especially in Proverbs, how to succeed in this life. While Proverbs reflects an ancient Israelite setting, its basic, core principles are timeless. It's God's game plan and it's called godly wisdom. As we study Proverbs, we need to start with

some fundamentals: What is godly wisdom? What's the key to getting it? Why is it so important? In the end, what's the payoff? The bottom line is this—without godly wisdom, you don't have a prayer. Trying to tackle life without wisdom would be like me (age 61, 5-10, 175) trying to beat LeBron James in one-on-one. We all desperately need to know the game plan. So let's get started.

Day One: Godly wisdom is like a multi-faceted game plan

Proverbs 1:1-3

Most teams have a team goal, a saying that keeps a team focused the entire season. Something like, "Oneness Wins." You have tee shirts and signs made to highlight it. In Proverbs Solomon is God's chosen coach: *The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel* (v. 1). Solomon gives the "team goal" of Proverbs in verse 2, *To learn wisdom and moral instruction, and to discern wise counsel*. Solomon isn't talking about just getting head knowledge. That can't change your life. You have to put what you learn into practice. In the ancient Israelite way of thinking, you didn't really know something until you made it a part of your core values and lived it out everyday. As a coach you think the same way. Tony Dungy says: "I've always believed that it takes a certain amount of time to prepare for a game, and once we're prepared, extra time won't help--only execution will."² You don't confine practice sessions to chalk talks and watching film. Players must drill and learn how to execute what they've been taught so they're ready at game time. Information has to be internalized and then put to use, or else it's useless.

We need to learn and apply wisdom and moral instruction. The Hebrew word for wisdom (pronounced, "coke-ma") means

"skill." It's used of God's skill in creating the world and of human skill in war, craftsmanship, sailing, and administration. In Proverbs it is skill in living a life that is pleasing to and rewarded by God. "Moral instruction" is an important facet of wisdom. This is more than simply verbal instruction. It includes the concepts of correction and discipline. In fact, Solomon uses the word when talking about the need to discipline children from a motive of love.³ We have a tendency to follow our own inclinations and to do what seems best in our eyes. We need instruction! Coaches are very aware of this concept. That's why so many are hoarse after the first days of training!

As a coach you spend a great deal of time correcting faulty fundamentals and imparting the disciplines of teamwork. When my dad was teaching me how to play baseball, he spent a lot of time showing me how to catch and throw. He wore me out with instruction. After all these years I can still hear the words, "follow through when you throw," echoing in my ears. But I grew to love the game because I learned how to play it right. The proverbs work the same way. Their moral instruction may seem confining at first, but we need it for life, just like athletes need correction and discipline to excel. Our "team goal" is also to discern wise counsel. With their insights about how the world works and how God expects us to live, the proverbs can help us recognize wise counsel when we see it. Do you feel bombarded every day with all kinds of advice fired at you from every angle? Proverbs gives us a measuring stick and filter to accurately evaluate all these ideas.

In verse 3 Solomon explains that moral instruction has four facets: *To receive moral instruction in skillful living, in righteousness, justice, and equity*. Skillful living is the discipline to see reality clearly and make a wise decision. Sometimes

we let our emotions or biases color our thinking. We've all seen a coach wince (or worse!) when a point guard starts playing "out of control." All that does is produce checks under the "TO" column in the stat sheet. The proverbs are designed to keep us "under control." The other three areas of moral instruction have to do with what is right and just. Righteousness is what is morally and ethically right, judged by the only standard that counts—God's. Justice is the ability to discern what is fair and to make a just decision. We need this because we are prone to judge on the basis of appearances and circumstantial evidence. Equity (literally, "what is straight") is honesty and fairness, especially in one's words (see Prov. 23:16). You probably can recall times when you as a coach had to decide what was right and wrong, or determine what was a fair punishment, or had to tell a player the truth, even though you knew it would hurt. We can't make right and fair decisions off the cuff; we need to have a foundation—a clear ethical code to draw on. The proverbs help us lay that foundation.

Day Two: Everyone needs godly wisdom

Proverbs 1:4-6

In verses 4 and 6 Solomon makes it clear that the proverbs are especially important for young people: *To impart shrewdness to the morally naïve, and a discerning plan to the young person . . . To discern the meaning of a proverb and a parable, the saying of the wise and their riddles.* As a coach, you are what Tony Dungy calls a "mentor leader." Mentor leaders "look for opportunities in life to make an impact."⁴ As a mentor leader, you will find all kinds of wisdom in Proverbs that you can pass along to the young people whom God has entrusted to you. You can help them build a lasting foundation and get a

strong grip on life.

The proverbs will help you be a teacher of life and character, not just your sport. Hopefully what Bill Walton said about John Wooden will be true of you: "Everything he said turned out to be right. He didn't teach basketball. He taught life."⁵ This goes counter to what we often see today in athletics, where such a premium is placed on skill. Sometimes athletics is the last place where character is taught. But you can be different and shine like a light in the darkness.

In working with young people, it's important to be realistic. Solomon calls young people morally naïve. They lack experience in making correct moral decisions. We're all born with a bent toward sin. As we grow up, we aren't yet full-fledged fools, but we're on the way. We may not have descended to the level of the fool yet, but we're on the elevator with the arrow pointing down. If no one intervenes, we're going to land in the basement and stay there. This is clear from Proverbs 22:15, which says, *folly is bound up in the heart of a child*, and correction is needed to free him from it.

The proverbs help morally naïve youths reverse this natural process. They need a foundation for life, called here shrewdness. They need to get a grip on life issues and have a discerning plan. You, as a trusted and admired coach, have the God-given opportunity to help implement God's wise plan in their lives. You'll have to be transparent and share from your experience, including your own struggles when you were their age. They may put you on a pedestal, but they need to know that you weren't born wise. They need to know that you have become what you are through your relationship with Christ and through applying God's wisdom to the challenges of life.

But naïve youths are not the

only target of Proverbs, as verse 5 makes clear: *(Let the wise also hear and gain instruction, and let the discerning acquire guidance!)* That's right; no one has ever "arrived." Tony Dungy says, "Mentor leaders are always willing to learn and grow, seeking advice and guidance as they lead others and help them develop."⁶ Even those who are wise still need guidance, a word used elsewhere of the strategy necessary to win a battle (Prov. 20:18; 24:6).

Proverbs offers a strategy for life that is like a battle plan. With it we can carry out a challenging mission, even against opposition. Its wise teachings are like an abundance of counselors who give good advice that can keep us from failing. When Jim Lee Howell was coaching the New York Giants, he had a couple of pretty fair assistant coaches named Lombardi and Landry. Kyle Rote, who played on those teams, tells this amusing story: "I looked into Lombardi's room, and he was working away on the offensive game plan. A few doors down, I looked into Landry's room, and he was putting the finishing touches on the defensive game plan. At the end of the hall, I looked into Howell's room. Jim Lee was sitting back in a chair with his feet up on the table, reading the newspaper."⁷ There is security in having good counselors! That's what the proverbs are for us. We need the guidance that God provides. And when we embrace it, we enjoy the security of knowing that we are in good hands and we can face the future with confidence.

Day Three: Godly wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord

Proverbs 1:7-9

To succeed in sports, one must master the basics. In life, as in athletics, there are fundamentals, which if followed lead to success, but if ignored lead to failure. After

telling us what wisdom is, Solomon gets right down to basics and tells us the key to acquiring it: *Fearing the Lord is the beginning of moral knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction* (v. 7). FEAR is the key to success? This seems to go against what my dad, a WWII fighter pilot, taught me about manhood. Men are taught to be brave, strong, and independent and those are good qualities when used at the right place and time. But as counter-intuitive as it seems, fear really is the key to success in life. But Solomon didn't say fear alone. The key is WHOM we fear—THE LORD. Solomon's advice makes sense when you think about it. God is the source of true wisdom, which goes beyond mere human understanding.⁹

So before we can become wise, we must come to grips with the reality of God and stand before him in fear. Fearing the Lord means that we respect him as the sovereign king of the world who created us and has the right to tell us how we should live. It means humbling ourselves before him, admitting that we are totally dependent upon him for success, and deciding that we will follow his moral code, not our own idea of what is right or wrong. Proverbs 3:5-7 says it well: *Trust in*

the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own estimation; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. The fool can be spotted a mile away because he has contempt for wisdom. Our fallen human nature is prone to self-centered pride. We want to march to the beat of our own drum because we think we know what's best. This arrogant spirit prompts the proud to reject and even despise the principles of godly wisdom, for these principles challenge their independence (see Rom. 1:21-22). But rejecting wisdom makes about as much sense as rejecting the advice of an instructor if you want to learn how to fly a plane. Do that and you'll crash and burn.

While God is the source of true wisdom, he often uses human instruments, especially godly parents—and coaches who know him—as his delivery system. In Israel parents were to teach their children the ways of the Lord (Deut. 6:6-7). That's what Solomon is doing here: *Listen, my child, to the instruction from your father, and do not forsake the teaching from your mother* (v. 8). And notice the payoff for the son: *For they will be like an elegant garland on your head, and like pendants around your neck* (v. 9). The imagery suggests value and visibility. The son who accepts wisdom gets something of value and he will enjoy success that will be obvious to everyone. He will be like the Olympic champion receiving a gold medal as the national anthem plays.

Interpretation Note: Verse 6 describes the form that proverbial wisdom takes. The wise need to be able to *discern the meaning of a proverb and a parable, the sayings of the wise and their riddles*. A proverb is a short, insightful saying that is loaded with meaning. It invites reflection and demands application. "Parable" and "riddles" may not be the best translations. All three words ("proverb," "parable," and "riddle") are used in Habakkuk 2:6 to describe the poem that follows. Hebrew poetry likes to join synonyms. That's the case here: A "proverb" and "parable" are essentially the same, as are the "words of the wise" and "riddles."⁸

Day Four: There is no shortcut to acquiring the benefits of godly wisdom

Proverbs 1:10-19

In urban America young people are sometimes tempted to join gangs. Apparently the same was true in ancient Israel, for Solomon warned his son to resist the temptation to join a gang bent on violence and robbery (vv. 10-16): *My child, if sinners try to entice you, do not consent! If they say, "Come with us! We will lie in wait to shed blood; we will ambush an innocent person capriciously. We will swallow them alive like Sheol, those full of vigor like those going down to the Pit. We will seize all kinds of precious wealth; we will fill our houses with plunder. Join with us! We will all share equally in what we steal." My child, do not go down their way, withhold yourself from their path; for they are eager to inflict harm, and they hasten to shed blood.*

Solomon expects the gang to try to entice his son to join them. This word "entice" refers to tempting someone with alluring and deceptive words, sort of like a hawker at a fair trying to get a guy to play a game with the promise that he'll win a prize for his girlfriend. The gang promises a great deal of wealth to the one who joins them. For a young

Historical Context: Some suggest there is an Egyptian background here. (A cosmopolitan king like Solomon had contact with Egypt and its culture.) In Egypt a wreath symbolized vindication before enemies, while a necklace symbolized divine guidance and protection.¹⁰ In this case, Solomon would be promising his son that wisdom would guide and protect him. In ancient Egypt people would also wear wreaths and necklaces to banquets to "dress up."¹¹ In this case, Solomon is promising his son that the principles of wisdom, if applied to one's life, make one attractive to others, which in turn promotes solid relationships and helps one advance and succeed.

man trying to prove himself to the world, their arrogance could be appealing and contagious. They'll use violence if they have to. They compare themselves to death (Sheol and the Pit were Old Testament names for the grave); they'll even kill if necessary. In fact they enjoy inflicting pain, like the bullies who were plastered all over the news in mid-June of 2012 for their brutal verbal assault on Karen Klein, the 68-year-old grandmother who was their bus monitor.¹¹ This gang of thugs is obsessed with getting rich quick at the expense of their victims. Of course, this undermines their promise that they'll all get an equal share, for hardened, violent people can't be counted on to be reliable and fair. You don't ask a crook to guard your valuables or a sadist to watch your baby!

Some of you will find Solomon's warning to be relevant, especially if you work with young people who live in an environment where gangs are a part of life. As our society becomes more "fatherless," many of you are working with athletes who do not have a male role model in the home. Abe Brown, who has a prison ministry in Florida, estimates that "70 per cent of the men in prison today grew up without a father figure in their lives."¹² If God has put you in such a place, he has given you a unique opportunity and challenge to be their Solomon and warn them about how self-destructive it is to run with the wrong crowd.

Let's see what advice Solomon gives his son. He first helps his son see through their plot: *Surely it is futile to spread a net in plain sight of any bird* (v. 17). If a bird sees a net spread out by a hunter before its eyes, it will fly away. The son needs to do the same, for their scheme should be obvious. He may be the one they intend to ambush!¹³ Solomon next focuses on consequences. If his son joins this gang, he'll be walking into a trap,

because the gang will self-destruct: *but these men lie in wait for their own blood, they ambush their own lives* (v. 18). No law-abiding society will tolerate this kind of behavior; sooner or later criminals will be punished for their runaway greed, which drives them to break the law. Solomon tops off his argument by making the point that there are no exceptions (v. 19): *Such are the ways of all who gain profit unjustly; it takes away the life of those who obtain it!* Greed and injustice are a self-destructive mixture; in the end crooks get caught. They tie the noose and then put their head into it.

We can easily put ourselves in the place of Solomon, but can we also put ourselves in the place of the son? Hopefully none of us would ever be tempted to join a gang, so how is Solomon's warning directly relevant to us? We need to dig a little deeper and we will hit pay dirt, for there is a broader principle here. In Proverbs one of the benefits of living a wise life style is material prosperity.

Wisdom says: *Riches and honor are with me, long-lasting wealth and righteousness* (8:18). You attain prosperity through persistence and wisdom: (1) *Wealth gained quickly will dwindle away, but the one who gathers it little by little will become rich* (13:11). (2) *By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; by knowledge its rooms are filled with all kinds of precious and pleasing treasures.* (24:3-4). In the case of the gang, they want to get rich quickly, not by working, but by robbery. They are trying to acquire one of the benefits of wisdom by bypassing the path of wisdom. This doesn't work. It's like trying to cross a raging river by jumping in and swimming, rather than walking across the bridge because the bridge is a mile downstream! There's a word for that kind of stupid: Drowned. In the same way, there are no shortcuts to

attaining the lasting security that only God can provide.

Yet in virtually every profession some people try to achieve success by dishonest means. The Bernie Madoffs of the world are doing time in prison for their Ponzi schemes. In the high-pressure world of sports, we often hear about coaches, even those with reputations for being honest and wise, breaking or fudging on the rules. They want to get an advantage in recruiting so that they can have a winning program, move up the ladder, get the admiration of their fellow coaches, and make more money. But sooner or later somebody blows the whistle. The coach is forced to resign in humiliation, leaving behind a penalized program and several athletes who must suffer the consequences of the coach's indiscretion. That's what happens when people try to get the benefits of wisdom by bypassing wisdom.

Tony Dungy has caught this principle. He recognizes that sometimes coaches and players look for the dishonest shortcut in their passion to win: "If you don't do it the right way, if you teach your players anything goes as long as you win, you're leading them down a dangerous path. There's a difference between aggressive play and dirty play. If you break the rules, it will eventually come back to haunt you, in sports or in life."¹⁴ Dungy's words are haunting in light of the recent NFL scandal involving "bounty hunting." One of the "motivational" slides used by the Saints on January 7, 2011, said this: "Now's the time to do our job, collect bounty \$. No apologies. Let's go hunting." Accompanying the slide were lots of bills and a picture of "Dog the Bounty Hunter."¹⁶ Sounds like something the gang of Proverbs 1 would say, doesn't it?

Proverbs 1:20--2:15**CHAPTER THEME****Your response to wisdom determines your destiny**

- Wisdom is available to everyone
- Disaster overtakes those who reject wisdom
- To acquire wisdom you must be teachable
- Those who embrace wisdom are secure

Proverbs 1:20-23

²⁰ Wisdom calls out in the street,
she shouts loudly in the plazas;

²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she calls,
in the entrances of the gates in the city she utters her words.

²² “How long will you simpletons love naiveté?
How long will mockers delight in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?

²³ If only you will respond to my rebuke,
then I will pour out my thoughts to you,
and I will make my words known to you.

A TRUE COACHING STORY

This year one of my players was continually on my heart and I prayed often for his salvation. He was a very dedicated and disciplined player, but I knew he was struggling with some things in his life. After losing our playoff game this season, I was making my way around the locker room hugging the guys and telling them I was proud of them. As I approached the young man who had been on my heart all season, he collapsed in my arms and began to cry uncontrollably. He said things like, “What am I going to do without football? I quit drinking and smoking dope for football.” I looked him in the eyes and lovingly told him: “You don’t need football; you need Jesus.” He responded with a sobbing, “I know.” We got on our knees right there in the locker room and he trusted in Christ. As we got up, I had a big grin on my face and thought, “I would trade a loss for a life any day.”

DAY 1: Proverbs 1:20-23**Wisdom is available to everyone****OBSERVATION**

1. Where does Wisdom proclaim her message (vv. 20-21)?
2. To what three groups does Wisdom call out (v. 22)?
3. What word does Wisdom use to describe her appeal (v. 23a)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What do verses 20-21 suggest about the accessibility of wisdom? Is wisdom hard to find?
2. What do the verbs used in verse 22 suggest about the attitudes of mockers and fools?
3. What does verse 23 indicate about God’s attitude toward sinners?

APPLICATION

1. Practically speaking in your experience and career, where, how, and when does “Wisdom” proclaim her message to us? What might keep you from listening?

Proverbs 1:24-32

²⁴ However, because I called but you refused to listen, because I stretched out my hand but no one paid attention,

²⁵ because you neglected all my advice, and did not comply with my rebuke,

²⁶ so I myself will laugh when disaster strikes you, I will mock when what you dread comes,

²⁷ when what you dread comes like a whirlwind, and disaster strikes you like a devastating storm, when distressing trouble comes on you.

²⁸ Then they will call to me, but I will not answer; they will diligently seek me, but they will not find me.

²⁹ Because they hated moral knowledge, and did not choose to fear the LORD,

³⁰ they did not comply with my advice, they spurned all my rebuke.

³¹ Therefore they will eat from the fruit of their way, and they will be stuffed full of their own counsel.

³² For the waywardness of the simpletons will kill them, and the careless ease of fools will destroy them.

DAY 2: Proverbs 1:24-32

Disaster overtakes those who reject wisdom

OBSERVATION

1. How do sinners respond to Wisdom (vv. 24-25)?
2. What is the destiny of those who disregard Wisdom's invitation? (See vv. 26-27, 31-32.)
3. In verses 28-32, what pronoun does Wisdom use to describe sinners? How does this differ from the pronoun used in verses 23-27?

INTERPRETATION

1. What causes sinners to reject godly wisdom? (Note especially v. 31.)
2. Characterize the negative consequences of foolish actions.
3. How does the switch from direct address (where wisdom uses "you") to mere description ("they") reflect Wisdom's attitude toward the sinners?

APPLICATION

1. Describe a coaching situation where disaster overcame someone who rejected wisdom. What wrong decisions did this person make that led him/her into trouble? When that person got to a point where it was simply too late to reverse the situation, what were the consequences? (Think in terms of financial, emotional, social, and spiritual consequences.)

Day Three: Proverbs 1:33--2:6

³³ But the one who listens to me will live in security, and will be at ease from the dread of harm.

^{2:1} My child, if you receive my words,
and store up my commands within you,
² by making your ear attentive to wisdom,
and by turning your heart to understanding,
³ indeed, if you call out for discernment--
raise your voice for understanding--
⁴ if you seek it like silver,
and search for it like hidden treasure,
⁵ then you will understand how to fear the LORD,
and you will discover knowledge about God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom,
and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

Day Four: Proverbs 2:7-15

⁷ He stores up effective counsel for the upright,
and is like a shield for those who live with integrity,
⁸ to guard the paths of the righteous
and to protect the way of his pious ones.
⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity--every good way.
¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart,
and moral knowledge will be attractive to you.
¹¹ Discretion will protect you,
understanding will guard you,
¹² to deliver you from the way of the wicked,
from those speaking perversity,
¹³ who leave the upright paths
to walk on the dark ways,
¹⁴ who delight in doing evil,
they rejoice in perverse evil;
¹⁵ whose paths are morally crooked,
and who are devious in their ways;

DAY 3: Proverbs 1:33--2:6

To acquire wisdom you must be teachable

OBSERVATION

1. According to 1:33, who will live in security?
2. What does the father urge his son to do (2:1-4)?
3. What will happen if the son seeks wisdom (2:5)?
Why will this happen (2:6)?

INTERPRETATION

1. Is the shift to the singular in 1:33 ("the one who"), in contrast to the use of the plural in the preceding verses (see day two), significant?
2. What does 2:1-4 imply about the son's responsibility in the quest for wisdom? (Note the verbs used.)
3. What do verses 5-6 teach us about the source and nature of genuine wisdom?

APPLICATION

1. From personal experience, how has pursuing godly wisdom given you security and peace of mind?
2. How do the principles of these verses apply to teaching and coaching young athletes?
3. Memorize Proverbs 2:6 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

DAY 4: Proverbs 2:7-15**Those who embrace wisdom are secure****OBSERVATION**

1. What does the Lord do for the wise (2:7-8)?
2. What will the Lord's protection provide for the son (2:9-10)?
3. From whom does the son need protection (2:12-15)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does the imagery of a shield (2:7) and the language of protection (2:8) suggest about the challenge the son faces as he grows up?
2. Is the progression of verbs in 2:9-10 (understand, enter, be attractive) significant?
3. What does the word "perversity" (v. 12) indicate about their speech?

APPLICATION

1. Can you think of a time when the principles of wisdom you've learned from God protected you from falling into destructive sin?
2. As a coach, how can you encourage young athletes to seek wisdom and successfully meet the moral challenges they will face in our society?

God's Word teaches:

Your response to wisdom determines your destiny

- Wisdom is available to everyone
- Disaster overtakes those who reject wisdom
- To acquire wisdom you must be teachable
- Those who embrace wisdom are secure

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

WEEK 2 Proverbs 1:20-2:15 - Study Notes

Winning Wisdom

Your Response to Wisdom Determines Your Destiny

Introduction

I had just finished my sophomore year at Syracuse University and I was troubled. All around me people were living in a way that ran counter to what I had been taught by my parents. In the classroom professors were challenging my belief system. I had a lot of questions: Do I believe the Christian message simply because that's what my parents taught me to believe? Is it really true? During the summer before my junior year I read and thought and agonized. My mom prayed for me and gave me Christian literature to read. She was the voice of wisdom in my case, and through her God was calling to me, urging me to internalize my faith and stay the course. By the end of the summer I had made my decision: The Christian message was indeed true; Jesus had died for our sins and then he defeated death by rising from the grave. But in addition to the historical evidence for Christianity, it was the reality of my parents' faith

and God's transforming power in their lives that ultimately convinced me that Christianity is the real deal. When I was a little boy, I had seen them radically change for the better when they trusted in Christ. There was substance in their character, something I did not see in the cheap life style of the typical college student or the shallow message of the anti-Christian voices at the front of the classroom. In life we often face important decisions—decisions that can make or break us. In the passages we're studying this week, Wisdom is pictured calling out to everyone. Your response to wisdom will determine your destiny.

Day One: Wisdom is available to everyone

Proverbs 1:20-23

Solomon compares wisdom to a woman who shouts loudly in the public places of the city: *Wisdom calls out in the street, she shouts out loudly in the plazas; at the head of the noisy streets she calls, in the entrances of the gates in the city she utters her words* (vv. 20-21). Wisdom is not hidden away somewhere; God makes it readily accessible. The implication is clear; as Fox says: "This means that no one can excuse folly by pleading ignorance of Wisdom's demands."¹

learn and grow. As we pointed out last week, the morally naïve have not descended to the level of the fool yet, but they're on the elevator with the arrow pointing down. If no one intervenes, they're going to land in the basement and stay there. The bad character of mockers and fools is more ingrained; they enjoy mocking others and they hate knowledge (v. 22). "Delight" refers to a strong desire or craving. Mockers don't just mock; they get a thrill out of it, like a trash talking receiver getting in the face of a defensive back he has just beaten badly for a TD. They thrive on proudly putting down others, probably because it makes them feel superior and feeds their ego. Fools don't just reject knowledge; they "hate" it, like an eight year boy hates broccoli and cauliflower. The very existence of God-imparted knowledge demands humility and a teachable spirit—traits that fools are too proud to embrace. Fox puts it well: Mockers are "chronically arrogant and cynical," while fools are "smug and thickheaded."²

Yet Wisdom urges them to respond positively to her correction; if they do, she promises to transform their thinking: *If only you will respond to my rebuke, then I will pour out my thoughts to you and I will make my words known to you* (v. 23). Of course, behind the personified figure of Wisdom we should see God himself, the source of all wisdom. This appeal to the morally naïve and fools tells us a great deal about God's character. He does not ignore sinners; he confronts them with a "rebuke" that exposes their wrong attitudes and actions. God wants to transform sinners by pouring his thoughts into them and giving them moral instruction. We see here both the holiness and the love of God, revealed in delicate balance. God is offended by human sin and confronts it, but he also reaches out to sinners and appeals to them to accept the truth.

Interpretation Note: Wisdom is portrayed as a young woman here and in Proverbs 8-9. She stands in contrast to her rival, "the woman called Folly" (9:1). Wisdom is pictured as a woman for two reasons: (1) The Hebrew word for wisdom (pronounced "coke-ma") is a feminine form. (2) The father is talking to his son. He knows young men have a strong attraction to young women, so he pictures the competing forces in life (wisdom and folly) as women who are after the son's attention. Lady Wisdom is embodied in the ideal wife of Proverbs 31:10-31; this is the type of woman the son should be seeking for a wife. Lady Folly is embodied in the adulteress described in 2:16-19; 5:3-6; 6:24-29; and 7:6-27. This is the type of woman the son should avoid.

Wisdom targets three groups in particular: simpletons (that is, the morally naïve), mockers, and fools: *How long will you simpletons love naiveté? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?* (v. 22) Simpletons lack experience in making correct moral decisions. Yet they love being naïve; they have no inclination to

Day Two: Disaster overtakes those who reject wisdom

Proverbs 1:24-32

Despite Wisdom's appeal, foolish sinners reject her offer: *However, because I called but you refused to listen, because I stretched out my hand but no one paid attention, because you neglected all my advice, and did not comply with my rebuke, so I myself will laugh when disaster strikes you, I will mock when what you dread comes* (vv. 24-26). As in verses 20-23, we see Wisdom's concern—she calls out and stretches out her hand toward sinners, as if to lead them to safety. But like a drowning man who refuses to get into a lifeboat, these sinners make a conscious decision to refuse her offer. They refuse to admit they are drowning and, convinced they can swim to shore, they insist on doing it their own way. For this reason, Wisdom will not show pity on them when it's time to pay the bill. This may seem like a harsh response, but Wisdom's laughter is actually a form of justice, for the mocking fools now have the tables turned on them (see v. 22). As Waltke says, "As the gullible did not respond to her in the time of salvation, she will not respond to them at the time of their judgment."³

The consequences of rejecting Wisdom are not pretty. Disaster eventually strikes, like a mighty

windstorm: *when what you dread comes like a whirlwind, and disaster strikes you like a devastating storm, when distressing trouble comes on you* (v. 27). The negative consequences are inevitable; notice that Wisdom does not say "if" they come, but "when."

They are also irresistible, as the comparison to a mighty windstorm makes clear; you can't block or tackle a tornado! One of my favorite football players was Larry Csonka, MVP of Super Bowl 8 and perhaps the best pure fullback of all time. I can still remember 6-3, 237 lb. Csonka steamrolling 5-9, 170 lb. Pat Fischer in Super Bowl 7. Those who reject wisdom will end up like that--flattened by the tornado their own foolish decision stirred up. The consequences of rejecting Wisdom are also inescapable. Fools will cry out for help, but it will be too late: *Then they will call to me, but I will not answer; they will diligently seek me, but they will not find me* (v. 28). The time to follow Wisdom's advice is before, not after, disaster strikes. You head for shelter when you hear the tornado warning go off at the fire station, not when the funnel cloud is fifty feet away. We have to assume that the sinners' desperate cries for help

do not come from a sincere, genuine love for wisdom, but from panic. They suddenly realize their self-reliance has let them down.⁴ Their true inner character is revealed by their attitude toward wisdom before disaster struck: *they hated moral*

KEEPER QUOTE

Purity of intention is really a reflection of the heart, and having a pure heart is so important . . . The heart of a person with integrity always wants to do what's right once he or she is sure what 'right' is . . . Being true to ourselves doesn't make us people of integrity. Charles Manson was true to himself, and as a result, he rightly is spending the rest of his life in prison. Ultimately, being true to our Creator gives us the purest form of integrity.

- John Wooden

knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, they did not comply with my advice, they spurned all my rebuke (vv. 29-30). The verbs suggest willful, stubborn rejection; they stiff-armed Wisdom. When one rejects what God offers, there is a price to pay: *they will eat from the fruit of their way, and they will be stuffed full of their own counsel. For the waywardness of the simpletons will kill them, and the careless ease of fools will destroy them* (vv. 31-32).

The consequences are of their own making, as the comparison to fruit makes clear. They were too proud to listen to Wisdom; instead they trusted their "own counsel." But they will be forced to eat everything on the table of consequences, to the point where they are "stuffed full," as it were. I think of the kid who keeps on cramming pizza into his stomach until his stomach says, "No more! All you olives and mushrooms. out of here! Go back the way you came! And take Pepperoni over there with you!" Or, on a more serious and deadly note, think of the chain smoker who refuses to listen to the doctor's warnings about lung cancer, and then is forced one day to look at dark spots on pictures of his lungs. Those who reject wisdom have an arrogant, complacent attitude that will end up killing them, for they will not be prepared when judgment comes. In short, the consequences are well deserved, self-imposed, and fatal.

Interpretation Note: When studying the Bible, it is important to pay attention to grammar, including basic things like pronouns. There is a subtle shift in language in verse 28 that highlights Wisdom's rejection of the fools who reject her. In verses 22-27 she speaks directly and with urgency to sinners, addressing them as "you." But in verses 28-32 she simply refers to the sinners in a matter-of-fact manner as "they." The shift from second to third person shows that Wisdom has now distanced herself from them; she no longer calls to them, for it is too late.⁵ *They* have made their choice; the time has come to pay the piper.

WEEK 2 Proverbs 1:20-2:15 - Study Notes

Day Three: To acquire wisdom, you must be teachable

Proverbs 1:33—2:6

But not everyone rejects wisdom: *But the one who listens to me will live in security, and will be at ease from the dread of harm* (v. 33). Perhaps Wisdom anticipates that those who listen will be in the minority, for she uses the singular in verse 33 (note “the one who”), in contrast to the preceding verses, where she addressed and described the foolish sinners as a group. When you respond positively to Wisdom you will enjoy security and have confidence about the future. Charlotte Smith, former WNBA player and an assistant basketball coach at the University of North Carolina, describes this inner security: “The ultimate godly woman is full of wisdom, which comes from constant communion with the Heavenly Father . . . She knows where she is headed in life because she knows who leads her in the path of righteousness, and that is God Almighty.”⁶ Solomon has much more to say about the security that wisdom provides (see 2:8-22), but before he develops that theme more fully, he identifies the key to attaining wisdom and the security that comes with it.

In the movie *Hoosiers* Norman Dale (played by Gene Hackman) arrives in Hickory, Indiana, to coach the high school boys’ basketball team. At the very first practice, as he is introducing himself and talking about the importance of teamwork and cooperation between coach and players, a couple of the players, Buddy and Whit, aren’t listening and are whispering to each other. Coach Dale interrupts them and Buddy says, “I’m curious about when we’re going to start.” Coach Dale replies, “We start when I say we start.” Then

Buddy sarcastically says, “Would you kinda let me know because I’m kinda gettin’ tired of standing here.” Coach Dale kicks them off the team on the spot. (By the way, once they see the error of their ways and humbly apologize, Coach Dale allows them to return to the team.) As a teacher, I find it especially frustrating when a student is not teachable. As a coach, you know the type—the athlete who is convinced he’s God’s gift to the school, thinks he knows it all, stubbornly refuses to listen to advice, and insists on doing things his own way.

Many athletes have loads of raw talent, but often the difference between mediocrity and greatness is teachability. John Maxwell, in his best seller *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, includes “teachability” in his list of “must have” leadership traits. In describing one successful individual, he attributes the person’s success to the fact that “he had great talent and incredible drive.” Then he points out: “But those traits were fueled by teachability.”⁷ I like the comparison to fuel. You can have a great engine, but without gas it can’t run and perform like it’s designed to do. Roger Maris had this fuel. He won two consecutive American League MVP awards and broke Babe Ruth’s single season home run mark when he hit 61 in 1961. He was a superstar. When he was traded to the National League’s St. Louis Cardinals, he went up to coach George Kissell and said: “George, you’re talking to an American Leaguer. Consider me a rookie. Whatever you want during spring training, you holler and I’ll be there. If I got my brain working, after you help me a bit, you won’t have to bother with me anymore.” Kissell was shocked. He said to Maris: “Roger, in my eyes you have always been on a pedestal.” But Maris said: “I don’t want to be up there. I’d rather you just saw me like everybody else around here.” Kissell remembers Maris this way: “He was

so humble that you never would have known who he was. He listened to everything.”⁸

We know from sports and life that teachability is essential to success. It is no surprise then that Solomon urges his son to be teachable. He says: *My child, if you receive my words, and store up my commands within you, by making your ear attentive to wisdom, and by turning your heart to understanding, indeed, if you call out for discernment—raise your voice for understanding—if you seek it like silver, and search for it like hidden treasure* (2:1-4). Foolish sinners hate knowledge, refuse to listen to wisdom, prefer their own counsel, and consequently self-destruct (see 1:29-32). But those who acquire wisdom escape disaster (1:33). However, you can acquire wisdom only if you are teachable. The scientists who got us to the moon and gave us the personal computer were geniuses; but they also paid attention in math class. Solomon makes it clear that the son must make a willful decision to learn and take ownership of the quest for wisdom. He must “receive” the words of wisdom and “store” them “up.” His ear must be “attentive” and he must “turn” his heart (or will) to understanding. Wisdom is as valuable as silver or treasure. Consequently, the son must actively “seek” and “search for” it. And the good news is this: Those who actively and sincerely seek wisdom will find it: *then you will understand how to fear the LORD, and you will discover knowledge about God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes understanding* (2:5-6). As we saw earlier (see 1:20-23), God wants to impart wisdom and he gladly gives it to those who seek it. Since genuine wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord (1:7), those who seek and receive wisdom become God-fearers. They recognize God’s authority and humbly submit to his will.

WEEK 2 Proverbs 1:20-2:15 - Study Notes

Day Four: Those who embrace wisdom are secure

Proverbs 2:7-15

Earlier Wisdom promised security to the one who listens to her (1:33). Here Solomon elaborates on this as he assures his son that God guards those who embrace wisdom and integrate its principles into their lives: *He stores up effective counsel for the upright, and is like a shield for those who live with integrity, to guard the paths of the righteous and to protect the way of his pious ones* (2:7-8). There is, of course, both bad news and good news here. The promise of God's protection is certainly encouraging, but *this implies that there is very real danger out there.*

When I was in seventh grade, I decided to go out for junior high football. Until then my football playing had been confined to two on two in the yard with guys my own size. It was all about speed and quickness; we didn't know anything about "smash mouth football." I'd never really been "hit." But the first day of practice, they brought out all the equipment—helmets, pads, and even mouth guards that fit snugly over our teeth. By the time I put all this stuff on my 100-pound body, I could hardly walk. It was clear to me what this meant. There were collisions on the way. Why else would we need all this stuff? And then the first time I carried the ball through the line a guy three times my size close lined me and body slammed me to the ground. It was clear I was not in my yard anymore and I was very thankful for the equipment, including the mouth guard. That's sort of the way it is when you read verses 7-8. The mere mention of a shield is a bit frightening, because you use a shield to parry life-threatening sword

slashes or to block flying arrows. So it's clear danger is present and that danger wants to hurt you. But the good news overwhelms the bad, because God is the shield of the upright.

God's protection takes the form of understanding and wisdom: *Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity—every good way. For wisdom will enter your heart, and moral knowledge will be attractive to you. Discretion will protect you, understanding will guard you* (vv. 9-11). The progression of verbs is important. You first gain understanding of what is right, then wisdom invades your heart (which includes the mind and will) and becomes attractive to you. Knowledge, like practice, is never adequate in and of itself; it must be internalized and embraced. Only then are you truly committed to doing what you know to be right. Only then are you truly secure. It's like prescription medicine. You can know what it's supposed to do and even buy it at the drugstore. But at some point you have to actually take it! Then it does its work and you get better.

As noted above, the reference to the shield (v. 7) implies there is danger out there. Solomon now tells us what that danger looks like: *to deliver you from the way of the wicked, from those speaking perversity, who leave the upright paths to walk on the dark ways, who delight in doing evil, they rejoice in perverse evil; whose paths are morally crooked, and who are devious in their ways* (vv. 12-15). God provides wisdom to shield the upright from evil people whose actions and words are perverse. The Hebrew word translated "perversity" refers to something that has been overturned; the ethics and moral code of the wicked are topsy-turvy.¹⁰ But the scariest thing about them, and what makes it absolutely essential to have God as a shield, is

the fact that they find great delight and joy in doing evil. It gives them a thrill to break the rules and take a moral shortcut, probably because playing outside the lines can be "fun" and it can give one an edge. They're like that charging buffalo herd I described in Zero Week.

Interpretation Note: The shield described here is not a full length body shield, but a smaller shield carried by warriors armed with offensive weapons who needed to have mobility as well as protection. Shields took various shapes; they were made from a variety of materials, including metal, wood, leather, and even braided twigs.⁹

The First Cavalry Regiment needed a "shield" when facing the charge. When Major Sedgwick, not knowing what to do, turned to Captain Sturgis, Sturgis was ready. He quickly moved the men into a tight V shaped formation with the front of the V facing the herd. He put the horses and wagons inside the V. He told the men to fire at a point directly across from the tip of the V; they were going to divide the herd with a continuing volley of lead directed at a single point. For thirty minutes the men fired their Sharp's rifles as fast as they could at that same point. Dead buffalo started to pile up, the herd divided into two streams, and went charging past on the right and left. The regiment was saved because of Sturgis' wise counsel.¹¹ His wisdom was a shield, just as God's wisdom is for us.

In verses 16-19, Solomon gives a concrete example of the kind of morally topsy-turvy person he is talking about—an adulterous, sexually loose woman who delights in seducing and destroying young men. But we will take up that topic later in our study of Proverbs as we address the subjects of marital fidelity and sexuality.

CHAPTER THEME**Controlling Your Temper is a Mark of Godly Wisdom**

- A fool can't control his temper
- Hot-tempered people stir up conflict and self-destruct
- A wise person knows how to defuse the anger of others
- Controlling one's temper is a mark of true strength and wisdom

Selected Proverbs on Anger**Proverbs 14:17:**

A person who has a quick temper does foolish things,
and a person with crafty schemes is hated.

Proverbs 14:29:

The one who is slow to anger has great understanding, but the one who has a quick temper exalts folly.

Proverbs 29:11:

A fool lets fly with all his temper,
but a wise person keeps it back.

"Anger does a man more hurt than that which made him angry."

*- Charles Spurgeon,
John Ploughman's Pictures, 37*

DAY 1:**A fool can't control his temper****OBSERVATION**

1. What type of person produces foolish actions (14:17)?
2. What does a hot-tempered person exalt (14:29)?
3. What does a fool do with his anger (29:11)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does Solomon mean by "foolish things"? (14:17)
2. What does it mean to "exalt" folly? (14:29)
3. What does it mean to "let fly" with anger? (29:11)

APPLICATION

1. Describe someone you've known in the coaching profession who fits the profile of the angry fool as depicted in these proverbs. What made this person so angry? What kind of reputation did this person have among his or her peers?
2. Have you ever struggled with anger in a coaching context? What is at the root of anger? (What causes it? Pride? Fear?)

Selected Proverbs on Anger

Proverbs 15:18:

A quick-tempered person stirs up dissension,
but one who is slow to anger calms a quarrel.

Proverbs 19:19

A person with great anger bears the penalty,
but if you deliver him from it once, you will
have to do it again.

Proverbs 26:21

Like charcoal is to burning coals,
and wood to fire,
so is a contentious person to kindle strife.

Proverbs 29:22

An angry person stirs up dissension,
and a wrathful person is abounding in
transgression.

DAY 2:

Hot-tempered people stir up conflict and self-destruct

OBSERVATION

1. According to 15:18, what does a hot-tempered person do? Proverbs 26:21 compares this to what?
2. According to 29:22, what is a consequence of being hot-tempered?
3. According to 19:19, what is a consequence of being hot-tempered?

INTERPRETATION

1. The comparison in 26:21 suggests what about the hothead's role in a conflict?
2. Proverbs 29:22 refers to "a wrathful person," literally, "an owner of wrath." What does this suggest about the character of such a person?
3. Explain the logic of 19:19. What is the second half of the verse advising? Why?

APPLICATION

1. Has there ever been a time when you stirred up conflict by losing your temper? What were the consequences? Did it cost you a relationship or the respect of others?
2. Describe someone in a coaching situation whose career was ruined by failure to control his or her temper. Why do some people fail to see the consequences of anger until it is too late?

Selected Proverbs on Anger

DAY THREE:

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle response turns away anger,
but a harsh word stirs up wrath.

Proverbs 15:18

A quick-tempered person stirs up dissension,
but one who is slow to anger calms a quarrel.

Proverbs 29:8

Scornful people inflame a city,
but those who are wise turn away wrath.

DAY FOUR:

Proverbs 14:29

The one who is slow to anger has great
understanding,
but the one who has a quick temper exalts folly.

Proverbs 16:32

Better to be slow to anger than to be a mighty
warrior,
and one who controls his temper is better than one
who captures a city.

Proverbs 29:11

A fool lets fly with all his temper,
but a wise person keeps it back.

DAY 3:

A wise person knows how to defuse the anger of others

OBSERVATION

1. Proverbs 15:1 contrasts what two responses to anger? How do they differ?
2. Proverbs 15:18 contrasts what two types of people? How do they differ?
3. Proverbs 29:8 contrasts what two groups of people? How do they differ?

INTERPRETATION

1. What is meant by "turns away" in Proverbs 15:1?
2. What does the order of the statements in Proverbs 15:18 suggest about the power of patience in relation to anger?
3. What is meant by "inflames" in 29:8?

APPLICATION

1. Have you ever calmly turned away anger? Recall the circumstances. Why is it sometimes difficult to resist the urge to answer anger with anger?
2. Have you ever seen someone calm down a group whose anger had been stirred up by a troublemaker? Recall the circumstances. What were the keys to the peacemaker's success?

DAY 4:**Controlling one's temper is a mark of true strength and wisdom****OBSERVATION**

1. According to 14:29, the ability to control one's temper reveals what about a person?
2. According to 16:32, true strength is revealed in what way?
3. According to 29:11, the ability to control one's temper reveals what about a person?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does "understanding" mean in 14:29?
2. What does 16:32 suggest about the power of anger and about the nature of true strength?
3. What does "keeps it back" mean in 29:11? What does the use of this verb imply about the strength of anger?

APPLICATION

1. With God's enablement, how does one develop the strength to control one's anger? Have you known an angry person who changed? What were the keys to this person's transformation?
2. Memorize Proverbs 29:11 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

God's Word teaches:

Controlling your temper is a mark of godly wisdom

- A fool can't control his temper
- Hot-tempered people stir up conflict and self-destruct
- A wise person knows how to defuse the anger of others
- Controlling one's temper is a mark of true strength and wisdom

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

Controlling Your Temper is a Mark of Godly Wisdom

Introduction

Tim Tebow's account of what he experienced from LSU fans the week before Florida's trip to Baton Rouge in 2007 is chilling. One of the thousands of hostile calls and texts he received said this: "Hey, Tim Tebow, you'd better tell your family to stay inside because we're going to find your parents tonight and they're going to end up in serious pain."¹ When the Florida team bus arrived at the stadium, the players and their families were all but mobbed by cursing fans throwing beer cans. It seems as if the words "sportsmanship," "honor," and "respect" have dropped out of the dictionary. All that matters is winning and, if intimidation is needed to win, then do it.

We live in a society filled with conflict. Often behind this conflict is anger. Unfortunately, if you asked people which profession is the angriest of them all, some would say: "Coaches!" Indeed there is a bleep-filled YouTube presentation entitled, "Angry NFL Coaches." There are others entitled "Top 10 Memorable NFL Coaching Rants" and "Coaches Blow Up." From the high school and middle school ranks we find "Angry Coach Beating Football Player" and "8th Grade Coach Gets Angry!" Surely the image of the ranting, abusive coach is a caricature, but some coaches have done their best to make it a profile. Many remember Bobby Knight as the coach who went ballistic and threw a chair across the court, not as the Hall-of-Famer who won three NCAA titles. When the name Woody Hayes is mentioned, many do not think of his accomplishments, but the punch he

threw at a Clemson player that led to Hayes being fired the next morning.

Coaches, like everyone in our tense, win-at-all-costs society, deal with the reality of anger, for they see it all around them and, in the heat of competition, face the temptation to explode in anger. Even worse, they sometimes use anger to motivate players. Joe Ehrmann, in reflecting upon his athletic career, says: "I realized that anger had driven much of my athletic success. Coaches leveraged it--they fired me up and charged me up by angering me. I thought anger was my fuel, but it was really my time bomb. It was driving me into drinking, drugs, and despair."² The proverbs, as one might expect, have something to say about anger and its effects. Bottom line, the proverbs teach that you don't need anger in your arsenal to be successful. In fact, anger is counter productive. We'll see that this is one of those areas where you, as a Christian coach, have to be and can be different. And if you are, you will have an immense positive impact on those watching you. So let's dive in.

Day One: A Fool Can't Control His Temper Proverbs 14:17, 29; 29:11

Before my dad became a Christian, he had a drinking problem and an anger problem (they often go hand in hand). Though I was only about four years old, I still remember a night he got drunk and was so mad at my mother he opened the window and jumped right out it (don't worry, it was on the first floor). I guess he needed some time to get away and cool off! By his own admission, my dad sometimes acted like an angry fool before Jesus saved him (more on that later). Proverbs 14:17a describes such a person this way: *A person who has a quick temper does foolish things*. What kind of foolish things? I'm sure we could all come up with examples from observation and maybe even personal experience,

but what did Solomon have in mind? Solomon was thinking of a person who won't listen to advice, even from a wise parent, but insists on making rash, premature judgments and doing what is right in his own eyes. He loves to quarrel and mock others. He refuses to learn his lesson and even gets angry with God when he suffers the negative consequences of his behavior.³

Worse yet, says Solomon, *the one who has a quick temper exalts folly* (14:29b). The word "exalts" means to lift something up high to a position of prominence, where all can see it. So, at the very least, this means that the hot-tempered person shows off his foolishness; he puts it on public display. But there is more. "Exalts" also suggests that a quick-tempered person values and promotes folly.⁴ The hothead is actually proud of his behavior; it's a badge of honor, perhaps because he misinterprets his angry, foolish tirades as a sign of strength that allows him to intimidate others. He holds it up proudly, like a flag-bearer in an army holds his banner high.

But the angry fool is anything but strong. Actually he's an emotional weakling who has lost complete control. As 29:11 says, *A fool lets fly with his anger*, in contrast to the wise person who shows restraint. He's like a fire hydrant that's lost its lid, spewing water high in the air. Everybody sees it, but nobody wants to go near it. And only the bravest of souls would dare try to put the lid back on. Of course, angry coaches sometimes justify their explosive tirades as designed to produce "discipline." Like a drill sergeant, they're demanding discipline from their players and letting them know that failure to be disciplined will be punished by drawing the disapproval of the coach--a verbal beating and then a seat at the end of the bench. But does the end (discipline) really justify the means? And is anger really, in the end,

a good motivator? Joe Ehrmann says: “Disciplinarians abound at all levels of sports. But here is the irony: Most disciplinarians lack self-discipline . . . They do not take time to contemplate their athletes’ needs and effective ways to truly engage them. They lack the discipline to do the InSideOut work [self-evaluation] required for transformational coaching [designed to benefit the athlete, not pad the resume of the coach].”⁵

Angry people sometimes pass off their anger with something like, “Well, that’s just the way I am.” But anger cannot be pushed aside so flippantly. The Bible warns against anger from cover to cover. It’s what Bible scholars might call a “persistent theme,” sort of like a steady bass beat that just won’t go away. For example, James 1:19-20 says: *Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. For human anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness.* Jealous anger prompted Cain to murder his brother Abel (Gen. 4:5). Jesus warned that anger is one step away from murder in the sight of God (Matt. 5:21-22). After warning Christians that we must not grieve the Spirit living within us, Paul urges us: “*You must put away every kind of bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and evil, slanderous talk*” (Eph. 4:30-31).

Day Two: Hot-tempered people stir up conflict and self-destruct

Proverbs 15:18; 26:21;
29:22; 19:19

When quick-tempered people decide to vent their anger, they are like a speeding car out of control—a collision is inevitable. Hotheads do not promote peace and harmony.

Because they are quick to take offense and verbally abuse others, they have the uncanny ability to start fights. Proverbs 15:18 states it this way: *A quick-tempered person stirs up dissension.* The phrase “quick-tempered person” in Hebrew is literally, “a man of heat.” “Heat” is used here of the emotions, as in our expressions “hothead” and “hot-tempered.” The word “dissension” refers to conflict and quarreling. Hot-tempered people love to argue. In fact, Proverbs 26:21 compares a quarrelsome person to charcoal or kindling that keeps a fire hot: *Like charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious person to kindle strife.* Anger fuels the fire of conflict.

While hotheads have a negative impact on everyone they meet, in the end they hurt themselves more than they do others. Proverbs 29:22, after repeating 15:18a, says: *and a wrathful person is abounding in transgression.* The Hebrew expression translated “wrathful person” means literally, “owner of wrath.” The angry person is not just someone who flares up occasionally. Angry people actually take ownership of anger, just as one owns an ox (Exod. 21:28), a cistern (Exod. 21:34), or a house (Exod. 22:8). They possess it; it belongs to them in that it characterizes them and is an essential part of their personality.

My dog is very territorial; she will, every time, bark and go ballistic if she senses someone is in our front yard or in the alley behind our house. It’s who she is; she’s wired to bark at strangers. In fact, she gets so irritated she’ll pick up a tennis ball and shake it violently, acting out what she’d like to do to the intruder. In the same way, angry people are wired to lose their cool anytime someone violates their standards or their rights or their space, etc. Anger is itself a “transgression,” a violation of God’s moral standards. But it inevitably

leads to other sins, often of a violent nature. According to Proverbs 14:29a, *the one who is slow to anger has great understanding* (literally, he is “abounding in understanding”), but 15:18 says the hothead is “abounding” in just the opposite, sin.

Interpretation Note: Proverbs 29:11 reads literally, “all his spirit (or breath) a fool brings out.” Fox observes, “The image is of the angry man expelling his breath in a storm of words.”⁶ A fool is unable or unwilling to suppress the emotions that stir within his inner spirit. He can’t hold his anger in, so he vents and spews it out for all to see. As McKane says, “the fool is the slave of impulse.”⁷

Of course, in God’s world sinners are not allowed to rebel with impunity. Eventually there is a price to pay. Proverbs 19:19 speaks of this: *A person with great anger bears the penalty, but if you deliver him from it once, you will have to do it again.* The word “penalty” refers to a fine exacted by a court of law. When hotheads explode, they do damage to property and to people. Society, through its court system, demands that they pay the price. Worse yet, because their anger has become so ingrained, hotheads have to learn their lesson the hard way. It makes no sense to bail them out. They need to experience the full consequences of their behavior. If you soften the blow for them, you’ll just end up having to do it again.

Sometimes the consequences of anger can be very self-destructive. When I was eighteen years old, I had a cocky teammate on my American Legion baseball team named John. He was always ready to argue and fight. In fact, at the end of one game he belted a guy on the other team and started a bench-clearing brawl. My father (who knew what anger

can do to a person) warned John that if he did not get control of his rage, it would consume him and he would someday kill someone. Not too many years later, John did indeed commit murder in a moment of anger and he ended up serving a life sentence. That's what angry people do—they start fights and hurt people, especially themselves.

Hopefully none of us would ever let anger go to such an extreme. But in the heat of competition, there is always a danger that anger will get the best of a player or a coach. And, as the examples of Hayes and Knight remind us, the price of uncontrolled anger can be a job or a career, as well as a tarnished legacy.

Day Three: A wise person knows how to defuse the anger of others

Proverbs 15:1, 18; 29:8

While Proverbs warns us about the dangers of uncontrolled anger, it also gives advice on how to respond to the anger of others. When others direct their anger toward us, how should we react? It's tempting in such cases to respond in anger, but "fighting fire with fire" doesn't really work in human relationships. It just runs the risk of starting a wild fire that spreads out of control and destroys everything in its path. There is a better way. Proverbs 15:1 says: *A gentle response turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.* "Turns away" pictures anger approaching, but then turning around and retreating. The Hebrew word is used here of driving someone back by force or reversing a movement, as an army would do to another army. Anger can be like a blitzing linebacker; you would think that great counter force would be necessary to turn it back. But ironically the great counter force in this case is gentleness! John Wooden

may have had this proverb in mind when he said: "There is nothing stronger than gentleness."⁸ Though it may seem counter-intuitive, a gentle, patient response can defeat anger.

Indeed, as Proverbs 15:18 says, *A quick-tempered person stirs up dissension, but the one who is slow to anger calms a quarrel.* The verb translated "stirs up" is used elsewhere of starting and fighting a battle; it pictures aggressive action. It's as if the hothead starts a mini-war. The verb "calms" is used elsewhere of causing conflict to cease and of bringing peace to a land. The calm person brings an end to the mini-war.

The order of the statements in this verse is telling. Angry people may appear to be strong, because they are forceful and try to use their anger to intimidate. However, the proverb suggests that the patient person has greater power than the angry one, for he is able to stop the fight that the hothead started.⁹ It's as if the calm person is armed with a fire hose that he unloads on the fire started by the hothead. Proverbs 29:8 pictures a similar situation: *Scornful people inflame a city, but those who are wise turn away wrath.* Scornful people are know-it-alls that use half-truths and lies to stir up public anger (note the reference to a "city"). Public anger, because it often feeds off runaway emotion and prejudice, can easily explode into mob violence. The Hebrew verb translated "inflames" here literally means "blow out, exhale." They breathe out inflammatory words; it's as if their breath supplies the wind that fans the fire. But the wise are able, through reason and truth, to defuse such anger. Once again, that verb "turn away" appears (see the discussion of 15:1 above).

I was reminded of

the power of a "gentle response" a couple of years ago, when I got pulled over by a state trooper. Distracted by a careless driver ahead of me, I failed to see that the trooper had turned his signal on and wanted me to pull off the road. When I finally pulled over and rolled down my window, he lit into me with an angry, insulting verbal broadside. My wife was afraid he might shoot me! I doubted he would go that far, but a solid beating seemed like a real possibility. Not knowing why he pulled me over, I simply pled ignorance and offered a gentle, heartfelt apology. When I answered calmly and humbly, the wind went out of his sails. He explained that I was going a little too fast for that stretch of road, gave me a warning, and, by the end of the conversation, was asking me about my family and wishing me the best. My pride had told me to yell back and defend my honor, but wisdom won out inside me, and I drove off a much happier man than if I had given into the rage surging inside me as a result of this officer's abuse of his authority.

*"Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
for God hath made them so;
But, children, you should never let
Such angry passions rise;
Your little hands were never made
To tear each other's eyes."*

- Isaac Watts,

Against Quarreling and Fighting, 1715

WEEK 3 Selected Proverbs on Anger - Study Notes

Day Four: Controlling one's temper is a mark of true strength and wisdom

Proverbs 14:29; 16:32; 29:11

My favorite sports movie, *Hoosiers*, is a story about second chances. Norman Dale had lost his coaching job because of anger, born out of a strong competitive desire to win at all costs. Overcome by rage, he had punched one of his own players and been banned from coaching. He is given a second chance to coach many years later in a small high school in rural Indiana. When his anger threatens to get the best of him again, a few people show some faith in him, he learns to control his anger, and changes. By the end of the movie, he has won the state championship, but his greatest victory has been learning to control his temper and to give priority to character, not winning.

The proverbs teach that controlling one's temper is a mark of true strength and wisdom. Proverbs 14:29 says: *One who controls his temper has great understanding.* The Hebrew word translated "understanding" refers to "good sense" or "know how."¹⁰ It is the practical side of wisdom that understands what works in life and what doesn't. Wise people understand, from common sense and experience, that losing your temper is counter productive and brings nothing but resentment, conflict, and destroyed relationships. They understand that true strength is inner strength. As we've stated above, angry people think anger is an expression of strength; they attempt to use anger to intimidate others and get their way. But the wise know better. Proverbs 16:32 says: *Better to be slow to anger than to be a mighty warrior; and one who controls his temper is better than one who captures a city.* Clifford captures the

idea: "Conquest of self is better than conquest of others"¹¹. In addition to defining true strength for us, this proverb also reminds us how powerful anger is. In comparison to controlling one's anger, capturing a city is mere "child's play."¹² But the wise are able to do so, as Proverbs 29:11 says: *A fool lets fly with all his temper; but a wise person keeps it back.* The Hebrew verb translated "keeps back" is a rare one. It is used only here and in two other passages (Pss. 65:7; 89:9), where it describes how God's power can calm the raging sea and its surging waves. In other words, this verb describes a mighty act of strength that is able to suppress a powerful force. This implies just how powerful anger is, but it also vividly pictures the inner strength of the wise.¹³ It's as if the wise person has within him an anti-ballistic missile system that counters the weapons fired by our sinful nature.

Anger is so powerful one wonders how anyone can control it. We know from the New Testament that God alone is the source of that kind of power. He provides it to his people through the gift of the indwelling Spirit, which all who trust in Christ as their Savior receive the moment they believe. As Paul says, "outbursts of anger" are one of the "works of the flesh," but "self-control" is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:20, 23). So by the grace of God and his indwelling Spirit, we can develop the inner strength we need to "keep it back." I know, because I saw my father change after he trusted in Jesus as his savior. He had grown up

with an angry father, angry uncles, and an angry grandfather who all drank too much. But Jesus began to change him as he delivered him from alcohol. I remember my father saying to my brother and me, "We have an anger and drinking problem in our family that goes back as far as anyone can remember. God is changing me and I expect you boys, by God's grace, to get this disease out of our family once and for all." My brother and I are sure not perfect, but we don't drink and God has helped us to combat anger. We haven't arrived, but we're making progress.

Coach, be honest with yourself. Do you struggle with anger? If so, admit it, get some help from trusted friends and/or counselors, and, most importantly, allow God's Spirit to transform you. Freedom from anger will lower your blood pressure, prolong your life, and begin to heal the strained relationships that inevitably haunt and afflict the angry. If you've used anger as a coaching "tool," consider tossing that outdated weapon in the trash and think seriously about switching to some more up-to-date methods that, in addition to being far more efficient, do not violate God's standards and reflect who you are in Christ.

TRUE COACHING STORY

After my first year in a new school, there was a young man in tenth grade who seemed to always stay in trouble. He seemed to be angry at life. We had to kick him off the team because of repeated rules violations. Throughout his junior year, we kept lifting him up in prayer in our coaches Bible study. Without any of us knowing it, each coach was reaching out to him in a special way. He ended up coming out for football his senior year with a new attitude and Christ in his heart. He finished his career with a state championship and a new outlook on life. This would not have been possible without the love of Christ and Coaches Outreach.

WEEK 4

God opposes pride and rewards humility

God opposes pride and rewards humility

- Pride produces conflict and prevents unity
- God hates pride
- Pride goes before a fall
- God rewards humility

Selected Proverbs on Pride and Humility

Proverbs 13:10

With pride comes only contention,
but wisdom is with the well-advised.

Proverbs 21:24

A proud and arrogant person,
whose name is 'Scoffer,'
acts with overbearing pride.

Proverbs 30:11-14

(11) There is a generation who curse their fathers
and do not bless their mothers.

(12) There is a generation who are pure in their own
eyes

and yet are not washed from their filthiness.

(13) There is a generation whose eyes are so lofty,
and whose eyelids are lifted up disdainfully.

(14) There is a generation whose teeth are like
swords

and whose molars are like knives

to devour the poor from the earth

and the needy from among the human race.

"The focus of health in the soul is humility, while the root of inward corruption is pride. In the spiritual life, nothing stands still. If we are not constantly growing downward into humility, we shall be steadily swelling up and running to seed under the influence of pride."

- J. I. Packer

DAY 1:

Pride produces conflict and prevents unity

OBSERVATION

1. According to 13:10, what does pride produce?

2. What name does 21:24 give to the proud?

3. How are the proud described in 30:13?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does the contrast in 13:10 (note the second line) suggest about pride?

2. Why is the name "Scoffer" (21:24) appropriate for the proud?

3. What does the statement "eyelids are lifted up" mean (30:13)?

APPLICATION

1. Based on how these verses describe pride, why is it so detrimental to teamwork and success? Think of an example from your experience where a coach's or player's pride produced conflict. What kind of impact did this have on the team?

WEEK 4

Achieving Success God's Way: A Study on Proverbs

Selected Proverbs on Pride and Humility

Proverbs 3:34:

Although he [God] is scornful to arrogant scoffers, yet he shows favor to the humble.

Proverbs 6:16-19:

(16) There are six things that the LORD hates, even seven things that are an abomination to him:

(17) haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

(18) a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift to run to evil,

(19) a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who spreads discord among family members.

Proverbs 8:13:

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
I [Wisdom speaking on God's behalf] hate the arrogant pride and the evil way and perverse utterances.

TRUE COACHING STORY

A senior four-year starter and fine young Christian, as well as our best baseball player, was called upon to finish a tight playoff game in relief of our starting pitcher. He had filled this role all season for our team. Unfortunately, he had a very bad night on the mound, we were unable to hold our lead, lost the game, and were knocked out of the playoffs. I knew that he was extremely disappointed, and prayed during the hour-long bus ride home for the right words to say to him. When we arrived home, I reminded him that his worth as a person would never be decided by athletic performance, but rather by his character; and that I was blessed to have the opportunity to be his coach. How grateful I am to have the ministry of coaching, and how blessed I am that young Christians impact my life as much or more than I impact theirs.

DAY 2:

God hates pride

OBSERVATION

1. In 6:16-19 what is mentioned first in the list of what God hates?

2. According to 8:13, what does Wisdom (the speaker here) hate?

3. According to 3:34, how does God respond to the proud?

INTERPRETATION

1. Why is "haughty eyes" put first in the list in 6:16-19? (Hint: Is it the starting point for the other things that are in the list? Explain.)

2. How is pride related to the two other things that Wisdom hates (8:13)?

3. How is God's treatment of the proud appropriate (3:34)?

APPLICATION

1. How can knowing that God hates pride motivate us to avoid it? How can you communicate God's hatred of pride to young athletes without sounding "preachy"?

WEEK 4

God opposes pride and rewards humility

Selected Proverbs on Pride and Humility

DAY THREE:

Proverbs 11:2:

When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.

Proverbs 15:25:

The LORD tears down the house of the proud,
but he maintains the boundaries of the widow.

Proverbs 16:5, 18

(5) The LORD abhors every arrogant person;
rest assured that they will not go unpunished.
(18) Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 18:12

Before destruction the heart of a person is proud,
but humility comes before honor.

Proverbs 29:23

A person's pride will bring him low,
but one who has a lowly spirit will gain honor.

DAY FOUR:

Proverbs 15:33

The fear of the LORD provides wise instruction,
and before honor comes humility.

Proverbs 16:19

It is better to be lowly in spirit with the afflicted,
than to share the spoils with the proud.

Proverbs 22:4; 27:2

(22:4) The reward for humility and fearing the LORD
is riches and honor and life.
(27:2) Let another praise you, and not your own
mouth;
someone else, and not your own lips.

DAY 3:

Pride goes before a fall

OBSERVATION

1. What eventually happens to the proud (16:18; 18:12)?
2. What does the Lord do to the proud (15:25)?
3. What is the Lord's attitude toward the proud (16:5)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What is meant by "destruction" (16:18; 18:12)?
2. What does it mean to "tear down the house of the proud" (15:25)?
3. What is the logical relationship between the two statements in 16:5?

APPLICATION

1. How can you communicate today's principle ("pride goes before a fall") to young athletes? How should awareness of this principle impact the way you coach?

WEEK 4

Achieving Success God's Way: A Study on Proverbs

DAY 4:

God rewards humility

OBSERVATION

1. According to the proverbs listed for day four, what are the rewards for humility?
2. What is better than sharing wealth with the proud (16:19)?
3. In 15:33 and 22:4 with what is humility associated?

INTERPRETATION

1. In what way are the contrasting destinies of the proud and humble surprising or unexpected? (See 11:2; 18:12; 29:23.)
2. Explain the reasoning of 16:19. How does the proverb emphasize the importance of humility?
3. How does the fear of the Lord (15:33; 22:4) make one humble?

APPLICATION

1. How should awareness of today's principle ("God rewards humility") impact the way you coach? In the coaching profession what do God's rewards look like?
2. Memorize Proverbs 27:2 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

God's Word teaches:

God opposes pride and rewards humility

- Pride produces conflict and prevents unity
- God hates pride
- Pride goes before a fall
- God rewards humility

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

WEEK 4 Selected Proverbs on Pride/Humility - Study Notes

Winning Wisdom

God Opposes Pride and Rewards Humility

Introduction

Miami, FL; July 9, 2010: Fans of the Heat were celebrating the arrival of LeBron James and Chris Bosh to join forces with Dwayne Wade. Pat Riley and the Heat organization set up the event, which amounted to a coronation of the trio as NBA champs before they had even played a game together. An Associated Press story describes it this way: “With 13,000 fans chanting ‘Yes We Did!’ Friday amid an atmosphere more suited to an awards show or rock concert than a basketball game, the Miami Heat put on a celebration unlike just about any other in team history. James, Heat favorite Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh all arrived accompanied by plumes of smoke, lifted into the air on a forklift for their grand arrival. ‘It’s still surreal, man,’ Wade said earlier. ‘Me, Chris and ‘Bron. We ready. We want to go to the gym now.’ Wade was in the middle as the trio was lifted skyward for the entrance — Bosh on his right, James on his left. Bosh pointed to the fans and screamed, while Wade aimed his index fingers at the crowd and James strutted about to the fans’ delight. The ‘Three Kings,’ Heat broadcaster Eric Reid called them as the program got under way.”¹

Now turn the clock back half a century—October 1, 1961; Yankee Stadium, Bronx, NY. Boston pitcher Tracy Stallard throws a low, inside fastball and Roger Maris drives it into the right field stands to become the first major leaguer to hit 61 home runs in a season, breaking Babe Ruth’s record. Maris jogs calmly around the bases, head down. He shakes Yogi Berra’s hand

as he crosses the plate and makes his way directly to the dugout, where his teammates insist he tip his cap to the roaring fans before they allow him to enter. Maris does so, sheepishly with a slight smile. Boston third baseman Frank Malzone describes the scene this way: “Roger Maris was a gentleman. He wasn’t jumping up in the air, he was just taking his regular stride.” When Roger arrived in the dugout, he walked its length, went up to teary-eyed batboy Fred Bengis, put his hands on the boy’s shoulders, and said: “We did it, Freddy. We did it.”² You see, Roger and Fred were friends. Fred describes Roger this way: “Roger and Bobby Richardson were the nicest players I ever met. I’d sit in front of Roger’s locker in the mornings and give him a piece of devil’s food cake, and we’d talk about baseball and everything else for the half hour he dressed for batting practice.”³ Roger Maris, America’s superstar in 1961, took a half hour every day to chat with a teenage boy.

We all know pride and humility when we see them. Deep down, pride repulses us; humility attracts us. Our innate response to both reflects the image of God that we all possess. God knows pride and humility when he sees them. He hates pride, but honors humility. Athletes know about pride. After all, most think the whole point of competition is to win and prove you’re better than someone else. But, coach, you know that’s not really why God has put you in your strategic role as a leader of young men and women. It’s not really about trophies and banners. God wants you to stand out from the crowd and show fellow coaches, players, and fans what humility looks like. Both the opportunity and the challenge are great. Proverbs has something to say to us.

Day One: Pride produces conflict and prevents unity

Proverbs 13:10;
21:24; 30:11-14

It was called The Feud. During the off-season following the Eagles’ Super Bowl loss in 2004, Terrell Owens verbally attacked his teammate, Donovan McNabb, blaming him for the defeat. As the 2005 season approached, the two were not on speaking terms. McNabb said that Owens was concerned about “money and power” and that he wanted to outdo McNabb and be “the face of the team.” The feud eventually divided the team, ruining its chemistry and its potential to win a championship. It reached its lowest point when an angry Owens started a fight in the team’s training room with Hugh Douglas, the team ambassador, and issued a general challenge to any of his teammates to duke it out with him.⁴ A desire for money and power? We all know that’s just a symptom of a proud heart. And when pride really starts to drive a person, conflict is inevitable.

Solomon puts it this way: *With pride comes only contention, but wisdom is with the well-advised* (Prov. 13:10). A wise person is open to advice from others, knowing that he or she does not have all the answers. But a proud person’s know-it-all attitude inevitably leads to conflict with others. When proud people lock horns, bravado and name-calling take over. Solomon describes it this way: *A proud and arrogant person, whose name is “Scoffer,” acts with overbearing pride* (Prov. 21:24). The phrase translated “overbearing pride” might be better stated, “angry arrogance.” Proud people fly off the handle easily and can be insolent, which the dictionary defines as “disrespectfully arrogant.” “Scoffer” is an appropriate

name for them, because they are quick to insult and demean others as stupid and incompetent. As Fox says, “The bloated and hypersensitive ego of the arrogant man gives him a hair-trigger temper. Seeing affronts everywhere, he easily explodes in rage.”⁵

Unfortunately, we live in a time when it’s almost in vogue to be insolent—to strut your stuff, proclaim your superiority, and verbally rip others to shreds with put downs. A wise man named Agur recognized that entire generations can sometimes be contaminated with arrogance: *There is a generation who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers. There is a generation who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation whose eyes are so lofty, and whose eyelids are lifted up disdainfully. There is a generation whose teeth are like swords and whose molars are like knives to devour the poor from the earth and the needy from among the human race* (Prov. 30:11-14). One generation, not four, is in view here.⁷ This proud generation has no respect for authority, not even their mother and father (v. 11). They are “pure in their own eyes,” even though they are covered with moral “filthiness” (v. 12). In other words, they justify their behavior and refuse to admit they are corrupt.

Verse 13 pictures their pride. They hold their heads up high so that their eyes are “lofty” and their eyelids are “lifted up.” We would say that they look down their noses at others. They are like wild animals with sharp teeth; they have no pity and will exploit the poor for their own gain. Fox observes that an entire generation “becomes infested by evil” and “the contamination spreads to families and infects individual attitudes.”⁸ Agur could easily be describing our world. As celebrities, including athletes, display pride, it filters down through our media-

saturated culture to the high school, middle school, and even elementary school levels. Children begin to copy their heroes. There is nothing more disgusting than to see a child trash talking or gesturing arrogantly during a youth or high school game. If you’re coaching at this level, you have an opportunity to stem the tide and be a model of humility and class. As Joe Ehrmann says: “Outside of parenting there might not be a better platform than coaching to transform boys and girls into healthy and thriving men and women. A coach’s responsibilities include helping young people to confront and comprehend the toxic culture that is trying to seduce and shape them.”⁹ You have an opportunity to teach young people that pride produces conflict and resentment and threatens to tear apart teams, families, and society. You also have the God-given privilege to show them what the opposite, genuine humility, looks like.

Day Two: God hates pride

Proverbs 3:34; 6:16-19; 8:13

When I hear the words, “God hates,” I sit up and take notice. I definitely want to know what follows those words. It sounds important! I don’t want to be associated in any way with what God hates. In the proverbs we discover that one of the things God hates, perhaps the thing he hates most, is pride. In fact, we get a list of seven things God hates in Proverbs 6:16-19: *There are six things that the LORD hates, even seven things that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift to run to evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who spreads discord among family members.* The things the Lord hates are called an “abomination”—this is strong language, used elsewhere for things the Lord

absolutely abhors, like idolatry and child sacrifice. Right at the top of the list is “haughty eyes.” This is a way of saying, “A proud look.” A proud person’s arrogant attitude shows in his demeanor, reflected in his eyes. Because they’re at the top of the list, the “haughty eyes” of the proud are

Interpretation Note: A “scoffer” is mentioned several times in Proverbs. His most basic characteristic, as we see in 21:24, is excessive pride. This shows itself in two main ways: (1) He rejects advice or correction from others, because he views himself as superior to them. (2) Because he thinks others are inferior, he looks down his nose at them, criticizes them, and even mocks (“scoffs at”) them and makes fun of them.⁶

especially repugnant to God. But when one examines the rest of this list, this is a bit confusing, because the things mentioned after this seem a lot worse—lying, murdering, giving false testimony in court, and trying to destroy families. But pride is basic to these other actions. At a fundamental level, a proud person gives priority to his own desires and places them above the well-being of others. As Waltke observes, the proud demonstrate “a denial of the LORD’s authority . . . and a disregard for human rights. Arrogance means self-exaltation over another person and violates the fundamentally equal honor of each individual.”¹⁰

As if to emphasize his hatred of pride, God states it once more in 8:13: *The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; I hate arrogant pride and the evil way and perverse utterances.* Here Wisdom, pictured as a woman (see the interpretation note for week two, day one), is speaking, but God is the reality behind Wisdom. Wisdom speaks for him. In this proverb arrogant pride is associated with “the evil way,”

Interpretation Note: There are several proverbs structured like 6:16-17. The first line gives a number (in this case, six) and the topic (in this case, things that the LORD hates), while the second line increases the number by one (in this case, seven) and repeats the topic. A list of items then follows, corresponding to the higher number.

or wrong actions, and “perverse utterances,” or immoral speech. The Hebrew word translated “perverse” refers to what is overturned. Here it describes speech that is morally topsy-turvy. The proud person scoffs at others, perverting God’s design for the human tongue. It is no surprise then that God scorns proud scoffers: *Although he is scornful to arrogant scoffers, yet he shows favor to the humble* (3:34). The Hebrew actually reads, “he scoffs at the scoffers.” This might seem as if God is lowering himself to their behavior, but in his capacity as Judge he is giving them what they deserve.¹¹ It’s like when a bully is picking on a little kid and then the little kid’s big brother shows up and gives the bully some of his own medicine! This is simple justice and the other little kids do not criticize the big brother; they cheer for him because they feel as if they have an advocate.

Day Three: Pride goes before a fall

Proverbs 11:2; 15:25; 16:5,
18; 18:12; 29:23

Who can ever forget the photos of a triumphant Muhammad Ali standing over the fallen Cleveland Williams and taunting him? Muhammad Ali was a favorite of many, in some ways the poster child of the 1960’s. Ali was brash and arrogant; he scoffed at opponents both inside and outside the ring. His main weapons, in addition to his lightning quick hands, were his equally quick feet, which, at the

heavyweight level, made him an almost unhittable moving target, and his equally quick tongue, which he used to intimidate his opponents and rob them of confidence. It’s ironic and tragic that today “the Louisville Lip,” ravaged by a debilitating disease, can barely walk and barely talk. Of course, no one can know for certain if this is God’s judgment and it would be presumptuous to say that it is, but the Bible does teach that in God’s world pride goes before a fall. Several proverbs state that clearly: (1) *When pride comes, then comes disgrace* (11:2a), (2) *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall* (16:18), (3) *Before destruction the heart of a person is proud* (18:12a), (4) *A person’s pride will bring him low* (29:23a). These proverbs don’t pull any punches; all the proud have to look forward to are disgrace, destruction, and a fall. The word translated “destruction” is used elsewhere of an arm or leg being broken; it pictures the proud being shattered.

Most understand the famous saying, “pride goes before a fall,” to mean that a person’s self-confidence causes him to become complacent, making him vulnerable and setting him up for defeat. The sports world certainly provides many examples of this—we usually call them “upsets.” But the ultimate reason why pride goes before a fall is because God hates pride, opposes the proud, and makes them fall! Proverbs 15:25 says: *The LORD tears down the house of the proud*. The “house” of the proud refers to his stability, including his property, wealth, and family.¹² The Hebrew verb translated “tears down” has more the idea of violently removing something than demolishing it. The proud won’t just be in a pile of rubble; they’ll be gone. They won’t just be flattened by divine judgment, but swept away, kind of like when a tornado scatters debris all over the countryside. Proverbs 16:5 gets to the root of the issue: *The LORD abhors every*

arrogant person; rest assured that they will not go unpunished. The logic is clear. Because the Lord abhors the arrogant, he will not let them overrun his world. They will be punished in due time. To use an example, it’s not just a case of a drug lord getting careless, selling to an officer in plain clothes, and getting himself arrested. No, God is the head of the vice squad who plans the sting and he is the judge who sends the criminal to prison. The sovereign God actively promotes the destruction of the proud. He may directly and swiftly intervene or he may orchestrate the slow, steady self-destruction of the proud. But either way, he’s in charge, calling the shots, and overseeing the fall of the proud.

Day Four: God rewards humility

Proverbs 3:34; 11:2; 15:33;
16:19; 18:12; 22:4; 27:2;
29:23

During the 2011 season Tim Tebow became the talk of the NFL. Despite heavy criticism from some, he may be the most popular player in the league. Why is that? Many Christians view him as their poster child, due to his unabashed faith and commitment to moral values. They want their children to grow up to be like Tim. Some appreciate his genuine sincerity and positive attitude. I think I am most impressed by his humility. When the press tries to bait him into talking about himself or criticizing others, he simply praises his Lord, his coaches, and his teammates. This is not by accident. Tim explains: “My parents decided that, with three boys around the house who were as competitive as we were, we had to institute a new rule. I was still young, and they were already concerned about the bragging that we were doing among ourselves. Here was the rule: we were forbidden from talking about

our own accomplishments, unless first asked by someone else. If someone specifically asked us how the game went or how we played, we could answer, we couldn't volunteer the information." His parents based this rule on Proverbs 27:2: *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips*. Tim says: "It was a great lesson for us toward living our lives with a humble spirit, a lesson we needed to learn and continue to work on." His parents even rewarded Tim and his brothers monetarily when someone complimented the boys on their character. Tim says: "We quickly became focused on those matters—such as character and humility—rather than on trying to impress someone with our exploits on or off the field."¹³

As Proverbs 27:2 says, God takes notice of humility and rewards it. Several proverbs teach this: (1) *Although he [God] is scornful to arrogant scoffers, yet he shows favor to the humble* (3:34), (2) *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom* (11:2), (3) *The fear of the LORD provides wise instruction, and before honor comes humility* (15:33), (4) *Before destruction the heart of a person is proud, but humility comes before honor* (18:12), (5) *The reward for humility and fearing the LORD is riches and honor and life* (22:4), (6) *A person's pride will bring him low, but one who has a lowly spirit will gain honor* (29:23).

The rewards of humility are God's favor, wisdom, and especially honor, which is mentioned in four of these passages. The contrast between the proud and the humble is ironic; the end result is unexpected. The proud exalt themselves, only to end up fallen, while the humble, who refuse to exalt themselves, end up being honored by God. Sometimes this honor takes the form of material

prosperity and security (22:4), but this is not the goal of humility. In fact, Proverbs 16:19 makes it clear that humility is much more important than material prosperity: *It is better to be lowly in spirit with the afflicted than to share the spoils with the proud*. There are two sets of opposites here: (1) the humble (lowly in spirit) and the proud, and (2) the afflicted and the prosperous (who are sharing the spoils of victory). Most are concerned about the second category—they want material wealth and would not want to live among the poor ("afflicted"). After all, wealth makes you somebody. Driven by their pride, some will do whatever it takes to get wealth. But this is wrong-headed because the second category is not what is most important in life. One's attitude is what really matters, and, if forced to choose between humility and wealth, you should pick humility, even if it comes with affliction, because God hates pride.

"Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil's reach as humility."

- Jonathan Edwards

But what is at the heart of humility? What produces it? Two of the proverbs quoted above hold the key. In both 15:33 and 22:4 humility is closely associated with "the fear of the LORD." Do a careful anatomical probing of humility and you will find that what makes it tick is the fear of the Lord. Why? When you recognize the Lord's greatness you know he is the ultimate authority to which we must bow. When you recognize the Lord's goodness you know that any talent you possess or accomplishments you achieve are made possible by his grace and generosity. Many star athletes act as if their ability really comes from them and they soak in the adoration of their fans as if they really believe they are mini-gods. But who gave them their genetic coding? Who

ultimately gave them the ability to perform well? God, of course, but so few recognize this. And the few who do dare to thank God publicly for their ability, like Tim Tebow, get accused by some of being self-righteous and preachy. Our society's idolizing of its heroes and its heroes' self-worship are just the symptoms of a serious, fatal disease—rejection of the one true God. As he looks down from heaven, he must be angered by what he sees, because he is the only one worthy of worship. He refuses to share his glory with anyone else (Isa. 42:8) and will ultimately destroy all the fake, puny gods who dare to receive what only he deserves. This idol worship would not happen if people truly feared God. When we have a healthy respect for the sovereign creator, we will melt in humility before him, recognizing that we are nothing before and apart from him.

Charles Spurgeon said that humility is "a correct estimate of ourselves."¹⁴ Indeed, a proper view of self in relation to God is the key to humility. As a coach, you have the great privilege and challenge to counter what we see all around us in this idolatrous society. You get to use your platform, as a respected coach and leader, to honor God. You also have the opportunity to remind young athletes where their ability truly comes from, and you get to encourage them to be grateful to their Creator and to show their gratitude by using their platform as a way to honor him. And athletes always have a platform; it may not be as big as Tim Tebow's, but they can have an impact in their corner of the world on their peers and the younger kids who look up to them. When their fans look up to them, athletes need to make sure that they direct the eyes of their fans to the One who sits in the heavens above.

WEEK 5

The wise control their tongue and use it to encourage others

The wise control their tongue and use it to encourage others

- The wise think before they speak
- Well-chosen words can do a lot of good
- Poorly chosen words can do a lot of harm
- God opposes those who use words to hurt and exploit others

Selected Proverbs on the Use of the Tongue

Proverbs 10:19, 32:

(19) When words abound, transgression is inevitable, but the one who restrains his words is wise.

(32) The lips of the righteous know what is pleasing, but the speech of the wicked is perverse.

Proverbs 13:3:

The one who guards his words guards his life, but whoever is talkative will come to ruin.

Proverbs 15:2:

The tongue of the wise treats knowledge correctly, but the mouth of the fool spouts out folly.

Proverbs 17:27-28:

(27) The truly wise person restrains his words, and the one who stays calm is discerning.

(28) Even a fool who remains silent is considered wise, and the one who holds his tongue is deemed discerning.

Proverbs 18:13:

The one who gives an answer before he listens--that is folly and his shame.

Proverbs 21:23:

The one who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps his life from troubles.

Proverbs 29:20

Do you see someone who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

DAY 1:

The wise think before they speak

OBSERVATION

1. What do 10:32 and 15:2 say about a fool's speech?
2. What are the dangers of talking too much? (See 10:19; 13:3.)
3. What do 18:13 and 29:20 say about a hasty response?

INTERPRETATION

1. According to 10:32 and 15:2, what does a person's speech reveal about his/her inner character?
2. What is meant here by transgression (10:19) and ruin (13:3)?
3. What is the point that 29:20 is making?

APPLICATION

1. Think of an example from your coaching experience where hasty words got you into trouble? What caused you to be hasty? How could you have handled the situation differently? What are some practical ways a coach can cultivate "speech control"?

Selected Proverbs on the Use of the Tongue**Proverbs 10:11, 21:**

(11) The teaching of the righteous is a fountain of life,
but the speech of the wicked conceals violence.
(21) The teaching of the righteous feeds many,
but fools die for lack of wisdom.

Proverbs 12:18:

Speaking recklessly is like the thrusts of a sword,
but the words of the wise bring healing.

Proverbs 15:4:

Speech that heals is like a life-giving tree,
but a perverse tongue breaks the spirit.

Proverbs 16:24:

Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 25:11-12:

(11) Like apples of gold in settings of silver,
so is a word skillfully spoken.
(12) Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold,
so is a wise reproof to the ear of the one who listens.

TRUE COACHING STORY

"All week I had been telling my long distance girls in practice that our track meet was on my birthday. I joked with them that they had to win for my birthday. During the 2400m race, our number one girl was struggling. She wasn't feeling very well. She was about 100m behind the leader starting the final lap. She started catching up. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a race to the finish. She won the race. I was so proud of how hard she ran. I went over to her and before I could say anything, she said: 'Happy birthday, Coach.' All I could do was cry and hold her in my arms. I will never forget that moment."

DAY 2:**Well-chosen words can do a lot of good****OBSERVATION**

1. In 10:11 to what are the words of the righteous compared?
2. According to 12:18 and 16:24, what do wise and pleasant words produce?
3. To what does 25:11-12 compare wise words of correction?

INTERPRETATION

1. How do the words of the righteous give life (10:11)?
2. Explain how wise and pleasant words heal (12:18; 15:4; 16:24)?
3. What do the comparisons in 25:11-12 suggest about wise words of correction?

APPLICATION

1. Think of a time when someone corrected you with just the right words. Why were these words effective? What are some ways that you as a coach can speak wise words of correction to an athlete without causing anger and resentment?

WEEK 5

The wise control their tongue and use it to encourage others

DAY THREE:

Proverbs 12:18

Speaking recklessly is like the thrusts of a sword, but the words of the wise bring healing.

Proverbs 15:4

Speech that heals is like a life-giving tree, but a perverse tongue breaks the spirit.

Proverbs 18:8:

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels, they go down into the person's innermost being.

Proverbs 20:19; 26:20

(20:19) The one who goes about gossiping reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with someone who is always opening his mouth.

(26:20) Where there is no wood, a fire goes out, and where there is no gossip, contention ceases.

DAY FOUR:

Proverbs 6:16-19:

(16) There are six things that the LORD hates, even seven things that are an abomination to him:

(17) haughty eyes, a lying tongue,

and hands that shed innocent blood,

(18) a heart that devises wicked plans,

feet that are swift to run to evil,

(19) a false witness who pours out lies,

and a person who spreads discord among family members.

Proverbs 12:19, 22

(19) The one who tells the truth will endure forever, but the one who lies will last only for a moment.

(22) The LORD abhors a person who lies, but those who deal truthfully are his delight.

Proverbs 19:5

A false witness will not go unpunished, and the one who spouts out lies will not escape punishment.

Proverbs 26:28

A lying tongue hates those crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

DAY 3:

Poorly chosen words can do a lot of harm

OBSERVATION

1. What does harsh, perverse speech do (15:4)?
2. To what does 26:20 compare gossip (slander)?
3. To what does 12:18 compare reckless words?

INTERPRETATION

1. What do the words "break the spirit" mean? What does this indicate about the power of perverse words?
2. In what ways is gossip (slander) like fuel to a fire (26:20)?
3. What does the comparison in 12:18 suggest about the power of reckless words?

APPLICATION

1. Think of a time when a coach's words broke your spirit or cut you like a sword. Have you ever done that to a player? Why do we sometimes copy our teachers, even when their example is harmful?
2. How can gossip (slander) threaten team unity? As a coach what are some ways you can prevent gossip (slander) from destroying team unity and morale?
3. Memorize Proverbs 12:18 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

DAY 4:**God opposes those who use words to exploit and hurt others****OBSERVATION**

1. In the list in 6:16-19 which of the seven things God hates pertain to speech?
2. According to 12:19; 19:5, 9; and 21:6, what is the destiny of those who lie and bear false witness?
3. According to 12:22, what does God abhor?

INTERPRETATION

1. How are "a lying tongue" and "a false witness" related to the other items in the list of things God hates in 6:16-19? (A look at 26:28 may help.)
2. What is the relationship between the destiny of liars and God's attitude toward lying (see 12:19, 22)?
3. What does it mean for God to "abhor" something (12:22)?

APPLICATION

1. In your coaching experience, have you ever been the victim of deceit or false witness, perhaps by a player, fellow coach, or an angry parent? How was it destructive?
2. How did you respond? What lessons did you learn? What advice would you give to other coaches as to how they can deal with such attacks or perhaps prevent them?

God's Word teaches:

The wise control their tongue and use it to encourage others

- The wise think before they speak
- Well-chosen words can do a lot of good
- Poorly chosen words can do a lot of harm
- God opposes those who use words to exploit and hurt others

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

The Wise Control Their Tongue and Use It to Encourage Others

Introduction

I'd like you to pause a moment and think about words—words people have spoken to you that have left an impact on you. They might be encouraging words that have stayed with you and bring a smile to your face. Or they might be painful, cruel words that have left scars or even wounds that have never completely healed. Now, think about how many of these words were spoken by your coaches. Joe Ehrmann makes this claim: "I have coached hundreds of players by now and I am certain of this: 100 percent of them remember my name, the words I spoke to them, and the emotions generated by our conversations and interactions. Forever! This is part of the awesome power and responsibility of coaching. You give your players memories, for better or for worse, that stay with them until the day they die."¹

This is true for me. I remember the name of every coach I had. My

Interpretation Note: The proverbs sometimes use a literary technique called hyperbole, which is exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. That is the case in Proverbs 29:20. The one who is hasty with words is, of course, a fool (see 15:2; 18:13). But he is spoken of as being even worse than a fool, as if there were such a thing. Furthermore, a fool has more hope than a hasty talker. Since there is little to no hope for a fool, the hasty talker is doomed for sure. The point seems to be that haste with words makes one the worst kind of fool and brings one to the brink of total ruin.

coaches marked me for life, some more than others. Many of the words I remember, whether encouraging or painful, were spoken by coaches. When I was ten years old, I reported for Little League practice. I had been practicing at home. Hour after hour I would throw a rubber ball off the back of our garage, catch it as it bounced back to me, and quickly throw it against the wall again. Deep in my heart I wanted to play shortstop, but I was sure that it would be right field again, my position the year before.

But all of a sudden, my dream came true. Coach Wahlstrom told me, "I want you to be our shortstop this year." Inside I was happy, but also afraid. I replied: "Me? I'm small and I've never played shortstop before." He said, "I've been watching the way you catch and throw. I know you can do it and I'll be right here to help you learn and improve. If you make some mistakes, that's OK, but I think you're going to be good." For the first time in my life, someone other than my parents or grandparents actually believed in me. And his words, spoken over fifty years ago, are as real in my mind and heart this very minute as they were on that day so long ago. So are the words of my Pony League coach four years later. After he saw me in the batting cage, he said to one of my teammates: "Ah, he's like Clete Boyer (the Yankees' third baseman at the time), good field, no hit." When I found out what the coach had said, it hurt and I still remember those words, which made me doubt my ability. Words have great power—for good and bad. Coaches need to be very careful and intentional about how they use them. This week we're going to look at what Proverbs says about the power of the tongue.

Day one: The wise think before they speak- Proverbs 10:19, 32;

13:3; 15:2; 17:27-28; 18:13; 21:23; 29:20

Words reveal a person's moral character. Proverbs 10:32 says: *The lips of the righteous know what is pleasing, but the speech of the wicked is perverse.* The Hebrew word translated "perverse" means "overturned." It describes what is topsy-turvy, like uprooted, overturned trees after a tornado hits. The speech of a wicked person is like that; it perverts or overturns God's moral standards and his design for how the human tongue should be used.

Proverbs 15:2 states: *The tongue of the wise treats knowledge correctly, but the mouth of the fool spouts out folly.* The verb "spouts out" pictures the fool's words bubbling up and then gushing out of his mouth. He can't contain what naturally wells up from his heart. He's like a fire hydrant that blows its top and spews water all over the street. He doesn't even stop to hear someone's explanation or reflect on what a proper response should be: *The one who gives an answer before he listens—that is his folly and his shame* (18:13). In fact, someone whose tongue is quick on the draw is a hopeless cause, at least from the human perspective: *Do you see someone who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him* (29:20). For a coach to have an unbridled tongue is hypocritical. Coaches expect their players to learn discipline, but, as Joe Ehrmann says, "If a coach cannot be disciplined with how he uses his words and gestures, should players be expected to be disciplined in executing blocking assignments?"²

In contrast to the fool's mouth, which gushes out words prematurely and profusely, the wise refrain from talking too much. The wise know the more you talk, the greater chance there is of sinning. When you watch your words, you demonstrate

wisdom, and you avoid trouble. Proverbs 10:19 says: *When words abound, transgression is inevitable, but the one who restrains his words is wise.* The Hebrew word translated “transgression” describes sinful actions that violate a relationship, sometimes through rebellion against authority. Here it refers to offenses committed against others. Those who fail to control their tongue typically brag, insult, and slander, stirring up a hornet’s nest of opposition and conflict, which in turn creates enemies and makes one a target. Worse yet, poorly chosen words offend God, who takes personal offense at an untamed tongue gone wild.

Several other proverbs speak of the importance of bridling the tongue. According to Proverbs 13:3, *The one who guards his words guards his life, but whoever is talkative will come to ruin.* This proverb makes it clear that how we use words is serious business. The word “ruin” does not simply picture destruction. Derived from a verb that means, “terrify,” it describes terrifying judgment that leaves one shattered. The wise understand the danger of words gone wild. That’s why Proverbs 21:23 says: *The one who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps his life from troubles. They watch their tongue: The truly wise person restrains his words, and the one who stays calm is discerning. Even a fool who remains silent is considered wise, and the one who holds his tongue is deemed discerning* (17:27-28). Coaches, of all people, know the truth of these proverbs.

Many basketball coaches have found out the hard way that yelling at refs during a game can cost you points, in the form of technical free throws taken by the other team’s best shooter. Many pro coaches have discovered the hard way that criticizing refs after a game can cost you money. Some coaches have even learned the hard way that spewing

out hasty, poorly chosen words can cost you a job. But worse than that, any coach at any level knows that spouting off, especially in anger, can cost you something even more important than points, money, and a job—it can cost you the respect of others and, if you claim to be a follower of the Savior, harm your Christian testimony and credibility. John Wooden was well aware of this danger and had his own personal way of holding his tongue in check: “In 1943, a friend gave me a small cross, and I’ve carried it in a pocket ever since. It’s not a good luck charm or anything like that, but I held it in my hand during games, and I still grab it during times of tension. It reminds me who is in control and who I represent. It probably is a good thing for officials that I had that in my hand when a bad call was made. Although the phrase was not in vogue back then, in a way, the cross in my pocket spoke to me and asked, ‘What would Jesus do?’ in any particular situation.”³

Day Two: Well-chosen words can do a lot of good- Proverbs 10:11, 21; 12:18; 15:4; 16:24; 25:11-12

Ancient Israelites viewed a fountain, with its fresh supply of water, as a source of life. The teaching (literally, mouth) of the righteous is like such a fountain: *The teaching of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the speech of the wicked conceals violence* (Prov. 10:11). Just as a fountain provides nourishing water, the righteous impart life by passing on God’s wisdom, which enables one to live in a way that pleases God and protects us from sin and its fatal consequences. Proverbs 10:21 says: *The teaching of the righteous feeds many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.* This proverb pictures people as sheep in need of food. The righteous, by imparting wisdom, “feed” many, just like a shepherd feeds his sheep by taking them to a lush pasture. When

a coach is that kind of shepherd, his players will remember his nourishing words and continue to look to him for guidance. Years after playing for Coach Wooden, Bill Walton still visited him. Here’s why: “What he has is a heart, brain and soul that put him in a position to inspire others to reach levels of success and peace of mind that we could never dream of reaching by ourselves . . . John Wooden is still our coach in so many ways . . . he is there with us to this very day. Pushing, shaping, molding, challenging, driving us to be better . . . John Wooden teaches by example . . . He teaches by creating an environment that people want to be a part of, where we want what he has to give.”⁴

Wise words impact the minds of others; they also have a positive impact on the emotions of others. Because life brings so much disappointment and pain, we often feel down or even depressed. Our souls are susceptible to illness, just like our bodies. When we get an infection, we take medicine. But what do you do when your soul is ill? Medicine for the soul sometimes takes the form of kind, well-chosen words that encourage others. Several proverbs speak of encouraging words as having healing qualities: (1) Proverbs 12:18: *Speaking recklessly is like the thrusts of a sword, but the words of the wise bring healing.* (2) Proverbs 15:4: *Speech that heals is like a life-giving tree, but a perverse tongue breaks the spirit.* (3) Proverbs 16:24: *Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

According to these proverbs, words have life-giving, healing properties. Tony Dungy says: “You may not buy the premise that encouragement is *always* needed, as I believe, but let me ask you this: Who really benefits from *discouragement*? More often than not, encouragement is exactly what is needed. As a mentor leader, you’re probably better off *overusing*

Interpretation Note: In biblical times honey was known for its sweetness, its medicinal qualities, and its capacity to invigorate the weary (see 1 Sam 14:26, 29; 2 Sam 17:29). It was considered a delicacy and sometimes presented as a valued gift. It often indicated or symbolized abundance and prosperity. The image of eating honey was used of pleasurable experiences, such as sexual intimacy.⁶

encouragement than *underusing* it.”⁵ Like all teachers, I sometimes wonder if I’m really making a difference or just wasting my time. But God seems to know when my soul needs a boost. Recently I was feeling down; out of the blue I got an email from a former student I hadn’t seen in years. He reminded me of something I had said in class one day that had impacted him for life. I didn’t even remember the incident, but his encouraging words healed my soul and gave me renewed energy and motivation.

We’ve seen that well-chosen words impart wisdom and encourage the soul. But sometimes well-chosen words must take the form of correction. Proverbs 25:11-12 says: *Like apples of gold in settings of silver, so is a word skillfully spoken. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reproof to the ear of the one who listens.* Normally we don’t like to be “reproved,” or corrected, because it can hurt. But wise reproof is attractive (like an earring), appealing (like apples), and valuable (like silver or gold). The key is how the reproof is delivered. John Wooden defined a coach as someone “who can give correction without causing resentment.” For Wooden this demanded a relationship of trust between coach and player: “Approval is a greater motivator than disapproval, but we have to disapprove on occasion when we correct. It’s necessary. I make

corrections only after I have proved to the individual that I highly value him. If they know we care for them, our correction won’t be seen as judgmental. I also try to never make it personal.”⁷ I am grateful that my high school baseball coach followed this philosophy. Coach Gibbons approached me one day during practice, called me by my nickname (“Chiz”), and then calmly told me that I was capable of running the bases faster. He could have falsely accused me of not hustling or yelled at me during the game. Instead he complimented me on my speed in the field; he said when I ran back on pop ups from my shortstop position that I ran fast.

But I didn’t run that way when trying to beat out a ground ball. When I was chasing a pop up, I focused on the ball and ran naturally. But when I ran the bases, I pounded my feet into the ground—I was overrunning! I made some adjustments and started flying around the base paths. My coach’s calm, analytical, positive approach made me receptive to what he had to say. He needed to correct me, but he didn’t use sarcasm or intimidation to try to shame or frighten me into change. His criticism was mixed with something positive. I knew he was my ally in my quest to become a better player. He gave me a lasting example of how to motivate people to correct mistakes without assaulting or breaking their spirits.

Day Three: Poorly chosen words can do a lot of harm

Proverbs 12:18; 15:4; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20

The old saying, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me,” is true in one sense, but false in another.

Words can’t do physical damage, but they sure can wound and crush the spirit. Proverbs 15:4 says: *Speech that heals is like a life-giving tree, but a perverse tongue breaks the spirit.* The Hebrew word translated “perverse” here (a different word than the one used in 10:32; see day

“The true test of a man’s spirituality is not his ability to speak, as we are apt to think, but rather his ability to bridle his tongue.”

*- R. Kent Hughes,
Disciplines of a Godly Man, 142*

one) means “twist, misrepresent.” It refers here to words that twist or distort the truth. Solomon probably has slander and false accusation in mind. The word translated “breaks” is used elsewhere of fracturing a leg or arm, and of shattering a piece of clay pottery.⁸ Twisted, distorted (“perverse”) words fracture or shatter the spirit, demoralizing us and robbing us of joy. You can probably remember a time when somebody fractured a leg (Joe Theismann comes to mind)—the sound, the image of a bone sticking out through skin or pointing in the wrong direction. Well, according to this proverb, slander and false accusation are just as destructive to the spirits of their victims.

Slander is especially threatening to a team because it destroys community. Proverbs 26:20 says: *Where there is no wood, a fire goes out, and where there is no gossip, contention ceases.* Gossip, or slander, sometimes takes the form of lies, but often it takes the shape of half-truths ripped out of context and given a negative spin. In either case, it ignites anger or provides the fuel that keeps conflict going, just like wood does for a fire. The proverbs are realistic. Gossip is sometimes juicy: *The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down into a person’s innermost being* (Prov. 18:8). But the best policy is to avoid gossips: *The one who goes about gossiping reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with someone who*

is always opening his mouth (Prov. 20:19).

Proverbs 12:18 uses another vivid image to describe the devastating effects of poorly chosen words: *Speaking recklessly is like the thrusts of a sword, but the words of the wise bring healing*. Those who speak without thinking typically use words destructively, for it is often negative emotions, like jealousy or anger, that prompt hasty words. This proverb reminds us just how destructive such words can be. Very few people know what a sword thrust feels like; but imagine how painful it must be when internal organs and arteries are sliced up. I think of the scene in the film *Braveheart*, where hundreds of men are lying on the battlefield, moaning in shock and pain as they bleed to death from sword wounds. Reckless, thoughtless words can have a similar effect on the spirits of their victims. I sometimes wince when I see a coach get in the face of a player and, in front of hundreds, thousands, or even (via TV) millions of onlookers, scream at a player at the top of his lungs, ripping into the young athlete's soul with his sharp tongue.

When you understand how the human mind is programmed to record and replay such highly emotional experiences, you realize that permanent damage is being inflicted. Players sometimes shrug it off as if it were a rite of passage, and coaches often justify it by calling it motivation, but it's actually destructive. One of Joe Ehrmann's rules of conduct for his coaching is this: "Know the difference between shaming and coaching. No screaming, shaming, swearing, or sarcasm."⁹ The most successful college basketball coach of all time had this to say about yelling: "I never yelled at my players much. That would have been artificial stimulation, which doesn't last very long. I think it's like love and passion. Passion won't last as long as love. When you are dependent on

passion, you need more and more of it to make it work. It's the same with yelling."¹⁰ If John Wooden could win ten national championships without yelling, then all coaches probably need to ask if it's really necessary. Even drill sergeants don't yell so much anymore. A recent article explains: "As the Army focuses more on developing the critical thinking skills of its soldiers and less on rote memorization and one-size-fits-all training, some of their top drill sergeants say bellowing is a last resort." Sgt. Danneit Disla says: "I really consider myself a new generation of drill instructor. I mean, unless you do something really, really out of place I don't think there's any need to do the whole yelling and screaming. I just think if you talk to them like a person, like a man, they will act like a man, like a grown man."¹¹

Day Four: God opposes those who use words to exploit and hurt others

Proverbs 6:16-19; 12:19, 22; 19:5, 9; 26:28

One of the things I love about the Bible is its honesty. Proverbs 6:16-19 is one of those honest passages. It pulls no punches, but comes right out and gives us a list of seven things the Lord hates: *There are six things that the LORD hates, even seven things that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift to run to evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who spreads discord among family members*. Three of the items pertain to speech. The first of these (a lying tongue) refers to lying in general, the second to a false witness who lies in court. The third (a person who spreads discord) is somebody who starts quarrels within a family through gossip and slander. Why

is lying, in one shape or another, so prominent in this list, which also includes pride and violence? Proverbs 26:28 gives a clue: *A lying tongue hates those crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin*. Self-promoting people often lie to destroy others and advance themselves. They are filled with hatred, which comes to the surface through their proud look, lying speech, and violent actions. Hate, lies, violence—they often go together like the Three Musketeers. The Lord hates these things and opposes hated-filled people (6:16).

The destiny of those who lie is not a pretty one. Proverbs 12:19 says: *The one who tells the truth will endure forever, but the one who lies will last only for a moment*. According to Proverbs 19:5, *A false witness will not go unpunished, and the one who spouts out lies will not escape punishment*. Why are liars doomed? The answer is in Proverbs 12:22: *The LORD abhors a person who lies, but those who deal truthfully are his delight*. This passage reads literally, "An abomination to the LORD are lying lips." The word "abomination," translated "abhors," is a strong one, used elsewhere of things that are especially repulsive to God, like idols or child sacrifice. God does not tolerate for very long what he abhors. Such things are like a dead, rotting carcass that shows up in your backyard. You don't leave it lying around to gather maggots and pollute the air. You get rid of it because it is disgusting and unhealthy. That's what God does with things he abhors. He gave us tongues so we can teach his truth and heal hurting souls; he will not tolerate those who use that gift as a weapon to wound and destroy. It would be like giving money to an unemployed father so he can buy food for his kids, only to find out that he squandered it gambling. That would make me mad. Well, we do that to God everytime we misuse our tongues.

The wise have a proper perspective on work

- The wise know that work is necessary
- The wise know that work is beneficial
- The wise know that shortcuts, delay, and haste are dead end streets
- The wise take care of basics

Selected Passages on the Theme of Work**Proverbs 16:26**

A laborer's appetite works on his behalf,
for his hunger urges him to work.

Genesis 3:17b-19a

(17b) Cursed is the ground thanks to you; in painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. (18) It will produce thorns and thistles for you, but you will eat the grain of the field. (19a) By the sweat of your brow you will eat food until you return to the ground.

2 Thessalonians 3:10b-12

(10b) If anyone is not willing to work, neither should he eat. (11) For we hear that some among you are living an undisciplined life, not doing their own work but meddling in the work of others. (12) Now such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and so provide their own food to eat.

"Hard work is a prison sentence only if it does not have meaning. Once it does, it becomes the kind of thing that makes you grab your wife around the waist and dance a jig."

*- Malcolm Gladwell
Outliers: The Story of Success*

DAY 1:**The wise know that work is necessary****OBSERVATION**

1. What motivates a person to work (Prov. 16:26)?
2. According to Genesis 3:19a, what is the reality that man faces?
3. According to 2 Thessalonians 3:10, what does Paul say about one who will not work?

INTERPRETATION

1. What is the logic underlying the observation in 16:26? (What harsh reality of life does it assume?)
2. How does Proverbs 16:26 reflect the reality described in Genesis 3:17-19?
3. How is Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 consistent with Genesis 3:17-19 and Proverbs 16:26?

APPLICATION

1. From where did you learn your work ethic?
2. Describe three ways that you help your players understand the value of hard work? Discuss your answers.

Selected Passages on the Theme of Work

Proverbs 10:4; 12:11; 13:4; 14:23; 21:5

(10:4) The one who is lazy becomes poor, but the one who works diligently becomes wealthy.

(12:11) The one who works his field will have plenty of food, but whoever chases daydreams lacks wisdom.

(13:4) The appetite of the sluggard craves but gets nothing, but the desire of the diligent will be abundantly satisfied.

(14:23) In all hard work there is profit, but merely talking about it only brings poverty.

(21:5) The plans of the diligent lead only to plenty, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

(12) I have concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they live, (13) and also that everyone find enjoyment in all his toil, for these things are a gift from God.

Ephesians 6:5-8

(5) Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart as to Christ, (6) not like those who do their work only when someone is watching—as people-pleasers—but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart. (7) Obey with enthusiasm, as though serving the Lord and not people, (8) because you know that each person, whether slave or free, if he does something good, this will be rewarded by the Lord.

DAY 2:

The wise know that work is beneficial

OBSERVATION

1. According to these proverbs, what are some tangible benefits of being diligent in one's work?
2. According to Ecclesiastes 3:12-13, what is a tangible benefit of work?
3. According to Ephesians 6:5-8, for whom are we really working?

INTERPRETATION

1. How does Proverbs 14:23 soften the reality described in Genesis 3:17-19?
2. How does Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 soften the reality described in Genesis 3:17-19?
3. How does Ephesians 6:5-8 soften the reality described in Genesis 3:17-19?

APPLICATION

1. Have you ever coached with someone who seemed to like every aspect of coaching and teaching? Why do you think they did?
2. What parts of coaching are most rewarding and satisfying and which aspects of coaching wear you down? How could you make the grind of coaching more satisfying?

Selected Proverbs on Theme of Work**DAY THREE:****Proverbs 12:11**

The one who works his field will have plenty of food, but whoever chases daydreams lacks wisdom.

Proverbs 14:23

In all hard work there is profit,
but merely talking about it only brings poverty.

Proverbs 21:5

The plans of the diligent lead only to plenty,
but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.

DAY FOUR:**Proverbs 24:27**

Establish your work outside and get your fields ready;
afterward build your house.

Proverbs 27:23-27

(23) Pay careful attention to the condition of your flocks,
give careful attention to your herds,
(24) for riches do not last forever,
nor does a crown last from generation to generation. (25) When the hay is removed and new grass appears, and the grass from the hills is gathered in,
(26) the lambs will be for your clothing,
and the goats will be for the price of a field.
(27) And there will be enough goat's milk for your food,
for the food of your household,
and for the sustenance of your servant girls.

DAY 3:**The wise know that shortcuts, delay, and haste are dead end streets****OBSERVATION**

1. According to 12:11b, who lacks wisdom?
2. According to 14:23b, what does mere talk bring?
3. According to 21:5b, what does haste bring?

INTERPRETATION

1. In 12:11b what is meant by "chasing daydreams"?
2. Explain 14:23b. How does talk result in poverty?
3. Explain 21:5b. How does being hasty result in poverty?

APPLICATION

1. Is a coach ever prone to going down one of these dead end streets? As human beings, why are we prone to falling into these traps?
2. Memorize Proverbs 14:23 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

DAY 4:**The wise take care of basics****OBSERVATION**

1. According to 24:27, to what should a person give priority?
2. According to 27:23, to what should a person give priority?

INTERPRETATION

1. Explain the reasoning underlying the advice given in 24:27.
2. Explain the reasoning underlying the advice given in 27:23-27.

APPLICATION

1. In our modern world, what corresponds to fields and flocks? As a coach, how can you apply the basic principle of these proverbs?
2. In coaching or in life in general, why do we sometimes neglect what is foundational to security?

God's Word teaches:

The wise have a proper perspective on work

- The wise know work is necessary
- The wise know work is beneficial
- The wise know that shortcuts, delay, and haste are dead end streets.
- The wise take care of basics

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

The Wise Have a Proper Perspective on Work

Introduction

As I grew up, I watched my father become a workaholic. When he was young, he would get home at the usual hour, 5:30 or so, and he never worked on Saturdays. There was always lots of time to play catch together. He even coached my Little League team one summer. But as he got older, things changed. My father was a banker; he was good at what he did (accounting) and he was a loyal, conscientious worker. He received promotions and became an officer in the bank. This was nice in one way because when we took a vacation to New York City, my father was able, with his banking connections, to get us box seats right behind home plate or the dugout at Yankee Stadium or Shea Stadium. But there was a price to pay for success. My father would work well into the evenings and even on Saturdays. He would often eat his dinner at 9:00 pm or later. I understood why he worked so hard—he told me. He had lived through the Great Depression as a child and he was determined that his family would always have a comfortable home and plenty to eat. But after he retired and I was a grown man, he told me he was sorry that he did not spend more time with me during my teens. I told him I understood, but secretly I too was sorry that he had not been around more during those years.

As a coach, you can probably relate to my story. If you're married, you feel the tension as your coaching responsibilities pull you one way and your love for your family tugs strongly from the other direction.

You want to succeed as a coach and you know that success demands preparation and preparation demands time. You also want to succeed in life as a spouse and parent. You know that your spouse and children should be a priority. But you also enjoy coaching and helping young people; it's an important ministry God has given you. And coaching is your job; you need the income it provides to make ends meet and help provide for your family. There is no magical formula to resolving this tension, but, as you might expect, the Bible, and Proverbs in particular, has much to say about work—and what our attitude toward work should be. In the next two weeks we'll see that Proverbs gives us a realistic, balanced perspective on work. With this topic it's especially important that we look at Proverbs in light of what other relevant texts have to say on the subject, so this week we're expanding our study to include passages from Genesis, Ecclesiastes, and the New Testament.

Day one: The wise know that work is necessary- Proverbs 16:26; Genesis 3:17b-19a; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

When I was a teenager, I had two main chores. In the summer I was responsible for mowing our yard and my grandparents' yard. Both yards were huge and neither my father nor my grandfather was about to spend hard-earned money on a riding mower for the sake of my convenience. It took several days to complete the task and there was rarely a break. In the winter I was responsible for shoveling out our driveway. Snow blowers were a thing of the future and my father was not going to spend hard-earned money to pay a guy to plow the driveway when he had two able bodied boys, my brother and me, available. We had a long driveway

and, living on the east side of Lake Ontario, we got a daily dose of "lake effect" snow that would drift across the driveway, sometimes four-five feet high. I was not crazy about these seasonal jobs. But when I complained about my plight, my father would bombard me with clichés: "Money doesn't grow on trees," "The world doesn't owe you a living." He explained that a lifetime of work was ahead and he was training me for it.

When God created Adam, he gave him a fruit orchard to care for and enjoy (Gen. 2:15-16). Work was part of the deal, but it wasn't intended to be oppressive. However, when Adam sinned, things changed dramatically. He would now have to dig around in the ground just to produce food. God told Adam that the ground would resist his efforts to grow things: *Cursed is the ground thanks to you; in painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, but you will eat the grain of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat food until you return to the ground* (Gen. 3:17b-19a). Since then work, often painful and unrelenting, has been a fundamental part of life in the fallen world. Solomon recognized this when he wrote: *A laborer's appetite works on his behalf, for his hunger urges him to work* (Proverbs 16:26). The worker described here is a realist. He understands how the world works. If he is a farmer, he knows the food won't grow without some effort on his part. If he is not a farmer, he knows he must work to earn the money he will need to buy food from the farmer. The farmer has had to labor hard to produce that food and he is not going to give it away. Wise people recognize that work is inevitable and necessary, at least if you want to eat. No one is exempt from the consequences described in Genesis 3:17-19. For someone to think he is entitled to food without laboring for it is the height of

arrogance, for it suggests he is better than everyone else. Worse yet, it's a blatant attempt to find a loophole in the way God has rigged the fallen world. The Apostle Paul encountered this attitude in the church in ancient Thessalonica. He had worked hard as a tentmaker while living there and had paid for his own food. But some in that church were lazy and were refusing to work. They expected the church to provide for them. Paul addressed the problem head on: *If anyone is not willing to work, neither should he eat. For we hear that some among you are living an undisciplined life, not doing their own work but meddling in the work of others. Now such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and so provide their own food to eat* (2 Thess. 3:10-12). Paul's teaching is consistent with Genesis 3:17-19: Everyone has to work in the fallen world—no exceptions. It's also consistent with Proverbs 16:26: The wise work hard because they know that's the price one must pay for food in a fallen world. Complaining about having to work is like complaining about bad weather. What good does it really do? Nobody can change it; it's reality. So it's better to accept reality and approach work with a more positive attitude. Fortunately, God makes this possible, as we will see.

Day two: The wise know that work is beneficial-

Proverbs 10:4; 12:11a; 13:4; 14:23a; 21:5a; Ecclesiastes 3:12-13; Ephesians 6:5-8

If we read Genesis 3:17-19 in isolation, we might think that man has been consigned by God to a concentration camp, doomed to slave away until he dies. But this is not the case. As we face the harsh reality of the necessity of work, it is comforting to know that God in his mercy redeems our work. The

proverbs commend hard work because it provides the essentials of life and is the foundation for financial security:

(1) *The one who is lazy becomes poor, but the one who works diligently becomes wealthy* (Prov. 10:4). (2) *The one who works his field will have plenty of food, but whoever chases daydreams lacks wisdom* (Prov.

12:11). (3) *The appetite of the sluggard craves but gets nothing, but the desire of the diligent will be abundantly satisfied* (Prov. 13:4). (4) *In all hard work there is profit, but merely talking about it only brings poverty* (Prov. 14:23). (5) *The plans of the diligent lead only to plenty, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty*. (Prov. 21:5) The word translated "hard work" in Proverbs 14:23 is closely related to the word translated "painful toil" in Genesis 3:17. Because of sin, work can be "painful toil," but God in his mercy also makes it produce "profit" for us. However, as the second half of the proverb says, those who defiantly try to escape the effects of sin by not working end up in poverty. So the options are clear: (1) Accept reality, embrace the necessity of work, and experience the profit that a merciful God provides, or (2) ignore the way God has rigged the fallen world, defy him by refusing to work, and end up hungry. This is one of those basic truths that you, as a coach, can teach and model for young athletes. Sports is an ideal way to teach the lesson, because those who refuse to work in athletics almost always end up failing, while hard work often leads to success.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 also looks at work as something positive: *I have concluded that there is nothing*

TRUE COACHING STORY

"My husband and I went to central Asia last year on a sports mission trip. This was before we were engaged and I was honestly unsure about what he really felt called to do. But to watch him coach these kids he had just met, how he loved on them, and how they soaked in every word he said—wow, what a blessing. God showed me what I hadn't seen before. Seeing him coach changed my love for my husband. I understood how he showed Christ to others. His leadership, compassion, and devotion showed me Christ in his life. I praise the Father for allowing me to see inside his ministry. It has truly made me fall more in love with my husband and his ministry."

better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they live, and also that everyone find enjoyment in all his toil, for these things are a gift from God. Yes, life is tough; there is toil and work. But, like Proverbs 14:23, Ecclesiastes puts a positive spin on this fact of life. We should view our work as a gift from God. Consequently, we should enjoy what we do. God has actually wired us to enjoy work. As we saw earlier (see day one), back in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve sinned, God had given them work to do. They were to care for the orchard and enjoy its fruit. So, even though work can potentially be tiring and beat us down, there is something gratifying about a job well done. As a professor who is expected to publish, I have written seven books and numerous articles—lots of words, lots of pages. I know well the truth of Ecclesiastes 12:12: *There is no end to the making of many books, and much study is exhausting to the body.* There have been times when I was weary. But there is something gratifying about completing a project, especially when you have committed it to God and realize, that by his grace, people will be helped by your work. I'm sure you've experienced it as a coach—you're good and tired sometimes, but there is also a feeling we can call, "good tired." Lazy people don't sweat and feel pain but they miss out on God's

gift—the great satisfaction that comes from a job well done.

As we turn to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul takes our view of work to an even higher level: *Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart as to Christ, not like those who do their work only when someone is watching—as people-pleasers—but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart. Obey with enthusiasm, as though serving the Lord and not people, because you know that each person, whether slave or free, if he does something good, this will be rewarded by the Lord* (Eph. 6:5-8). Speaking to slaves, who had to do menial tasks all day long with little thanks, Paul transforms their view of work. Like those first century slaves, we don't really work for a human boss. No, God is our boss and he is a fair boss who will repay us for all the work we do, if we do it in a proper spirit and with the right motive, as unto him.

Day Three: The wise know that shortcuts, delay, and haste are dead end streets-

Proverbs 12:11b; 14:23b;
21:5b

We have seen that work is necessary in the fallen world, but also that God in his mercy makes it meaningful. We looked at several proverbs that spoke of the rewards of being diligent in one's work. Today we are going to look at three of these a second time. In the previous study we focused on the first line of each, which speaks of the benefits of hard work. Today we're going to look at the second line of each, which contrasts being diligent with unwise behavior that will leave you empty. You've probably had the experience of making a wrong turn down a

dead end street—the street may look nice, you think you're making progress, but then you reach the end with nowhere to go. You have to turn around and retrace your steps to get back on track. Our proverbs for today warn us about three kinds of dead end streets that can keep us from being productive, successful, and pleasing to God.

Sometimes we make the mistake of turning down a dead end street because we think it may be a shortcut. That's what the second half of Proverbs 12:11 has in mind: *The one who works his field will have plenty of food, but whoever chases daydreams lacks wisdom.* The word translated "daydreams" literally means "empty things." It's used elsewhere of an empty cistern or jar. It holds promise, but lacks substance. "Chases" refers to repetitive pursuit bordering on the obsessive. The proverb has in mind risky ventures or get-rich-quick schemes.¹ Chasing daydreams stands in contrast here with working one's fields, which may not seem so glitzy, but does have the benefit of putting food on the table. Working one's fields pays off, in contrast to becoming obsessed with something that has very little, if any, hope of ever materializing. Since work can be tiring, people are often tempted to find a shortcut—a get-rich-quick scheme that will produce a life of luxury and ease. The gambling industry exploits this tendency to the fullest. I once worked a summer job with a bunch of janitors. They took their hard-earned meager wages and bet on the horses every night. Occasionally they'd win a few hundred dollars and get all excited. But then I'd crunch some numbers for them and show them that over the long haul, they'd actually lost money, much to the dismay of their families, who barely had enough to wear and eat. The glamor of the quick-fix can even deceive coaches. When Tony Dungy began coaching in the NFL, he wanted to build a consistent winner. He says: "I didn't

want to fall into the trap of making short-term adjustments for the benefit of one season." He and his staff rejected "quick-fix ideas" and focused on producing a "good plan that would stand the test of time if we persevered."²

Delay is another dead end street that prevents a person from being productive and successful, as the second half of Proverbs 14:23b reminds us: *In all hard work there is profit, but merely talking about it only brings poverty.* The logic is clear: Talking doesn't actually produce any profit. Without action it leaves you empty-handed in the end. It's easy to turn down this cul-de-sac because talking can be justified as planning, which is necessary for success. But at some point the talking must stop and the doing must begin. As Tony Dungy says: "I've always believed that it takes a certain amount of time to prepare for a game, and once we're prepared, extra time won't help—only execution will."³ Artist Chuck Close would agree: "The advice I like to give young artists, or really anybody who'll listen to me, is not to wait around for inspiration. Inspiration is for amateurs; the rest of us just show up and get to work. If you wait around for the clouds to part and a bolt of lightning to strike you in the brain, you are not going to make an awful lot of work. All the best ideas come out of the process; they come out of the work itself. Things occur to you. If you're sitting around trying to dream up a great art idea, you can sit there a long time before anything happens."⁴ As a basketball coach I often found this to be true. I'd draw up plays and continuities, but it was only in the "messiness" of practice and the unpredictability of the game, where we had to improvise, that we refined them so that they really worked and produced something substantial.

The second half of Proverbs 21:5 identifies a third dead end street that is an obstacle to success: *The plans*

of the diligent lead only to plenty, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty. This proverb agrees with the old saying, “haste makes waste.” The logic is clear: If you are hasty and don’t do the job right, you won’t have anything to show for your labor in the end. It’s easy to turn down this dead end street because when you work hastily, you feel as if you’re working. But not really—you’re active, but not truly productive. I once decided to put up a basketball hoop on our garage so my kids could play ball in the driveway. It was hot in the garage attic and I hurried. Everything seemed to be fine that day, but the next morning I found the backboard and rim lying on the driveway. Embarrassed, but thankful no one had gotten hurt, I then took the time to do the job right. I had learned the hard way the truth of this proverb.

Interpretation Note: In ancient Israel, money and a crown represent static wealth, that is hidden away to be used at an appropriate time. It stands in contrast to land and fields. Clifford explains: “Unlike stored-up treasure that is subject to theft or seizure, grass-land renews itself and sustains herds . . . Year after year beast and field provide clothing, money to purchase more pastureland, and food for the entire household.”⁷

Day Four: The wise take care of basics

Proverbs 24:27; 27:23-27

It’s a basic rule of investing that you protect your principal. You might decide to use a portion of your earnings to take a vacation, make some home improvements, or buy that new car you’ve always wanted. But you don’t dip into your principal, because you know that without it, there will be no income. If you’re wise, you’ll prioritize your assets and take care of basics. It’s

actually a principle that applies to all of life, not just economics. Coaches certainly know how it works. One of the most discouraging things for a team is when a player becomes ineligible. The 2012 Syracuse University men’s basketball team knows the feeling. They had just completed a 31-2 season, earned a number one seed in the NCAA tournament, and hoped to go to the Final Four. But as they got ready to board the plane to travel to their tournament opener, they were told that Fab Melo, their outstanding center and defensive game-changer, would not be traveling with them. He had not taken care of basics. Details were not revealed to the public, but he had not done what was necessary to maintain eligibility. Without him, the team fell one game short of making the Final Four.

Proverbs 24:27 says: *Establish your work outside and get your fields ready; afterward build your house.* You might think that a house is more basic than fieldwork. After all, you need shelter from the elements. Ideally, you’d want to do both—attend to your fields and build a house. But the proverb pits them against each other to make an important point. The crop is more basic than the house. You can live, though not very comfortably, without a house, at least temporarily. But without crops, the farmer has nothing to eat and will starve to death. As Garrett says, this proverb teaches “the principle that one should not provide for personal comfort until a means of income is established. As such, it emphasizes the practical rule of producing before consuming.”⁵ As the old saying goes, “first things first.”⁶

Proverbs 27:23-27 also teaches the importance of giving priority to basics. It focuses on the farmer’s flocks and herds: *Pay careful attention to the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever, nor does a crown last from*

generation to generation. When the hay is removed and new grass appears, and the grass from the hills is gathered in, the lambs will be for your clothing, and the goats will be for the price of a field. And there will be enough goat’s milk for your food, for the food of your household, and for the sustenance of your servant girls. The farmer must make sure his animals have adequate pasture, because those animals, if properly cared for, will provide clothing and food. In fact, the farmer can even sell some of his goats to acquire more land, which will produce more food for him and his family. On the surface, one would think that money or a beautiful crown deserves more attention than a bunch of sheep and goats. However, the farmer’s cattle, if cared for, are a continuing source of security.

For us, living in the modern world, “fields and flocks” will take a different form. But surely our jobs would come under this category. It’s easy to take a job for granted, maybe even to think that we’re entitled to an income. If that happens, it’s easy to just go through the motions, neglect making the improvements that a job demands, and get distracted by other, perhaps more interesting or enjoyable things. Before we know it, we’re passed over for a promotion or maybe even out of a job.

Interpretation Note: These proverbs reflect an agricultural setting. Many people in ancient Israel were farmers. The typical Israelite farmer would plow and plant his grain fields in Fall. The barley and wheat harvests were in Spring. Grapes, figs, and olives were harvested in Summer. A farmer also owned livestock. Sheep were raised for their wool, goats provided milk, donkeys served as pack animals, and oxen were used for plowing. For an ancient Israelite farmer, both fields and flocks were essential to life.

The wise have a proper perspective on work: Part Two

- The wise know that laziness brings poverty and frustration
- The wise know that lazy people lie to others and to themselves
- The wise know that God, not work, is ultimately their source of security
- The wise know that God blesses those who honor him

Selected Proverbs on the Theme of Work**Proverbs 12:24**

The diligent person will rule,
but the slothful will become a slave.

Proverbs 15:19

The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns,
but the path of the upright is like a highway.

Proverbs 21:25-26

(25) What the sluggard desires will kill him,
for his hands refuse to work.
(26) All day long he craves greedily,
but the righteous gives and does not hold back.

Proverbs 24:30-34

(30) I passed by the field of the sluggard,
by the vineyard of one who lacks wisdom.
(31) I saw that thorns had grown up all over it,
the ground was covered with weeds,
and its stone wall was broken down.
(32) When I saw this, I gave careful consideration to
it; I received instruction from what I saw:
(33) 'A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to relax,
(34) and your poverty will come like a bandit,
and your need like an armed robber.'

DAY 1:**The wise know that laziness brings poverty and frustration.****OBSERVATION**

1. According to 24:30-34, what does the sluggard own? What has happened to it?
2. To what does 15:19 compare a lazy person's "way"?
3. According to 12:24, how will a lazy person end up?

INTERPRETATION

1. Why is poverty compared to a bandit and robber in 24:34?
2. Why is the sluggard's path (way of life) comparable to a hedge of thorns (15:19)?
3. Explain 12:24. Why will a lazy person end up being subject to the authority of others?

APPLICATION

1. Have you ever turned a lazy athlete into a dedicated and hard worker? What did you do or say to change his/her attitude?

Selected Proverbs on the Theme of Work**Proverbs 22:13**

The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside!
I will be killed in the middle of the streets!'

Proverbs 26:14-16

- (14) Like a door that turns on its hinges,
so a sluggard turns on his bed.
(15) The sluggard plunges his hand in the dish;
he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.
(16) The sluggard is wiser in his own estimation
than seven people who respond with good sense

TRUE COACHING STORY

"I spent years complaining about my not having enough of my husband's time or focus. In time, the Lord clearly showed my husband that through careful stewardship of time and efficient planning his staff could 'get the job done' in six days. The results of his decision have been remarkable. His choosing to work so diligently in order to be with us on Sundays reinforces the understanding that we take priority in his life. He is able to worship with us on Sunday morning and truly focus on the Lord. Relaxation and physical restoration can happen, allowing him to be truly excited and prepared come Monday. My husband is healthier now, and doesn't fall asleep when he sits still for longer than two minutes! Coaches, what you are doing is incredibly significant. No other profession has the same potential to effect the lives of young people that yours has. You are chosen by God, but so are your wives. They only love you and long to know that they are more important than your win-loss record. Who will remember the latter in five, ten or twenty years? But the legacy of a strong marriage and family will bless generations to come."

DAY 2:**The wise know that lazy people lie to others and to themselves****OBSERVATION**

1. According to 22:13, how does a sluggard justify not working?
2. How does 26:16 describe a sluggard?
3. How do 26:14-15 describe a sluggard?

INTERPRETATION

1. The sluggard's reason for not working sounds legitimate on the surface (22:13). Is it?
2. Why does the sluggard think he's wise (26:16)?
3. How do his actions, as described in 26:14-15, prove that his boasting is empty?

APPLICATION

1. After examining the Scripture for today and reading the Study Notes, write out a brief statement that you may give to an athlete who could be so much better if he/she was willing to put out more effort. Share with the group.

Selected Passages on the Theme of Work**Day Three:****Proverbs 10:22 (alternative translation)**

The blessing of the LORD is what enriches;
toil cannot add to it.

Day Four:**Proverbs 3:5-6**

- (5) Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own understanding.
(6) Acknowledge him in all your ways,
and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 16:3

Commit your works to the LORD,
and your plans will be established.

"Our spouses should be able to trust us to be good managers of our time at work—and to keep our priorities in line. We can all usually work smarter, not harder. Don't confuse activity with productivity."

- Tommy Cox, "Don't Confuse Activity with Productivity", "Point After", Winter 1995-96

DAY 3:**The wise know that God, not work, is ultimately their source of security****OBSERVATION**

1. According to the first half of Proverbs 10:22, who is the source of a person's prosperity?
2. According to the second half of 10:22, can work add to the Lord's blessing?

INTERPRETATION

1. Several proverbs say that hard work produces prosperity (see day one). How do we harmonize 10:22 with those passages?
2. What is the second half of 10:22 saying? (See the interpretation note for day three.)

APPLICATION

1. Why is it so easy to forget that God is the ultimate source of success?
2. If God is the source of our prosperity, what is one tangible thing you can start doing daily to show God you believe that?

DAY 4:**The wise know that God blesses those who honor him****OBSERVATION**

1. What does Proverbs 3:5-6 instruct us to do?
2. What does the first half of Proverbs 16:3 instruct us to do?
3. According to the second half of Proverbs 16:3, what is the result of committing your works to the Lord?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does the expression "make your paths straight" mean (Prov. 3:6)?
2. What does it mean to commit our works to the Lord (Prov. 16:3)?
3. What is meant by the word "established"? (Prov. 16:3)

APPLICATION

1. How have you seen God bless you personally for honoring him first? How about someone else? Describe.
2. Memorize Proverbs 3:5-6 or 16:3 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

God's Word teaches:

The wise have a proper perspective on work: Part Two

- The wise know that laziness brings poverty and frustration
- The wise know that lazy people lie to others and to themselves
- The wise know that God, not work, is their ultimate source of security.
- The wise know that God blesses those who honor him

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

The Wise Have a Proper Perspective on Work: Part 2

Introduction

Former heavyweight champion Smokin' Joe Frazier knew how basic hard work is to being a successful boxer and person. He once said: "You can map out a fight plan or a life plan, but when the action starts, it may not go the way you planned, and you're down to your reflexes . . . That's where your roadwork shows. If you cheated on that in the dark of the morning, well, you're going to get found out now, under the bright lights."¹ Proverbs teaches that work is necessary and beneficial. Through our work God gives us what we need and then some. But there are two extremes we must avoid. Joe Frazier isolated one of them—laziness. We'll see what Proverbs has to say about laziness; none of it is good. But for coaches, caught up in a competitive environment, the other extreme is the greater threat. Sometimes commitment to hard work, which is a good thing, can go to an unhealthy extreme. Hard-workers can become self-sufficient and put God on the sidelines. We'll look at some proverbs this week that remind us that God is ultimately the source of success. If that's true, he has to be our number one priority. We'll think about what that might look like for a coach.

Day One: The wise know that laziness brings poverty and frustration

Proverbs 12:24; 15:19;
21:25-26; 24:30-34

Every coach has had to deal with lazy players. Often lazy players

have great natural talent. In fact, that may be why they're lazy. They were able to succeed when they were young without really having to work hard. But as they get older and the competition improves, they discover that talent alone won't get it done. Now they have to push themselves to compete, but since they haven't done the hard work it takes to be properly conditioned, they often get injured. Laziness is like that—sooner or later, it brings trouble and even disaster.

The proverbs pull no punches as they describe the negative consequences of laziness. Because they refuse to work, lazy people never experience the satisfaction of achievement. Proverbs 21:25-26 puts it this way: *What the sluggard desires will kill him, for his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves greedily, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.* Lazy people spend their entire lives wanting, but never getting. A nationally ranked high school basketball program had as its 2009-10 slogan, "Dreams are what you want; hard work determines what you get!" Lazy people rarely advance beyond the dreaming stage. As Kidner says: "The sluggard lives in a world of wishing, which is his substitute for working."² The frustration of not having what he desperately desires robs him of joy and ruins life for him. In the exaggerated language of verse 25, it kills him.

Proverbs 24:30-34 likewise paints a very black picture of the sluggard: *I passed by the field of the sluggard, by the vineyard of one who lacks wisdom. I saw that thorns had grown up all over it, the ground was covered with weeds, and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw this, I gave careful consideration to it; I received instruction from what I saw: 'A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to relax, and your poverty will come like a bandit, and your need like an armed*

robber. In this vignette, the sluggard is a farmer; he has the means to be secure (a field and vineyard), but he refuses to use what he has and suffers the consequences. It doesn't take much for the farm to go to ruins—just a "little" sleep, etc. And poverty comes very quickly. It's compared here to a bandit, an armed robber. No one expects robbers to show up; they come suddenly and take you by surprise. The proverb reflects the real world, described in Genesis 3:17-19 (see last week, day one). Making ends meet is a constant challenge in the fallen world, which is rigged so that we can easily meet disaster and have nothing.

Farmers know this. My uncle was a dairy farmer. The cows demanded his attention every day. If he had taken a few days off to relax, the cows would have been so filled with milk they would have burst open. If he didn't plow, plant, and harvest his fields at the right time, the cows would have no food. He'd lose his farm just like that. But this is not only true of farmers. It's true of any walk of life. If I as a teacher do not keep up with the latest thinking in my field, I'll quickly lose my edge. My employer and my students will know I've become lazy and I'll pay the price when performance evaluations roll around. This is especially true in the coaching field. You've got to keep your edge, because you work in a very competitive environment where, unfortunately, success is too often measured only by wins and losses, and there are only so many W's to go around. Tony Dungy didn't understand why his father, a biology teacher, kept taking courses, even after he got his PhD. But he eventually came to understand that "he didn't want to shortchange his students." He explains: "When I started coaching it began to make sense. I couldn't undermine my players' ability to perform at their best because I hadn't taken the time to keep learning more about football.

The more you know, the better you'll be able to coach."³

The consequences of not doing the necessary work are painful. Proverbs 15:19 says: *The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is like a highway.* This proverb pictures the sluggard's path covered with a row of thorns. Any progress will be difficult and painful. Proverbs 12:24 gives a concrete example of what this may mean for the sluggard: *The diligent person will rule, but the slothful will become a slave.* Reduced to poverty by his own laziness, the sluggard becomes vulnerable to the power of others. Some will not tolerate his lazy attitude and will force him to work for the common good. The Hebrew word translated "slave" refers to a compulsory labor gang, the kind that ancient Israelite kings would sometimes use for their building projects—the Israelite version of a modern chain gang. Sharp, painful thorns indeed! The reality is this: The diligent worker will always be respected, but the lazy guy never is.

Day Two: The wise know that lazy people lie to others and to themselves

Proverbs 22:13; 26:14-16

Lazy people may refuse to work, but they don't lack creativity. In fact, they often work hard and display some real brilliance in one area—making up excuses for their laziness. Over my 31 years in the teaching profession, I've heard them all. Before every exam, one student always seemed to meet some kind of personal disaster—an accident, an illness, you name it. He would petition me for an extension, appealing to that magic word in Christian circles, "grace." Oddly enough, once I granted him an extension, he seemed to recover

rather quickly, even miraculously, from these setbacks. After a while, I decided enough was enough. After all, I train people for ministry and I did not want to unleash such a lazy person on the Church. He was expecting special treatment, something that was unfair to the other students and that he would not receive from his future employer. So I told him if he was breathing, he was going to take the exam with everybody else at the appointed time or suffer a severe late penalty. It's amazing how life suddenly improved for this fellow! No more sudden disasters! Proverbs 22:13 describes such a person: *The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I will be killed in the middle of the streets!'* At first, this sounds like a legitimate reason for not venturing outside to do work. After all, if there are dangerous animals prowling the streets, preserving one's life is more important than getting to work, right? But it's easy to see through the plastic wrap. Really, what were the chances of encountering a lion in the middle of an ancient Israelite town? And the excuse is grossly overstated. The word translated "killed," actually means "murdered," as if the lion were stalking him in a premeditated manner, singling him out from everyone else.

In addition to a knack for excuses, sluggards are also typically know-it-alls. Proverbs 26:16 says: *The sluggard is wiser in his own estimation than seven people who respond with good sense.* Lazy people have this arrogant attitude because they think they've beaten the system. After all, they're sitting around relaxing while others are plowing fields and feeding animals. But their inflated

view of themselves is like a cheap party balloon waiting to be popped to shreds, as verses 14-15 make clear. These verses lampoon the lazy, picturing them as going nowhere and as incapable of taking care of their most basic needs: *Like a door that turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed. The sluggard plunges his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.* There may be some movement, but no progress. The word "plunges" (or "buries") pictures the sluggard's greed. He is so eager to eat, he buries his hand in his food! But he is so lazy, he lacks the energy to bring his hand to his mouth. His cravings go unsatisfied because of his laziness.

Day Three: The wise know that God, not work, is ultimately their source of security

Proverbs 10:22

The proverbs promote work as something that is necessary and beneficial; they criticize and lampoon laziness. But this does not mean that success and security are ultimately dependent on our own effort and ingenuity. While human

Interpretation Note: The proverbs have little sympathy for lazy people who come to poverty. Yet several other proverbs take a sympathetic view of the poor and encourage God's people to help them. For example, Proverbs 14:31 says: *The one who oppresses the poor insults his Creator, but whoever shows favor to the needy honors him.* How do we explain this apparent contradiction? Passages that take a sympathetic view of the poor have in mind people who are vulnerable due to no fault of their own, like widows and orphans. But the sluggard is different; he has the means to be secure, but refuses to use them due to laziness. Some proverbs contrast the sluggard with the righteous (see 15:19 and 21:26, quoted above in our day one study), not simply the diligent. The sluggard's laziness is viewed as a moral deficiency; it displeases God.

Interpretation Note: Interpreters debate the meaning of the second half of verse 22. Part of the problem is that one of the key Hebrew words can sometimes mean, “sorrow,” and at other times “toil.” One option is to translate as *NET Bible* has: and he adds no sorrow to it. In this case, the point is that God’s blessings are pure and come with no negative consequences (sorrow). But I prefer a different view (see translation above), in which the point is that our sovereign God determines the extent of our blessing and all our frenzied attempts to enrich ourselves cannot exceed what he decides.⁴

effort can produce prosperity, it is ultimately the Lord’s blessing that brings success. Proverbs 10:22 is a very important verse in this regard; I prefer to translate it: *The blessing of the LORD is what enriches; toil cannot add to it.*

Work may be the instrument God uses to bless us materially, but we must never forget that it is the Lord who gives us the strength and wisdom to work effectively and who blesses our efforts with success. Some hard-workers forget this, become workaholics, and fall into the trap of hubris, an excessive form of pride. Fox states it strongly; “Excessive effort is a form of hubris, as if one were presuming to push beyond the blessing that God would grant.” He explains that both the sluggard and the workaholic offend God. The sluggard “smugly assumes that he can fill his needs without investment” and the workaholic “assumes that he can force a way beyond the natural limits God has set on human achievement.”⁵ Tony Dungy puts it well: “There’s a fine line between passion and addiction, between a dedicated employee and a workaholic. I pray constantly for balance in my life.”⁶

But what is the key to receiving the Lord’s blessing? As we saw in an earlier study, the fear of the Lord.

According to 1:7, *fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge*. To fear the Lord is to obey him, as Proverbs 3:7 says: *fear the LORD and turn away from evil*. Those who fear the Lord are rewarded and honored by him: (1) *In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and it will be a refuge for his children. The fear of the LORD is like a life-giving fountain, to turn people from deadly snares* (14:26-27). (2) *The reward for humility and fearing the LORD is riches and honor and life* (22:4).

Day Four: The wise know that God blesses those who honor him

Proverbs 3:5-6; 16:3

Eric Liddell appears on the cover of this study guide. Ever since the popular movie *Chariots of Fire* appeared in 1981, people have been familiar with his story. Eric was born in 1902 in China, the son of missionaries. God gifted him with speed. When he came to Scotland to attend college, he became a track star and made the 1924 British Olympic team. The 100 meters was his best event, but when he discovered that the heats would be run on Sunday, he refused to participate because he believed he must honor God by keeping the Sabbath holy. Instead he raced in and won the 400 meters. Eric became a missionary to China. When the Japanese conquered China, Eric was put in an internment camp, where he died from a brain tumor in 1945. As instructed by his Savior, he always prayed for his enemies, his Japanese captors. One of his friends describes him this way, “What was his secret? He unreservedly committed his life to Jesus Christ as his Saviour

and Lord. That friendship meant everything to him. By the flickering light of a peanut-oil lamp early each morning he and a roommate in the men’s cramped dormitory studied the Bible and talked with God for an hour every day. As a Christian Eric Liddell’s desire was to know God more deeply, and as a missionary, to make Him known more fully.”⁷ In the closing scene of *Chariots of Fire*, just before the running of the final of the 400 meters, another runner hands Eric a note that reads: “It says in the old book, ‘He that honors me I will honor.’” Eric crumples up the note and holds it tightly in his fist as he runs to victory. The incident is fictional, but it dramatically captures Eric Liddell’s life’s passion—to honor God—and drives home the point that God does honor those who honor him.

The passage from the “old book” is 1 Samuel 2:30. There are many other passages that teach the same principle, including some well-known proverbs. Proverbs 3:5-6 says: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight* (Prov. 3:5-6). In Hebrew idiom, “acknowledge” means “obey.” Trust and obedience are two of the basic ingredients of honoring the Lord. As the old hymn says, “trust and obey, for there’s no other way.” The Lord rewards those who trust and obey. This is compared to making “paths straight.” In the first half of the verse, life is compared to walking in pathways. In the second half, the Lord’s reward is compared to making those pathways “straight,” that is, level and free from obstacles. This does not mean that God’s people never confront problems, but it does mean that God is there with them to lead them safely to the destination he has chosen for them. As Psalm 23:3b-4 says: *He leads me down the right paths for the sake of his reputation. Even when I must walk through the*

darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff reassure me.

So how do we honor God in our work? It starts by making sure our priorities are straight and that work doesn't swallow up other commitments—to God and to what God prioritizes, such as family. Tony Dungy understands this principle; he writes: “Your employer deserves your loyalty and whatever time it takes to perform your job. However, that job, that career, has to fit into your life in the appropriate place. It cannot be your life. It cannot be what defines you. It simply has to be one of the important priorities in your life. There may always be something else you can do to secure a client or land a sale, but you’ve got to learn to prepare to whatever level is appropriate and then walk away.”⁸ There’s always a tension between work responsibilities and commitment to God. Sometimes it can be relieved to some extent, if we commit to working smarter, not harder. In fact, the decision to do so can be evidence of commitment to God and he will give wisdom as to how to be more efficient. And then, as confirmation that you have chosen the wise, God-honoring course of action, he may even bless you with success.

Mark Howard, athletic director and head football coach at Frisco Centennial High School committed to do this very thing. I interviewed Mark as I was writing this study. Mark “had always struggled with working on Sundays” because he wants to “honor God and family.” But he was trained in the “old school” system. He explains: “I’ve always felt like you had to work both days on the weekend to get everything done in order to best prepare as coaches and players. My wife would often comment that she wished we didn’t have to work on Sundays so coaches could be home with their families. I understood

what she was saying but in my mind I simply felt there was no way around it. I would always tell my wife that all of the Christian head football coaches I knew and respected worked on Sundays as well.” But before the 2011 season Mark decided not to have his players come in as a group on Saturday and to make Sunday a day off. He devised a new Saturday routine that accomplished the staff’s goals in a more streamlined way that utilized online technology. At first, he wasn’t sure how it would work, but he says: “My coaches and players were both more refreshed during the season.” It seemed to work well on the field too; Centennial went 12-1. Mark says: “Is it coincidental that we had the most successful season ever in our program by not working on Sundays? I choose to believe that honoring God’s fourth Commandment and not working on Sundays really did make a difference.” If you go to the Centennial football website and click on Mark’s link, you’ll see that he lists Proverbs 3:5-6 under “inspirational words.” Mark is applying the truth of that proverb in a very practical way as he leads the Centennial athletic program.⁹

Another important proverb that urges us to give God priority is 16:3: *Commit your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established.* We must “commit” everything we do, including our work, to God. The word “commit” literally means, “roll,” as one would a stone. It’s a picture of placing everything we do in God’s care and relying on him for the outcome. When we do this, our plans will be “established,” a word that pictures them being firmly

“Do I make the honor of God the great object of my life and the rule of my conduct? If so, He will honor me. I may for a while receive no honor from man, but God will Himself put honor upon me . . . What can I do this day to honor the Lord? I will promote his glory by my spoken testimony and by my practical obedience, I will also honor him with my substance and by offering to Him some special service.”

*-Charles Spurgeon,
“Faith’s Check Book, Honor God”*

grounded and incapable of being overturned or knocked down. When Austin ISD athletic director Tommy Cox started his football coaching career many years ago, he was committed to balancing work with other values, such as family. In an article he wrote in the late nineties, entitled, “Don’t Confuse Activity with Productivity,” he wrote: “Our coaching staff does something that might help you capture some valuable time for your family during football season and might even make your staff more productive: We do not meet as a staff on Sundays. This is a decision I made in my first year as a head coach fifteen years ago. I wasn’t even sure how we were going to get the job done at first; it was just a commitment I made to God and to my family.” Working smarter, Cox came up with a detailed plan of how to make it work that actually led to greater efficiency among his staff, not to mention stronger families. In summing up the point of his article, he refers to Proverbs 16:3: “God will bless your work if you put him first (Proverbs 16:3).”¹⁰ This is another example of a coach working hard (and smarter) because he wants to honor God. (To see the positive benefits that implementing the six-day approach had for one coaching family, see our True Coaching Story for this week.)

The wise have a proper perspective on material wealth

- When we receive God's material blessings, we are to honor him by being generous
- Material wealth has its advantages, but its value should not be overrated
- Our character and relationships are more important than material wealth
- The wise are content with their means

Selected Proverbs on Money**Proverbs 3:9-10**

(9) Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first fruits of all your crops;
 (10) then your barns will be filled completely, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Proverbs 14:31

The one who oppresses the poor insults his Creator, but whoever shows favor to the needy honors him.

Proverbs 19:17

The one who is gracious to the poor lends to the LORD, and the LORD will repay him for his good deed.

Proverbs 21:13

The one who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor,
 he too will cry out and will not be answered.

Proverbs 22:9

A generous person will be blessed,
 for he gives some of his food to the poor.

Proverbs 28:27

The one who gives to the poor will not lack,
 but whoever shuts his eyes to them will receive many curses.

When we receive God's material blessings, we are to honor him by being generous**OBSERVATION**

1. What is the consequence of honoring God? (see 3:9-10)
2. What is one way to honor the Lord and receive his favor? (see 14:31; 19:17)
3. What are the consequences of being generous (see 22:9; 28:27a)? of being stingy (see 21:13; 28:27b)?

INTERPRETATION

1. Explain the logic underlying 3:9-10. (Do we normally think that giving away wealth will lead to more wealth?)
2. What do 14:31 and 19:17 suggest about God's attitude toward the poor?
3. What is meant by "will receive many curses" (28:27)?

APPLICATION

1. What are practical ways your team can reach out to the poor?

Here's a true coaching story to stimulate your thinking! On his way to the Saturday morning film time, a coach who had just lost a heart breaker had an idea. When he arrived and saw his coaches' long faces, he said, "Men, we can get down about this loss, or do something positive to move on. What do you think if we load up the players and take them to a nursing home?" They said, "That is your call, coach." They went and the kids came out after their visit cackling like a bunch of hens. The QB hollered: "Coach, guess what I saw on the wall of this lady I visited with? 'Thriving - Not Just Surviving.'" It became the team slogan for the year! All the players started whooping and hollering and constantly repeated the slogan throughout the year. They went on to have a good season and became closer than any team this coach had ever coached. When you reach out to the poor, you usually end up being blessed more than they are.

2. Memorize Proverbs 19:17 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

Selected Proverbs on Money

Proverbs 10:15

The wealth of a rich person is like a fortified city, but the poor are brought to ruin by their poverty.

Proverbs 11:4, 28

(4) Wealth does not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from mortal danger.
(28) The one who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

Proverbs 13:8

The ransom of a person's life is his wealth, but the poor person hears no threat.

Proverbs 19:4, 7

(4) Wealth adds many friends, but a poor person is separated from his friend.
(7) All the relatives of a poor person hate him; how much more do his friends avoid him—he pursues them with words, but they do not respond.

Proverbs 22:7; 23:4-5

(22:7) The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.
(23:4) Do not wear yourself out to become rich; be wise enough to restrain yourself.
(23:5) When you gaze upon riches, they are gone, for they surely make wings for themselves, and fly off into the sky like an eagle.

"People don't spend enough time with their families. They get caught up in material things, thinking that those make up life. The pursuit of material possessions often takes precedence over the things that are lasting, such as faith, family, and friends. Don't allow the lesser values to wreak havoc on your family."

- John Wooden

Life Wisdom from Coach Wooden, 74-75

DAY 2:

Material wealth has its advantages, but its value should not be overrated.

OBSERVATION

1. What are some of the advantages of material wealth (see 10:15; 19:4; 22:7)?
2. According to 13:8, how can a person's wealth sometimes benefit him?
3. Why does righteousness ultimately provide greater security than material wealth (11:4, 28)?

INTERPRETATION

1. Look beneath the surface of what is said in 10:15; 19:4; and 22:7. How are wealth's apparent advantages not all they're cracked up to be?
2. What does the second half of 13:8 mean?
3. What is the "day of wrath" mentioned in 11:4?

APPLICATION

1. How can you as a coach teach your players that moral purity (righteousness) is more important than material wealth?
2. Have you ever praised the character of an athlete from a poor family in a way that showed the other athletes that you value character above material possessions?

Selected Proverbs on Money**DAY THREE:****Proverbs 3:13-18**

(13) Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who obtains understanding.

(14) For her benefit is more profitable than silver, and
her gain is better than gold.

(15) She is more precious than rubies,
and none of the things you desire can compare to her.

(16) Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.

(17) Her ways are very pleasant,
and all her paths are peaceful.

(18) She is like a tree of life to those who obtain her,
and everyone who grasps hold of her will be blessed.

Proverbs 15:16-17

(16) Better is little with the fear of the LORD
than great wealth and turmoil with it.

(17) Better a meal of vegetables where there is love
than a fattened ox where there is hatred.

Proverbs 17:1

Better is a dry crust of bread where there is quietness
than a house full of feasting with strife.

Proverbs 22:1

A good name is to be chosen rather than great wealth,
good favor more than silver and gold.

Proverbs 28:6

A poor person who walks in his integrity is better
than one who is perverse in his ways even though he
is rich.

TRUE COACHING STORY

One of my best players was a freshman named Jake. His dad, who came to every game, was diagnosed with a liver disease; he died one month later. After his dad's death, Jake looked to me as a father figure. Since that time I have seen Jake trust Jesus as his Lord and Savior and attend a Christian university where he played baseball. Jake has also gone on two mission trips to Mexico with my family. What an amazing blessing to be able to play such an important role in a young man's life.

DAY 3:**Our character and relationships are more important than material wealth****OBSERVATION**

1. According to 3:13-18, what is more important than material wealth?
2. According to 15:16-17 and 17:1, what should get priority over material wealth?
3. According to 22:1 and 28:6, what are more important than material wealth?

INTERPRETATION

1. Why is wisdom more valuable than material wealth (3:13-18)?
2. Proverbs 15:16-17 and 17:1 associate material wealth with turmoil, hatred, and strife. Why?
3. What is meant by "perverse in his ways" (28:6)?

APPLICATION

1. How can these proverbs encourage you to stay the course, even when you feel underpaid and maybe underappreciated?
2. List three ways that the proverbs for day three encourage you:

WEEK 8

Achieving Success God's Way: A Study on Proverbs

DAY FOUR: Proverbs 30:8-9

(8) Remove falsehood and lies far from me;
do not give me poverty or riches,
feed me with my allotted portion of bread,
(9) lest I become satisfied and act deceptively
and say, "Who is the LORD?"
Or lest I become poor and steal and demean the
name of my God.

The wise are content with their means

OBSERVATION

1. According to Proverbs 30:8, what are the two extremes we should avoid?
2. According to Proverbs 30:9a, what might the one who is satisfied do?
3. According to Proverbs 30:9b, what might the one who is poor do?

INTERPRETATION

1. What is meant by "my allotted portion of bread" (30:8)?
2. What is meant by "act deceptively" (30:9a)?
3. What is meant by "demean the name of my God" (30:9b)? How does stealing do this?

APPLICATION

1. How do you know when you are truly content with your means? What does that look like?

God's Word teaches:

The wise have a proper perspective on material wealth

- When we receive God's material blessings, we are to honor him by being generous.
- Material wealth has its advantages, but its value should not be overrated.
- Our character and relationships are more important than material wealth.
- The wise are content with their means.

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

WEEK 8 Selected Proverbs on Money - Study Notes

Winning Wisdom

The Wise Have a Proper Perspective on Money

Introduction

In the opening scene of the classic movie *Citizen Kane* billionaire Charles Foster Kane, peers into a snow ornament and whispers “Rosebud.” The ornament falls to the floor and breaks, as Kane dies in the darkness. Throughout the remainder of the movie, which flashes back and tells Kane’s story, people try to figure out the meaning of “Rosebud.” Why was it the last word that came from Kane’s lips? In the movie’s final scene workers are throwing the late Kane’s accumulated goods into a furnace in the basement of his mansion. They throw a child’s sled into the fire. Written on it is the word “Rosebud.” An earlier scene from the movie comes to mind—Kane as a small child playing on a sled the day his mother cold-heartedly informed him he was being shipped off to boarding school. To the very end of his life, Kane was haunted by two things that were more important to him than all his wealth, but which his money could not recover or buy—the innocent joy of childhood and his mother’s love, both symbolized by “Rosebud.” Many stories, like *Citizen Kane*, remind us that riches can’t buy lasting happiness. Yet people remain obsessed with acquiring money. Ray Ortlund says we have an “itch” for it; he writes, “But let’s all admit that, sadly, money has an almost hypnotic spell over us. Money makes us feel secure and in control and important.”¹

“The person who thinks the money he makes is meant mainly to increase his comforts on earth is a fool, Jesus says. [See Luke 12:13-21.] Wise people know that all their money belongs to God and should be used to show that God, and not money, is their treasure, their comfort, their joy, and their security.”

- John Piper, Brothers, We Are Not Professionals, 168

Proverbs gives us a wise, balanced perspective on material wealth. This week we will examine what it says about this important subject.

Day one: When we receive God’s material blessings, we are to honor him by being generous

Proverbs 3:9-10; 14:31; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; 28:27

One morning several years ago, as my wife Deb and I were taking a walk, Deb saw a \$100 bill lying in the street, as if it had fallen from the sky. Convinced we would not be able to find the owner, we decided to take it. I could think of several ways the money would come in handy. But Deb informed me that she was going to convert it to smaller bills and give it to a couple of our children’s underpaid teachers. As far as Deb was concerned, God had generously dropped this money into our lap so we could give it to others who needed it more than we did. We were not to be recipients, but conduits. My wife is one of the most generous people I have ever known; she is also the most godly person I have ever known. There is a correlation between the two—generosity and godliness. When the rich young ruler claimed to have kept the Law, including the command to love one’s neighbor, Jesus challenged him: *If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.* (Matt. 19:21)

In last week’s study we saw that God is ultimately the one who gives us the strength to work and earn money. In response we are to honor him from the wealth he provides.

Proverbs 3:9-10 says: *Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled completely, and your vats will overflow with new wine.* When God blesses us materially, it is only right that we give some of it back to him, out of gratitude and in recognition that he owns it all anyway. If we do honor God in this way, a strange thing happens. By giving up a portion of what we have, we end up with more. Addition by subtraction! Our generosity is like a wise investment in the game of Monopoly. You have to give something up, but in the end the property you purchase can bring in way more than you initially paid out. It may seem counter-intuitive, but that’s the way it is with God. He loves a grateful heart and will pour his blessings out on grateful people who honor him.

When we think of honoring God from our wealth, we probably think of giving to the church and supporting “God’s work.” But honoring God with our wealth is not limited to tithing. One of the ways we can honor him is by being generous to those in need. Proverbs 14:31 says: *The one who oppresses the poor insults his Creator, but whoever shows favor to the needy honors him.* This proverb assumes that God identifies with the poor and needy. To oppress them is to insult God, who created all people (see Prov. 22:2); to help them is to honor God. Proverbs 19:17 makes a similar point: *The one who is gracious to the poor lends to the LORD, and the LORD will repay him for his good deed.* It’s like the scene in the funny, offbeat movie *Napoleon Dynamite*, where Pedro promises all the victims of bullying that, if elected class president, he will protect them from bullies. He enlists his tough older cousins to police the campus. As a bully is ready to beat on a little kid’s head, they drive up, honk, and merely shake their head “no” at the bully, who runs off. Do it to a little kid and you do it to Pedro’s tough

cousins. They had the back of the little kids. The Bible is clear that God “has the back” of the poor.

Generous people mirror the character of God. So it’s no surprise that God rewards the generous. Proverbs 22:9 says: *A generous person will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.* But those who are tight-fisted will find no one to help them in a time of need. Proverbs 21:13 says: *The one who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and will not be answered.* Your attitude and actions will boomerang on you. It’s the old principle of “what goes around, comes around.” Proverbs 28:27 contrasts the generous and the stingy: *The one who gives to the poor will not lack, but whoever shuts his eyes to them will receive many curses.* Bottom line: Give to the poor and God gives to you. Be stingy and you’ll make enemies. The stingy guy might say, “Big deal! What can a bunch of powerless poor people do?” But God listens to the poor and, if their complaint is legit, he’ll zap the stingy! (See the interpretation note.)

Day Two:

Material wealth has its advantages, but its value should not be overrated

Proverbs 10:15; 11:4, 28;
13:8; 19:4, 7; 22:7;
23:4-5

One of the things I love about the Proverbs is its realism. Proverbs acknowledges that money does have its advantages. It does not try to deny the obvious. The rich do have an edge over others. But Proverbs also puts this in proper perspective. Having a financial edge may make life easier, but it’s no guarantee of security and contentment, because wealth brings with it problems of its own and like everything in this world, it doesn’t last forever. The

advantages of wealth are obvious. Money can bring a degree of security. Proverbs 10:15 says: *The wealth of a rich person is like a fortified city, but the poor are brought to ruin by their poverty.* Money is compared to the wall of a fortified city, which holds back enemies and protects the city’s residents. Money also brings popularity. Proverbs 19:4 says, *Wealth adds many friends, but a poor person is separated from his friend.* The plight of the poor is described in more detail in 19:7: *All the relatives of a poor person hate him; how much more do his friends avoid him—he pursues them with words, but they do not respond.* People like to hang around the rich because of the perks. One thinks of sports stars or entertainers surrounded by their entourage, all hoping to benefit from the rich star’s handouts and generosity. But when’s the last time you saw a homeless person with an entourage? Even a poor person’s relatives shun him because he is an embarrassment and can’t do anything for them. In addition to security and popularity, money can give power, as Proverbs 22:7 acknowledges: *The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.* The rich rule because they have the means to influence people, control institutions, and gain power.

These three proverbs speak of the advantages of wealth, but if you scratch their surface and look a little deeper, you see that money isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Yes, a fortified city is less susceptible to attack than an unwalled town, but the image is not entirely a positive one. It implies that there are enemies to be

Interpretation Note: In ancient Israel people responded to kindness by praying a blessing. In a blessing you ask God, the righteous Judge of the world, to reward others for their kindness to you (see, for example, Ruth 1:8-9; 2:20; 3:10). However, if someone treated a person unjustly, the victim would typically pronounce a curse. This is not what we think of as cursing—angrily yelling obscenities. A curse is when you ask God, who is committed to fairness, to punish someone for mistreating of you (see, for example, Ps. 11:6). This is the background for Proverbs 28:27b: The poor desperately cry out for help, but the stingy person ignores them (“shuts his eyes”). The poor then appeal to God, who punishes the miser for his cold-hearted, tight-fisted attitude. This is what is meant by “receives many curses.” This may seem unfair, but remember two things: (1) As the righteous King, God is concerned about the poor and expects us to be as well (see Ps. 146:5-10). (2) The miser should remember that all he has comes from God. His wealth is not something to hoard up. God has given it to him so that he can share it with others. God expects him to be a conduit, not just a recipient.

beaten back. Furthermore, biblical history is filled with examples of walled cities being defeated. Siege warfare could isolate the people of a city and eventually bring starvation and death. People with wealth are sometimes not free to really live. They must insulate themselves, like a recluse in a mansion surrounded by a high fence, for fear of having their wealth stolen. Proverbs 13:8 describes such a scenario: *The ransom of a person’s life is his wealth, but the poor person hears no threat.* Rich people are sometimes the target of kidnappers. The wealthy are usually able to pay the ransom, but the poor never have to worry about such threats. Yes, money is like a wall around a city, but do you really want to be a magnet for thieves? And will that wall always hold up? Popularity isn’t all that great either. It’s nice to be popular, but what kind of “friends” are in the entourage? Fox writes that the rich “are victims of their wealth, for they can never be sure of their friends’ sincerity.”²² The reality is that the “friends” love the rich man’s money, not the rich

man. Perhaps the classic example of this is the aging sugar daddy who “marries” the gold-digger who is young enough to be his daughter. He gets a little enjoyment in his old age, but surely he must realize that she is really a high-priced prostitute bent on getting his fortune. Even the power that money acquires is deceiving. True, the rich rule over the poor, but is there enough power to go around? What often happens is that the rich destroy each other as they grasp for more control and more prestige.

So, while great wealth has obvious advantages, it’s not all it’s cracked up to be, for those advantages have strings attached. And in the end the advantages are only temporary, for wealth, like everything else in this world, doesn’t last forever. For this reason Proverbs 23:4-5 says: *Do not wear yourself out to become rich; be wise enough to restrain yourself. When you gaze*

Interpretation Note: The reference to a “tree of life” recalls the Garden of Eden.³ Adam and Eve had access to this tree, but when they sinned, God no longer let them eat from it (Gen. 3:22-24). In John’s vision of the heavenly city, he sees the tree of life, once again available to the human race (Rev. 22:1-2). We don’t have free access to this tree today, but God allows us to enjoy a taste of its fruit when we humbly take hold of the wisdom he offers. Jesus embodies the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24) and he has come to give abundant and eternal life to all who trust in him (John 10:10; 17:2-3).

upon riches, they are gone, for they surely make wings for themselves, and fly off into the sky like an eagle. And when the day of reckoning arrives and people stand before God, money will be of no help. Only one’s moral standing before God will count. As Proverbs 11:4 says: *Wealth does not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from mortal danger.* 11:28 says essentially the same thing: *The one who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.* The “day of wrath” is the day when God, angered by sin,

comes to judge. On that day, he can’t be bought off; trying to bargain with God would be as crazy as throwing dollar bills at a tornado.

Day Three: Our character and relationships are more important than material wealth-

Proverbs 3:13-18; 15:16-17; 17:1; 22:1; 28:6

On the day of reckoning, righteousness matters, money doesn’t. In addition to righteousness, there are other things that are more important than material wealth. According to 3:13-15, acquiring wisdom should get priority over accumulating wealth: *Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who obtains understanding. For her benefit is more profitable than silver, and her gain is better than gold. She*

is more precious than rubies, and none of the things you desire can compare to her. Wisdom is more valuable than jewels because it provides genuine security: Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are very

pleasant, and all her paths are peaceful. She is like a tree of life to those who obtain her, and everyone who grasps hold of her will be blessed (3:16-18). Genuine wisdom is founded on the fear of the Lord and originates with him. Those who embrace wisdom and live according to God’s principles are truly secure because he blesses them.

Relationships are also more important than wealth. Your relationship with God must get first priority: *Better is little with the fear*

of the LORD than great wealth and turmoil with it (15:16). But human relationships characterized by love are also more important than wealth: *Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened ox where there is hatred* (15:17). Proverbs 17:1 makes the same point: *Better is a dry crust of bread where there is quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.* These proverbs associate turmoil, hatred, and strife with wealth, because money has a way of generating greed, which in turn produces envy and conflict as people fight over riches. The classic example is the family that disintegrates into a war zone while fighting over an inheritance. Tony Dungy says it well, “Accumulating things is highly prized in our society, as are status and fame. On the other hand, the truly important things of life often happen in quiet, private moments--moments of faith, family, and building relationships.”⁴ Joe Ehrmann seconds those words: “All the power and prestige and possessions in the world will never make up for failed relationships.”⁵ John Wooden put it this way: “Don’t let making a living prevent you from making a life.”⁶

Having integrity and a good reputation are also more important than wealth. Proverbs 22:1 says: *A good name is to be chosen rather than great wealth, good favor more than silver and gold.* According to Proverbs 28:6, *A poor person who walks in his integrity is better than one who is perverse in his ways even though he is rich.* The expression “perverse in his ways” means, “twisted in (his) two paths.” In the Bible one’s life style is often compared to a road; in this proverb the rich person’s life is like a dangerous road filled with hair pin turns. The reference to “two paths” pictures him as a “double dealing” deceiver who defrauds others and then tries to cover it up.⁷ God doesn’t like “perverse” people. He makes sure their path is filled with “thorns and snares” (Prov. 22:5) and

he uses their own methods to bring them down (Ps. 18:26). A dishonest person may get rich, but he makes himself a target of God's anger. And who wants to have a big red circle on your back when God is doing the shooting?

We live in a society that values wealth above all things and is willing to do just about anything to acquire it. As a coach, you are in a unique position to challenge this perverted value system and to teach young people, by word and example, the importance of righteousness, wisdom, relationships, integrity, and reputation. Teacher Taylor Mali's poem, "What Teachers Make," was written in response to those who look down their noses at teachers, recite the little ditty, "Those who can do, those who can't teach," and then ask the underpaid teacher, "What do you make?"⁸

Joe Ehrmann has adapted Mali's poem for coaches: "You want to know what I make? I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I make them push through self-imposed limitations, athletically and academically. I make them strive together and for each other. You want to know what I make? I make boys into men . . . I make them aware of their social responsibility to build a better world. I make them competitive and teach them how to win with humility and lose with honor. I make them understand that if you follow your heart and someone ever tries to judge you by what you make, you must pay no attention because they just don't get it. You want to know what I make? I MAKE A DIFFERENCE. What do you make?"⁹ As a Christian coach, you make a difference when you teach and show young people what really matters and challenge them to reject the materialism of a greedy culture.

Day Four: The wise are content with their means

Proverbs 30:8-9

Physical balance is important in sports. If a shortstop or a quarterback throws "off balance," bad things can happen. If a golfer doesn't keep his body and swing in balance, he may well see the rough or a sand trap up close and personal. Balance is important in all of life. Proverbs recommends balance in our attitude toward material wealth. Agur says in Proverbs 30:8b: *do not give me poverty or riches, feed me with my allotted portion of bread.* Agur wanted to avoid extremes; he was satisfied with his allotted portion of bread, in other words the basic necessities of life, which would include food, clothes, and shelter. He explains in verse 9: *lest I become satisfied and act deceptively and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I become poor and steal and demean the name of my God.* On the one hand, wealth can produce a proud and self-sufficient attitude that has little, if any, place for God. In this context (note "Who is the LORD?") "act deceptively" refers to being unfaithful to God by renouncing your dependence on him. Bottom line: Money can make you forget God.

On the other hand, there is nothing honorable about poverty either, for the pressures created by poverty can tempt people to sin out of desperation. Agur was a loyal follower of God, but if he broke God's commandment ("Thou shalt not steal") this would "demean" God's name, or reputation. The verb translated "demean" literally means, "seize, do violence to." When God's people do wrong, they violate and dishonor the God to whom they swear allegiance, kind of like Jerry Sandusky brought dishonor on Penn State when he decided to play way, way outside God's moral boundaries.

Agur anticipates what the New Testament says about money. Paul says that *godliness combined with contentment brings great profit* (1 Tim. 6:6). We should be content with food and shelter for *the love of money is the root of all evils* and can bring people to moral ruin (vv. 8-10). Jesus warned his disciples, *Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal* (Matt. 6:19). He urged them, *But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal* (v. 20). There are no burglars in heaven! We store up treasure in heaven by doing good deeds and sharing generously with those in need. Paul said this: *Command those who are rich in this world's goods not to be haughty or to set their hope on riches, which are uncertain, but on God who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous givers, sharing with others. In this way they will save up a treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the future and so lay hold of what is truly life* (1 Tim. 6:17-19). My wife made a deposit in her heavenly bank account that day she decided to pass the \$100 bill from the sky on to some needy teachers. It's hard to imagine what treasure in heaven will be like. Think of a moment of sheer enjoyment (maybe your wedding day, the arrival of your first baby, or a great win against a tough opponent). We can't sustain those moments here on earth--they come and quickly go. But the joy that comes from heavenly treasure will be a million times greater than anything we experience in this life and it will last forever. So keep storing it up and keep your focus there. As Jesus said: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matt. 6:21).

Genuine sexual fulfillment is found only within marriage

- Your spouse is fully capable of satisfying you
- God blesses the marriage union he has ordained
- Adulterers can't hide from God or consequences
- Adultery begins in the heart

Proverbs 5:15-17

¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern
and running water from your own well.

(Verses 16-17: Alternative Translation)

¹⁶ The springs available to you flood the streets,
and run like streams through the public squares.

¹⁷ But they belong to you alone!
Other men cannot share them!

*"There may be sixty queens,
and eighty concubines,
and young women without number.
But she is unique!
My dove, my perfect one!
She is the special daughter of her mother,
she is the favorite of the one who bore her.
The maidens saw her and complimented her:
'Who is this who appears like the dawn?
Beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun,
awe-inspiring as the stars in procession?'"*
- Solomon to his bride,
Song of Solomon 6:8-10

*"When a man and a woman give themselves to
each other in an act of marital love, they can
know the love of Christ as no one else
can know it."*
-J. Vernon McGee

DAY 1:**Your spouse is fully capable of satisfying you****OBSERVATION**

1. In verse 15 what does the father tell his son to do?
2. Note the alternative translation of verses 16-17. What image does the father use to describe the wife (v. 16)?
3. To whom do these springs/streams belong (v. 17)?

INTERPRETATION

1. In verse 15 what is the father really referring to? Why is this an appropriate comparison?
2. In verse 16 what is the father saying about his son's wife's capacity to satisfy her husband?
3. In verse 17 what is the father teaching his son about the nature of marriage?

APPLICATION

1. Why do men and women so easily become dissatisfied with their spouse? Do you believe that the father is right about a wife's capacity to satisfy her husband?

Proverbs 5:18-19

¹⁸ May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in your young wife--
¹⁹ a loving doe, a graceful deer;
may her breasts satisfy you at all times,
may you be captivated by her love always.

*"Oh, how I wish you would kiss me
passionately!
For your lovemaking is more delightful
than wine. The fragrance of our colognes is
delightful;
your name is like the finest perfume."
- Solomon's bride,
Song of Solomon 1:2-3*

*"You have stolen my heart, my sister, my
bride!
You have stolen my heart with one glance of
your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.
How delightful is your love, my sister, my
bride!
How much better is your love than wine;
the fragrance of your perfume is better than
any spice!
Your lips drip sweetness like the honeycomb,
my bride, honey and milk are under your
tongue."
- Solomon,
Song of Solomon 4:9-11*

DAY 2:

God blesses the marriage union he has ordained

OBSERVATION

1. To what is the son's wife compared in verse 18?
2. To what animal is she compared in verse 19?
3. What three verbs describe the son's pleasure (vv. 18-19)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does the comparison to a fountain suggest about the wife's capacity to satisfy? (Recall our day one study.)
2. What does the comparison to a deer (v. 19) imply about the son's sexual desire?
3. Is the progression of the three verbs (vv. 18-19) significant?

APPLICATION

1. What wrong attitudes do Christians sometimes have about their sexuality? How does this passage challenge those attitudes?

FOR MARRIED COACHES:

2. In the midst of your busy schedules how can you keep the romantic side of marriage alive and well?

Day Three: Proverbs 5:20-23

²⁰ But why should you be captivated,
my son, by an adulteress,
and embrace the bosom of a different woman?

²¹ For the ways of a person are in front
of the LORD's eyes,
and the LORD weighs all that person's paths.

²² The wicked will be captured by his
own iniquities,
and he will be held by the cords of his own sin.

²³ He will die because there was no discipline;
because of the greatness of his folly he will reel.

Day Four: Proverbs 23:26-28

²⁶ Give me your heart, my son,
and let your eyes observe my ways;

²⁷ for a prostitute is like a deep pit;
a harlot is like a narrow well.

²⁸ Indeed, she lies in wait like a robber,
and increases the unfaithful among men.

*"For this is God's will: that you become
holy, that you keep away from sexual
immorality, that each of you know how to
possess his own body in holiness and honor,
not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who
do not know God . . . For God did not call
you to impurity but in holiness."*

Paul, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 7

*"Marriage must be honored among all and
the marriage bed kept undefiled, for God
will judge sexually immoral people and
adulterers."*

- Hebrews 13:4

DAY 3:

Adulterers can't hide from God or consequences

OBSERVATION

1. How does 5:21 picture the Lord?
2. What four verbs are used in 5:22-23 to describe what will happen to the adulterer?
3. According to 5:22-23 what causes the downfall of the adulterer?

INTERPRETATION

1. From the picture in 5:21 what do we learn about the Lord's character?
2. How does the word "captured" (v. 22) picture the sinner?
3. What is meant by "discipline" (v. 23)?

APPLICATION

1. How should the truth of God's omniscience (that he is aware of everything that happens) impact the way we think about sexual purity?

FOR MARRIED COACHES:

2. Why do adulterers sometimes think there will be no consequences to pay and that they will not be caught?
3. Memorize Proverbs 5:21 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

DAY 4:**Adultery begins in the heart****OBSERVATION**

1. In 23:26 the father asks his son to give him what?
2. To what three things does the father compare a prostitute (23:27-28a)?
3. What word does 23:28b use to describe adulterers?

INTERPRETATION

1. What does the father's reference to his son's heart and eyes (23:26) suggest about moral decision-making?
2. Why is the comparison of the prostitute to a deep well (23:27) especially appropriate?
3. In what ways does adultery rob the adulterer (23:28)?

APPLICATION

1. How can our "heart" and "eyes" conspire to lead us astray from the path of sexual purity? How can we prevent the enemy from capturing our heart and eyes?

God's Word teaches:

Genuine sexual fulfillment is found only within marriage

- Your spouse is fully capable of satisfying you
- God blesses the marriage union he has ordained
- Adulterers can't hide from God or consequences
- Adultery begins in the heart

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

Genuine Sexual Fulfillment is Found Only Within Marriage

Introduction

Scandal—it's a word that's commonplace in the news. Almost daily we read about scandals—financial scandals involving multi-million dollar Ponzi schemes, political scandals involving illegal campaign funds, and, yes, sex scandals that come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The most publicized recent one, involving former Penn State assistant coach Jerry Sandusky's sexual abuse of young boys, has shaken the nation, ruined the legacy of one of the most successful college football coaches of all time, and devastated the reputation of a great university that has held its football program up with pride for several decades. Frequently sex scandals involve adultery. Not too long ago Eliot

Spitzer, governor of New York and a rising star in the Democratic Party, had to resign from office after spending thousands of dollars on call girls. Mark Sanford, governor of South Carolina and a rising star in the Republican Party, had to resign when his wife found out that he was not hiking on the Appalachian Trail after all, but cavorting with his South American mistress.

Adulterous sex scandals are especially common in professional sports. Tiger Woods' golfing career and advertising value plummeted like a lead balloon once the public discovered he was a sex addict who had repeatedly cheated on his wife. Coaches are not exempt. A highly successful college basketball coach and father of five admitted to having a one-night stand with an admirer. He told the media: "I do want to say that the past seven months have been very difficult on the people I love. I am here today because I personally apologize to my family every single day. I let them down with my indiscretion six years ago and I'm sorry for that and I tell

them that every day."¹ But when the media kept pressing, his attitude seemed to change:

"Enough's enough, everybody is tired of it. We need to get on with the important things in life like the economy and really some crucial things in life like basketball."²

Before we too quickly and self-righteously condemn adulterers, we need to remember the Bible's warning, "*Pay close attention to yourselves, so that you are not tempted too*" (Gal. 6:1). The fact is that most of us are vulnerable to sexual sin. Our sexuality

is a wonderful gift from God, but in our fallen, sinful condition we are prone to misuse and pervert the gift. That is why the Bible has so much to say about the subject. Indeed, in three consecutive chapters in Proverbs the father warns his son about the dangers and consequences of sexual promiscuity (see 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27). When God repeats himself, it's probably a good idea to pay close attention. In fact, because the subject is so important we're going to spend the next two weeks studying it.

This week we're going to look carefully at 5:15-23 and 23:26-28. In these passages the father urges his son to express his sexuality in the right way, within the boundaries of marriage established by God. He also warns his son of the grave consequences of adultery. Because we live in such a sex-saturated society, we need to hear what he has to say.

Day One: Your spouse is fully capable of satisfying you Proverbs 5:15-17

The father begins by urging his son to satisfy his sexual desires in the proper way—within marriage: *Drink water from your own cistern and running water from your own well* (v. 15). The father is not talking about where to get a literal drink. He's comparing his son's sexual desires to thirst and the son's wife to a cistern or well, where the son can find cool, refreshing water to quench his thirst. The father's approach is realistic. By comparing sexual satisfaction to quenching one's thirst he recognizes the power of the male sexual drive.

But the son might be thinking: I don't know, dad, is there really enough water for me in that cistern or well? The father answers that

Interpretation Note: Coach, you know very well that sometimes you have to get technical. You have to go to the board and draw some X's and O's or analyze the game film as if you were looking at blood samples under a microscope. The same is sometimes true in Bible study. Some passages continue to challenge biblical scholars. Proverbs 5:16-17 is such a passage. Interpreters have offered a variety of explanations about what these verses mean, but there is no consensus. I've spent over thirty years teaching biblical Hebrew and translating the Old Testament into English. I'm convinced that the usual way of translating verses 16 (as a question) and 17 (as a command) are wrong. There is nothing in the Hebrew grammar of these verses that demands or even favors that translation. Several years ago I published an article arguing that both statements are best taken as simple descriptions of the son's wife and of her capacity to satisfy her husband.³ See the translation offered above in the study notes.

question in verses 16-17, which I prefer to translate as follows (see the interpretation note for a fuller discussion of this): *The springs available to you flood the streets, and run like streams through the public squares. But they belong to you alone! Other men cannot share them!*

The father is essentially telling his son: “Your wife’s capacity to satisfy you is more than adequate. She is more like an overflowing natural spring than a mere cistern or well (see the historical note). The good news is that this bountiful source of sexual pleasure is all yours! No one else has a right to enjoy her.” To emphasize the abundance of water available to the son, the father creates a mental image of water bubbling up from the ground and then running through the streets. The point seems clear; the son’s wife produces all the “water” the son will ever need. The son might think of her as being like a garden hose with a kink in it, but she’s really more like a fire hose hooked to a hydrant with the switch turned to “open.” In fact, she has the capacity to satisfy many (hence the reference to the “plazas”). But, the good news is that in God’s design of marriage, she is off limits to “strangers,” a term that simply refers here to other men. (The form is masculine in Hebrew, so it refers to men, not women.) Wives need to understand that they are the only *legitimate outlet* for their husbands in this area. God gives both husbands and wives the responsibility, privilege, and pleasure of satisfying their spouse. When we follow God’s design, there is always great satisfaction and joy.

Day Two: God blesses the marriage union he has ordained

Proverbs 5:18-19

The father continues to build his case for marital fidelity. He begins with a form of prayer called a blessing: *May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in your young wife* (v. 18). This is not just polite well wishing, but an appeal to the sovereign God to endue the son’s wife with special power to please. You may be thinking: You mean we can pray about sexual satisfaction in marriage? Yes, we can. In fact, in a society where soft porn bombards us every day from billboards, commercials, etc., I pray every day that the Lord would help me to see my wife for what she is—a flowing fountain (not just a cistern or well!) given to me by God.

I find that God answers that prayer for me by keeping my focus on my wife and all the love and pleasure she gives me. It’s this simple: *God is predisposed to bless what he has ordained when we follow his prescribed pathway to fulfillment.* In other words stay on the route God has marked out for you and you’ll arrive at your destination--satisfaction and joy. He wants us to enjoy this aspect of human experience and he is ready to bless us. A wife possesses a special divine endowment to satisfy her husband’s sexual needs. Even though our text is addressed by a father to a son, we can extend the principle and say that the reverse is true as well: a husband possesses the God-given capacity to satisfy his wife’s needs.

The father uses an odd image in verse 19a, when he describes the son’s wife as *a loving doe, a graceful deer*. I wouldn’t want to call my wife this; I don’t think she’d

Historical Note: In ancient Israel there were three main sources of water, apart from streams and rivers, which sometimes dried up if there was not enough rain. A cistern was a manmade receptacle used to collect run off water. A well was also manmade; it tapped into a subterranean water source. A spring or fountain, however, bubbled up from the ground; it was viewed as the handiwork of God (Ps. 104:10).⁴

find it flattering. But in ancient Israel they used animal imagery in love poetry; it resonated with them (see, for example, Song of Solomon 2:8-9, 17; 8:14). By comparing the son’s wife to a doe, he again reveals his awareness of his son’s elemental sexual urges. By implication the son is compared to a buck, which is well known for its powerful sexual drive during mating season. Yes, the language may seem a little earthy, but it gives the father credibility with his son, as if the dad is saying, “Son, I know how you feel, I’ve been there.”

The father speaks of the delight that awaits the son in the marriage bed. After praying that the son will “rejoice” in his wife (v. 18), he then prays: *may her breasts satisfy you at all times, may you be captivated by her love always* (v. 19b). The word “satisfy” means “to revive, saturate, give abundant refreshment,” like the rain that saturates plowed ground (Ps. 65:10). “Be captivated” is actually used elsewhere of the effects of too much wine (Prov. 20:1; Isa. 28:7). God wants you (remember the father is praying here!) to be intoxicated with your wife’s love. With the progression of verbs he uses, the father is intensifying the mental image he’s trying to create for his son: First he finds joy, then he is saturated with the pleasure his wife’s breasts bring him, and he ends up intoxicated by her love! As Fox states, “In the marriage bed, inhibitions may be

left behind.”⁵

Some women might find it surprising that Proverbs 5:16-18 pictures a wife as a flowing fountain. However, when the father compares the son’s wife to a gushing spring, this does not imply that a woman can turn her sexuality off and on like a faucet. When I teach this passage, I always teach it along with the Song of Solomon, which is a collection of love poems that celebrate romantic love and anticipate the excitement of marital romance. The Song gives God’s stamp of approval to human love as it is expressed physically and emotionally. God essentially says: “I created human romantic love and sexuality to be enjoyed. Here are some songs that will arouse your passion and help you express love. Recite and sing them, but most of all enjoy the experience they envision!”

I believe that everyone has a romantic side, even men with rough exteriors, like some coaches. Think back to when you were dating and to your honeymoon—couples need to try to resurrect some of that. It is within the context of romance that intimacy flourishes and sexual passion ignites. But genuine romance doesn’t involve just flowers and music; it derives from genuine sacrificial love that a husband should have for his wife. Paul describes it this way: *Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her* (Eph. 5:25). When husbands love their wives in that way, wives respond and then a couple’s expression of sexuality is more than just a physical act. It becomes the ultimate expression of the love that binds a man

and woman together. In short, it becomes everything that God intended it to be, made possible by Christ’s redemptive work. If you’re single, then obviously God expects you to wait to enjoy this experience. This kind of intimacy can’t happen outside of a marriage commitment. But imagine what you have to look forward to! Follow God’s way and you’ll experience his blessing as he honors you for your faithfulness to his standards.

Day Three: Adulterers can’t hide from God or consequences-

Proverbs 5:20-23

Having used strong positive motivation, the father now gives the other side of the coin. Great pleasure awaits the son if he views his wife properly, as a gift from God, and seeks sexual satisfaction God’s way, in marriage. On the other hand, if he decides to play outside the lines, deep, deep trouble awaits. The father begins this section with a question: *But why should you be captivated, my son, by an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of a different woman?* (v. 20) It makes no sense at all to seek sexual pleasure with another woman when God has given you all you’ll ever need and is ready to bless your marriage bed. Nevertheless, some are convinced that variety is the spice of life and insist on crossing the boundaries and ignoring the “do not trespass” signs placed there by God.

Despite all the evidence that sexual promiscuity does not bring lasting joy, some dive in, convinced they will be the exception. They won’t get caught and there won’t be any consequences. But the father reminds his son: *For the ways of a person*

are in front of the LORD’s eyes, and the LORD weighs all that person’s paths. Cheating on your spouse is foolish because it can never be done in secret. God knows everything (theologians refer to this as omniscience); he is always watching. The reference to God’s “eyes” is an especially vivid image, for it pictures God peering in or staring at you, even when you’re behind closed doors and think you have privacy. But God doesn’t just watch; he also evaluates all that a person does.

God is holy and just. Just as he is ready to bless the obedient, he makes sure the disobedient get what they deserve: *The wicked will be captured by his own iniquities, and he will be held by the cords of his own sin. He will die because there was no discipline; because of the greatness of his folly he will reel* (vv. 22-23). Our actions always have consequences; there are no exceptions. In the case of the adulterer, the picture is not pretty: he is captured and held fast by cords (or ropes). The verb “captured” pictures the adulterer as one who is hunted. It is used elsewhere of animals being trapped in a net or snare. The image of being held fast by ropes pictures the adulterer as becoming a prisoner. Ironically, it is the adulterer’s own sin that captures and imprisons him. The sin of adultery becomes like an enemy that hunts down the adulterer. This is a vivid way of making the point that adultery is self-destructive.

Verse 23 says the adulterer will die because of his lack of “discipline.” This is the same Hebrew word (pronounced “moo-sahr”) used in Proverbs 1:2-3 (see week one, day one), where it is translated “moral instruction.” It includes the concepts of correction and discipline. The adulterer does not heed the warnings; he is undisciplined and he pays the

“When adultery walks in, everything worth having walks out.”

- Woodrow Kroll

ultimate price for his lack of self-control. The last word of verse 23 (“reel”) translates the same Hebrew word as “captivated” in verses 19-20. Comparing the three verses makes for an interesting study in contrasts. If the son seeks satisfaction God’s way, he will end up intoxicated with his wife’s love (v. 19). But if he seeks this intoxication with another woman (v. 20), he will end up stumbling to his death, reeling like a drunk who falls off a cliff (v. 23).⁶ God’s moral standards are like the outside line on the shoulder of a mountain road. Stay inside the line and you’ll enjoy a beautiful drive and see some great scenery. Venture outside the line and you’ll end up careening to the valley below or crashing on the side of a rocky cliff. The sovereign God has rigged the world so that a person’s foolish lack of moral discipline will be self-destructive.

Day Four: Adultery begins in the heart

Proverbs 23:26-28

Proverbs 23:26-28 nicely complements the passage we have just studied. It’s as if the father throws in one more word of warning to his son. In verse 26 he says: *Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes observe my ways.* In Hebrew thinking the “heart” included more than just the emotions; it was also viewed as the source of thoughts (what we call the mind) and desires (what we call the will). That’s where unfaithfulness starts, in our inner character. Those inner motives, desires, and plans then find an avenue for expression through the eyes. If you fall to temptation, it is not simply due to what you have seen. It is because you already decided deep within your heart to stray.

I love Cadbury chocolate mini-

eggs, but you can find them only around the holidays. Knowing this, my loving wife stocks up on them and puts them in the freezer in the garage so I’ll have some available throughout the year. Now I’m on a diet plan--Weight Watchers, which gives you a certain amount of “points” to use on food each week. If I eat just a few mini-eggs, I’ll be OK. But sometimes I get the “urge” to have a feeding frenzy. I wander into the garage, open up the freezer, and there they are. I see them, I grab a bag, and before you know it the Weight Watchers scoreboard is lighting up like a pin ball machine. Now failure didn’t happen when I saw the bag. I only saw it because I lusted for it in my heart and decided to stray into the garage. I was looking for the eggs and I found what I wanted. By the time I saw them, it was a lost cause and the outcome was inevitable. The same is true for the son here in Proverbs, and for all of us--married or single, male or female--when it comes to sexual temptation. Ultimately, the battle is not won with the eyes, but in the heart. The father, who speaks here for God, demands our undivided attention.

The father insists on this because there is great danger lurking outside the home: *for a prostitute is like a deep pit; a harlot is like a narrow well. Indeed, she lies in wait like a robber, and increases the unfaithful among men* (vv. 27-28). The thought of falling into a deep pit or a narrow well is frightening. The image of the well, where one would expect to find thirst quenching water, is particularly ironic. By describing it as narrow and pairing it with “deep pit,” the father transforms something that might seem appealing into what it really is—a life threatening terror.

Back in Proverbs 5:15, the son’s wife is compared to a well that yields water and quenches his thirst. But here an unfaithful husband seeks satisfaction from a narrow well that only entraps, but does not satisfy.⁷ The prostitute is also a robber. As Fox says, “This woman is not only a passive hazard like a cistern or pit; she is an active danger, like a robber lying in ambush.”⁸ She has no interest in her victim apart from his money (see Prov. 29:3). But she not only robs him of his money; she also steals his integrity. She expands the list of the “unfaithful among men.” The “unfaithful” have broken a bond of loyalty; they have betrayed a trust and are traitors. Americans detest Benedict Arnold, because he was disloyal to his country. Well, nobody wants to be the Benedict Arnold of his or her family. Follow God’s advice, stay within the boundary lines, and God’s blessing awaits.

TRUE COACHING STORY

My husband and I attended the Coaches Outreach Marriage Conference for the first time in 2009. We had been through a very emotional and turbulent struggle that had been very draining on us, our spirits, and our marriage. We had no idea what to expect. God was so good to us--we were given a peace about our experiences, we were given a renewal of spirit, we were given a recommitment to our marriage, and thanks to a powerful small group, we were given some lifelong friends who are still encouraging us and lifting us up in prayer. We will always be humbled by all the blessing that came to us.

CHAPTER THEME**Sober thinking is necessary when facing sexual temptation**

- We must be well prepared if we expect to resist sexual temptation
- Sexual temptation appeals to pride
- Sexual temptation appeals to greed
- A reality check is needed when facing sexual temptation

Proverbs 7:1-5

¹ My child, keep my words
and treasure up my commands in your own
keeping.

² Keep my commands so that you may live,
and obey my instruction as your most prized
possession.

³ Bind them on your forearm;
write them on the tablet of your heart.

⁴ Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,”
and call understanding a close relative,
⁵ so that they may keep you from the adulterous
woman,
from the loose woman who flatters with her
words.

DAY 1:**We must be well prepared if we expect to resist sexual temptation****OBSERVATION**

1. In verses 1-3 what does the father tell his son to do?
2. In verse 4 to what does the father compare wisdom and understanding?
3. According to verse 5, how are wisdom and understanding capable of helping the son?

INTERPRETATION

1. To what does “most prized possession” refer (v. 2)?
2. What is the point of comparing wisdom and understanding to a sister and close relative (v. 4)?
3. What makes the adulterous woman such a threat (v. 5)? What is meant by “flatters with her words”?

APPLICATION

1. Can you think of a time when you faced and resisted sexual temptation? How did your past moral training help you?
2. Why are we sometimes vulnerable to flattery?
3. Memorize Proverbs 7:2 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

Proverbs 7:6-15

⁶ For at the window of my house
through my window lattice I looked out
⁷ and I saw among the naïve—
I discerned among the youths—
a young man who lacked wisdom.
⁸ He was passing by the street near her
corner,
making his way along the road to her house
⁹ in the twilight, the evening,
in the dark of the night.
¹⁰ Suddenly a woman came out to meet
him!
She was dressed like a prostitute and
with secret intent.
¹¹ (She is loud and rebellious,
she does not remain at home—
¹² at one time outside, at another in the wide
plazas,
and by every corner she lies in wait.)
¹³ So she grabbed him and kissed him,
and with a bold expression she said to him,
¹⁴ “I have fresh meat at home;
today I have fulfilled my vows!
¹⁵ That is why I came out to meet you,
to look for you, and I found you!

DAY 2:

Sexual temptation appeals to pride

OBSERVATION

1. How is the youth described in verse 7?
2. How is the woman described in verses 10-13?
3. What was her purpose in coming outside her house (v.15)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What foreshadows the youth's downfall (vv. 6-9)? How did he lose the battle before the woman even arrived?
2. In what ways would the woman's appearance, demeanor, and actions be appealing to a man (v.10-13)?
3. In what ways would the woman's words be appealing to a young man (vv. 14-15)?

APPLICATION

1. Why should every parent read this passage to their teenage son? Write down *your* answer before reading the following. (One reason is that when an adult reads a passage like this it helps take the titillation out of the mind and shows a reality of life that will ultimately only hurt you. If the Bible warns of something that advertisers know and use, it gives young people a “heads up” that can help them avoid sin.)

FOR MARRIED, MALE COACHES:

2. You may not come face to face with this kind of woman, but you can confront her in virtual reality every day—through advertising, media, the internet, etc. What are some ways you can insulate yourself from lusting for her in your mind and heart?

Day Three: Proverbs 7:16-21

¹⁶ I have spread my bed with elegant coverings,
with richly colored fabric from Egypt.

¹⁷ and I have perfumed my bed
with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon

¹⁸ Come, let's drink deeply of
lovmaking until morning,
let's delight ourselves with sexual intercourse.

¹⁹ For my husband is not at home;
he has gone on a journey of some distance.

²⁰ He has taken a bag of money with him;
he will not return until the end of the month

²¹ She persuaded him with persuasive words;
with her smooth talk she compelled him.

Day Four: Proverbs 7:22-27

²² Suddenly he went after her
like an ox that goes to the slaughter,
like a stag prancing into a trapper's snare

²³ till an arrow pierces his liver—
like a bird hurrying into a trap,
and he does not know that it will cost him his
life

²⁴ So now, sons, listen to me,
and pay attention to the words I speak.

²⁵ Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways—
do not wander into her pathways;

²⁶ for she has brought down many fatally wound-
ed, and all those she has slain are many.

²⁷ Her house is the way to the grave,
going down to the chambers of death.

DAY 3:

Sexual temptation appeals to greed

OBSERVATION

1. Describe the scene painted by the woman in verses 16-17.
2. To what does the woman compare lovemaking (v. 18)?
3. Where does the woman say her husband is (vv. 19-20)?

INTERPRETATION

1. How is the scene the woman paints in verses 16-17 persuasive? To which of the five senses does she appeal?
2. How does verse 18 contribute to the woman's strategy? To which of the senses does she appeal?
3. What's "smooth" and "persuasive" about what the woman says in verses 19-20?

APPLICATION

1. Why are men especially susceptible to sexual temptation? What circumstances sometimes prompt wives to get involved in an affair? Are there factors peculiar to the coaching profession that make coaches and their spouses especially susceptible to sexual temptation?

DAY 4:**A reality check is needed when facing sexual temptation****OBSERVATION**

1. To what does the father compare the young man's downfall (vv. 22-23)?
2. In verse 25, what does the father tell his son?
3. According to verses 26-27, what is the consequence of getting involved in an affair with this type of woman?

INTERPRETATION

1. How do the illustrations in verses 22-23 support the last statement in verse 23?
2. What is the significance of the father mentioning the son's heart, rather than his eyes (v. 25)?
3. What would death look like for the son (vv. 26-27)? (See the interpretation note in the study notes.)

APPLICATION

1. Is sexual promiscuity really deadly? How could it be deadly for you? How can we remind ourselves of the consequences of adultery in order to prevent failure in this area of our lives?

God's Word teaches:

Sober thinking is necessary when facing sexual temptation

- We must be well prepared if we expect to resist sexual temptation
- Sexual temptation appeals to pride
- Sexual temptation appeals to greed
- A reality check is needed when facing sexual temptation

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

Sober Thinking is Necessary When Facing Sexual Temptation

Introduction

His nickname was Leo The Lip, because he always had something to say—usually something brash and often obscene. His most famous saying was made when he was managing the Dodgers. He pointed to the rival Giants' dugout and said: "Take a look at them. All nice guys. They'll finish last. Nice guys—finish last." By the time sportswriter Roger Kahn got to know The Lip he had already been divorced twice; two more failed marriages would follow. Kahn describes Leo The Lip Durocher this way: "Durocher's vocabulary would make a longshoreman wince. He gambled incessantly, unscrupulously fleecing innocents. His pursuit of women was relentless." One day Kahn was sitting with The Lip in a Phoenix hotel lobby. A famous blond actress walked by; Kahn's eyes were glued to her. The Lip asked, "Like that?" and then informed Kahn that he was sleeping with her. Kahn replied, "You and that movie star?" The Lip answered, "Sure, kid," and then explained that he had to curtail his relationship with the actress the next day because the Lip's current wife, actress Laraine Day, was arriving in town. The Lip then told Kahn, "Stick with me, kid. Write what I tell you, good positive stuff. Do that and I'll teach you how to

get movie stars to go to bed with you."¹ When I read Kahn's account, two of The Lip's many character flaws jump out at me: ego and greed. They are the characteristics of a gambler—always ready to cheat and take risks, at the card table, in the bedroom, and in life. This week, as we continue our study on what Proverbs teaches about marital fidelity, we're going to read about such a gambler and what happened to him. His story has some important lessons for us.

Day One: We must be well prepared if we expect to resist sexual temptation

Proverbs 7:1-5

For the third straight chapter, the father warns his son about the danger of sexual temptation. He begins this round by urging his son to pay careful attention to his words of advice: *My child, keep my words and treasure up my commands in your own keeping. Keep my commands so that you may live, and obey my instruction as your most prized possession. Bind them on your forearm; write them on the tablet of your heart* (vv. 1-3). The son must make a conscious effort to memorize, remember, and do what the father says, because his life will be at stake (note, "so that you may live"). The son must treat his father's advice as if it were his "most prized possession," literally, "the pupil of his eye," one of the last things you'd be willing to give up. If somebody comes at you with a knife threatening to make you blind, you'll fight him to the death because he wants to take something that you really, really value. The father says we need to put that same value on God's wisdom. The father compares this to binding his words on the son's forearm (literally, fingers),

sort of like a quarterback would put a play list on his wrist, and to writing his commands on the tablets of his heart (or mind). The father expects the son to record his advice in his mind, so that when temptation comes, he can just hit the play button and access the wisdom the father has planted there.

The father's word choice makes it clear that the son is about to face a great challenge. To meet that challenge, maximum preparation is necessary. The father is ready to impart wisdom and the son must treat that wisdom with the utmost respect and devotion, just as he would his own sister or a close relative: Say to wisdom, "*You are my sister;*" and call understanding *a close relative* (v. 4). The father finally reveals the challenge the son will face: *so that they may keep you from the adulterous woman, from the loose woman who flatters with her words* (v. 5). The son will inevitably face temptation in the form of a woman who knows how to use words to maximum advantage. "Flatters with her words," reads literally in the Hebrew, "who makes her words smooth." She's a smooth talker. She will use her words to stroke the son's ego and to stimulate his imagination and hormones. Against such a formidable foe, there is no room for complacency. Thorough, careful preparation is essential.

Of course, all coaches know the importance of careful preparation. It usually means the difference between success and failure. Several years ago I served as an assistant boys' basketball coach for a small private high school. Early in the season, our point guard, who was a one-man press breaker, went down with an injury. We didn't have time to prepare adequately for a game against an opponent that pressed us relentlessly—we lost by forty. The next day the boys reported for practice with long faces. I told them not to be ashamed or discouraged.

"My soul, see here the danger of gratified passions; they are the janitors of hell."

- Charles Spurgeon,
Treasury of David, on Ps. 78:30

WEEK 10 Proverbs 7:1-27 - Study Notes

They did not lose the game; we, the coaching staff, had lost it by not preparing them properly for the onslaught they had faced. We would play this same team again in three weeks and I told the boys that we would win the rematch because we were going to be ready this time. We worked on a variety of press breakers, sometimes practicing against six defenders. The boys wrote our instruction on the tablets of their hearts, as it were. They knew what to do against every conceivable type of pressure. Game night arrived and it was gratifying to see our boys slice the opponent's press to shreds and win going away. As we shook hands with the opposing coach after the game, he said, "That was a different team you put out there tonight." I replied, "We were ready this time." Difficult challenges always demand careful preparation. Sexual temptation is one of those challenges.

Day Two: Sexual temptation appeals to pride Proverbs 7:6-15

Sometimes stories are the best form of teaching. The father uses a story to warn his son about the danger of sexual temptation. It begins this way: *For at the window of my house through my window lattice I looked out and I saw among the naïve—I discerned among the youths—a young man who lacked wisdom. He was passing by the street near her corner, making his way along the road to her house in the twilight, the evening, in the dark of the night* (vv. 6-9). The main character is a "young man who lacked wisdom"; he's a member of a group called the naïve. He plays a supporting role in Proverbs. Words like "simple" or "naïve" are used to describe him. The Hebrew word is *peti* (pronounced "puh-tee") so we'll just call him "Pete." In the

proverbs Naive Pete is the little brother of the fool. As we pointed out in our week one study, Pete hasn't yet descended to the level of the fool, but he's on the elevator with the arrow pointing down and he will eventually arrive in the basement if something drastic doesn't turn him around. Pete is the kind of guy who is gullible—he'll believe anything. He needs wisdom but, unfortunately, he tends to reject wise instruction.²

The classic description of Naive Pete appears here in Proverbs 7, where he gets his chance to take center stage and meets a sexy and exciting supporting actress whom we'll call Mrs. Robinson. (Some of you may recall her from the movie "The Graduate" or from Simon and Garfunkel's song about her. Today she'd be called a "cougar," an older woman, like Demi Moore, looking for a younger man.) In fact we could entitle this little story: "Fatal Attraction: Naive Pete Meets Mrs. Robinson." This very first scene is foreboding. It's early evening, around sunset. We see a group of young men, "the naïve." One of the group, Pete, leaves his companions and strides confidently down the street toward "her corner," where "her house" is located (v. 8).³ We know, having read the father's description of "her" (v. 5) that Pete is in trouble. He's hanging around with the wrong crowd; he's in the wrong place at the wrong time. He seems to be looking for trouble, and when you do that, trouble will always find you.

And it found Pete: *Suddenly a woman came out to meet him! She was dressed like a prostitute and with secret intent. (She is loud and rebellious, she does not remain at home—at one time outside, at another in the wide plazas, and*

"Our minds are mental greenhouses where unlawful thoughts, once planted, are nurtured and watered before being transplanted into the real world of unlawful actions . . . These actions are savored in the mind long before they are enjoyed in reality. The thought life, then, is our first line of defense in the battle of self-control."

- Jerry Bridges,
The Practice of Godliness, p. 138

by every corner she lies in wait.) (vv. 10-12) She's a single-minded woman and her purpose is clear. She's been looking for someone like Pete, and now that she's spotted her prey, she's going for the jugular. Even though she's not really a prostitute, as we'll see, she's dressed like one. In other words, she's going out of her way to draw male eyes to what she has to offer. Through her dress and her demeanor she's saying: "Come on, undress me with your eyes, use your imagination, and then make your dreams a reality." She's not shy or afraid; she's aggressive and willing to play outside the lines. When the text describes her as "loud and rebellious," we should not picture a drunken, obnoxious woman yelling obscenities. Perhaps a good paraphrase would be "outgoing and uninhibited," which to some would mean passionate and exciting.

Notice what she does next: *So she grabbed him and kissed him* (v. 13a). Before Pete has a chance to even think about putting up his defenses (if he even has any!), she gives him the shock treatment and, with a determined look in her eye, shows him in no uncertain terms that she finds him attractive, even irresistible. Pete won't have to work for this pick up; she's picking him up! Finally she speaks: *and with a bold expression she said to him, "I have fresh meat at home; today I have fulfilled my vows! That is why I came out to meet you, to look for you, and I found you!"* (vv. 13b-15) She begins, oddly enough, by

Interpretation Note: Part of the meat from fellowship offerings accompanying vows could be eaten by the offerer (Lev. 7:15-16).⁴ This is essentially an invitation to the ancient Israelite equivalent of a steak dinner. By mentioning offerings and vows, the woman is presenting herself as religious; she's not just a common prostitute.

talking about her religious devotion. Yet in the process she begins to appeal to his physical appetites. She essentially says: "I've been to church and I've got a delicious dinner prepared at home just for you." You can satisfy your appetite at my house, in more ways than one! The implication is clear—he can satisfy his desires and fantasies without resorting to some trick off the street. She's a woman who's got some class. But the real knockout punch comes next. She flatters him by telling him she has been looking specifically for him. She appeals to his ego and egos come in just one size—huge! Let's face it, we all enjoy it when members of the opposite sex flirt with us and let us know they find us attractive. It's at that point that we may be most vulnerable, because that ego wants to be fed and it likes a big meal, just like the one Mrs. Robinson is ready to serve Naïve Pete!

Day Three: Sexual temptation appeals to greed

Proverbs 7:16-21

Mrs. Robinson is just warming up. Having thrown a solid shot at Pete's ego, she now appeals to another of his fatal flaws, greed. She stimulates his senses of sight and smell: *I have spread my bed with elegant coverings, with richly colored fabric from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon* (vv. 16-17). This is no back seat of a

Ford parked on a dark country road. The romantic setting, with its beautiful fabric and sweet aroma, promises a night of pure delight. Next she targets his senses of taste and touch: *Come, let's drink deeply of lovemaking until morning, let's delight ourselves with sexual intercourse* (vv. 18-19). She arouses his erotic desires as she compares intercourse to drinking an intoxicating beverage. She wants him to taste and touch her charms. But there might be a lingering question in Pete's mind: What about your husband? As great as her offer sounds, he wouldn't want to be caught in the act. She eliminates that final barrier: *For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a journey of some distance. He has taken a bag of money with him; he will not return until the end of the month* (vv. 19-20). Verse 21 characterizes her speech as persuasive and smooth: *She persuaded him with persuasive words; with her smooth talk she compelled him*. Smooth, tempting speech like this always finds fertile soil when greed is the fertilizer. Our greed, which is part of our fallen nature, makes us want more than we need and it refuses to be satisfied when our needs are met.

Perhaps you are confident you would never commit adultery. But before you get too complacent, remember the words of Jesus. He said that we commit adultery in God's sight when we desire in our heart a member of the opposite sex and start to fantasize (Matt. 5:27-28). Our enemy, Satan, is the cosmic Pimp. He has always tried to enslave young ladies and use them to exploit the weaknesses of young men, dehumanizing both groups in the process. He has recently devised a new strategy—internet porn. Mrs. Robinson is now making herself available in virtual reality. You might think that virtual adultery is not the real thing, but Jesus says otherwise. To imagine is

to do, as far as God is concerned. And internet porn appeals to the potential for greed that is within us all because it provides variety and vivid images. Addiction to internet porn is like a flesh eating bacteria that's always hungry. Coach, you need to first make sure you're clean in this area; if not, get help now. Then you need to convince the young people under your care that virtual sex is wrong in the sight of God and, for that reason, poison to the soul. Pouring porn into the brain is as harmful to the soul as eating rat poison is to the body.

Day Four: A reality check is needed when facing sexual temptation

Proverbs 7:22-27

Naïve Pete's fatal flaw is his inability to see beyond the moment. He fails to consider the consequences of his actions and just jumps in head first. Little does he realize that the pool has no water in it: *Suddenly he went after her like an ox that goes to the slaughter, like a stag prancing into a trapper's snare till an arrow pierces his liver—like a bird hurrying into a trap, and he does not know that it will cost him his life* (vv. 22-23). Each of the images depicts a sudden, deadly end that comes as a complete surprise to the victim. The ox goes to the slaughtering block and suddenly a knife is at its throat. The deer runs into the snare and suddenly the hunter's arrow is speeding toward its vital organs. The bird rushes toward the bait and suddenly the trap springs and it's caught. Little does Pete realize that there is a very large price to pay for this oh so brief night of pleasure.

Having described Pete's demise, the father draws the lesson for his sons: *So now, sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words I speak*.

WEEK 10 Proverbs 7:1-27 - Study Notes

Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways—do not wander into her pathways; for she has brought down many fatally wounded, and all those she has slain are many. Her house is the way to the grave, going down to the chambers of death (vv. 24-27). The father's warning can be boiled down to four commands: pay attention, guard your heart, guard your actions, and consider the consequences. He first demands the son's attention; you'll never learn anything if you don't first listen.

Next he mentions the heart, not the eyes. As we saw in last week's study, failure begins at the core of one's being, in the thought life, before we ever receive any visual stimulation. Actions then follow, as the feet follow the heart. It's also vital to use foresight, to consider the consequences of actions. In this case the consequences are severe. Verse 26 pictures a battlefield covered with corpses, while verse 27 says her house is the gateway to death.⁵ Contrast the way she described her bedroom with the father's description of her house. She painted a tempting picture of her bedroom with the focal point being her perfumed bed covered with beautiful fabric. But, the father says, to enter her house and her bedroom is to begin a descent that leads to other rooms far below in the land of the dead. In other words, she is the candy apple with poison

inside, the sparkling champagne laced with arsenic.

But are the consequences really as bad as the father says? Does sexual sin really kill? If I were to cheat on my wife, what would the consequences be? Well, first of all, I'd lose the respect of my wife, a godly woman who has sacrificed in countless ways for my welfare. If I were unfaithful to her, it would be the ultimate act of ingratitude. I'd also lose the respect of my adult children and I'd pollute the legacy that my father handed down to me. I'd wound the heart of my 90 year-old mother. What a bitter pill to give her in the winter of her life. I'd also lose my career and my ministry for which I've trained and expended so much energy over the past years. And even worse, I'd undermine all the things I've been teaching over the years to hundreds of students and friends, perhaps creating cynicism. And, of course, last but certainly not least, I think of how it would grieve Christ, who hung on that cross and endured all of that shame in order to redeem me so that I can live a life pleasing to God.

One word summarizes all these negative effects that adultery would have on my life: death. My heart would still be ticking, and God's forgiveness would be available, but my existence would be a living hell because sin, even when it's

forgiven, has consequences. The price tag for sexual immorality is infinitely too high. For perhaps a brief moment of excitement, I would lose everything that is near and dear to me on this earth. Take a few moments and think about what the consequences of adultery would be for you. What would "death" look like in your case? Not a pretty picture, is it? I'm sure the photo contains the pained look of an injured and betrayed spouse, eyes filled with tears. Maybe it also includes some children with a look of disbelief and disappointment on their faces, who (apart from God's grace) may become very insecure about relationships and find it difficult to trust fully a future mate. Pull out that mental picture if "Mrs. Robinson" shows up at your door or on your computer screen someday. Better to preview the consequences and walk away from them than to face them inside a cage with no exit.

Interpretation Note: Adultery was a capital offense according to the Law of Moses (Deut. 22:22). However, the maximum penalty was not always carried out. Yet the consequences were still severe. An offended husband had legal recourse against a man who committed adultery with his wife. Offended husbands were typically so filled with vengeance that they could not be bribed or convinced to settle out of court (see Prov. 6:30-35). The penalty for adultery involved at least some form of corporal punishment and a certain degree of disgrace (6:33). Some form of financial reparation may have been involved, as well as public humiliation and a sense of regret in one's later years (see Prov. 5:7-

14). So, it would appear that in ancient Israel adultery did bring some very serious physical, financial, social, and psychological repercussions. In ancient Israel death was not viewed in a strict clinical sense as the cessation of bodily functions. In the Israelite view, death invaded a person's life any time one's reputation or financial security was threatened.⁶ In light of this, we can see why the father warns that death is the consequence of adultery, for adultery and its consequences would severely disturb your personal welfare and bring you face-to-face with the long, cold arm of death reaching up into the land of the living.

The wise know how to relate to friends, neighbors, enemies, and fools

- The wise understand the dynamics of genuine friendship
- The wise treat their neighbors properly
- The wise respond properly to enemies
- The wise keep their distance from fools

Selected Proverbs on Social Relationships**Proverbs 17:17**

A friend loves at all times,
and a relative is born to help in adversity.

Proverbs 18:24

A person who has friends may be harmed by them,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 27:6

Faithful are the wounds of a friend,
but the kisses of an enemy are excessive.

Proverbs 27:9

Ointment and incense make the heart rejoice,
likewise the sweetness of one's friend from sincere counsel.

"The good man has his enemies. He would not be like his Lord if he had not. If we were without enemies we might fear that we were not the friends of God, for the friendship of the world is enmity to God."

- Charles Spurgeon, Treasury of David, Psalm 23

"There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship."

- Thomas Aquinas

DAY 1:**The wise understand the dynamics of genuine friendship****OBSERVATION**

1. How do 17:17a and 18:24b describe a true friend?
2. According to 27:9, a friend's sincere advice is like what?
3. According to 27:6, what does a true friend sometimes do?

INTERPRETATION

1. What one word would best describe the character of the friend in 17:17 and 18:24?
2. Explain the comparison in 27:9. How is good advice like ointment or incense?
3. Explain the reasoning of 27:6a. How can wounds be faithful?

APPLICATION

1. How can we cultivate genuine friendship? Think of a faithful friend. How did you and your friend grow that relationship?
2. Think of a time when you had to wound a friend or had to be wounded by a friend. How did that work out in the long run?
3. Memorize Proverbs 27:6 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

Selected Proverbs on Social Relationships

Proverbs 3:27-28

(27) Do not withhold good from those who need it, when you have the ability to help.

(28) Do not say to your neighbor, "Go! Return tomorrow and I will give it," when you have it with you at the time.

Proverbs 11:12

The one who denounces his neighbor lacks wisdom, but the one who has discernment keeps silent.

Proverbs 25:16-17

(16) When you find honey, eat only what is sufficient for you, lest you become stuffed with it and vomit it up.

(17) Don't set foot too frequently in your neighbor's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you.

"I cannot even imagine where I would be today were it not for that handful of friends who have given me a heart full of joy. Let's face it, friends make life a lot more fun."

- Chuck Swindoll

TRUE COACHING STORY

After one season, I had to adjust the role of one of my assistant coaches. He didn't fully agree with the decision, but, because of our relationship and closeness as brothers in Christ, we prayed through it and made the adjustment. A year later God took him from our school to be a head coach elsewhere. It was such a blessing to see the awesome growth in his life and in his family's life. God used our tough times together to prepare us both for the future. It is through tough, real times together that we grow. Praise God for the good and tough times!

DAY 2:

The wise treat their neighbors properly

OBSERVATION

1. How should we respond to a neighbor who seeks our help (3:27-28)?
2. According to 11:12, it is unwise to do what?
3. What can happen if we wear out our welcome (25:17)?

INTERPRETATION

1. What is meant by "good" in 3:27?
2. What is meant by "denounces" in 11:12?
3. How does the illustration about eating honey in 25:16 support the advice given in 25:17?

APPLICATION

1. Do these verses apply to administrators, fellow teachers, and coaches you "live close to"? How?
2. Share with the group a time when your frustration with a "neighbor" caused conflict that ended up hurting you more than the neighbor? What did you learn from the experience?

DAY THREE:**Proverbs 16:7**

When a person's ways are pleasing to the LORD,
he even reconciles his enemies to himself.

Proverbs 24:17-18

(17) Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
and when he stumbles do not let your heart rejoice,
(18) lest the LORD see it, and be displeased,
and turn his wrath away from him.

Proverbs 25:21-22

(21) If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat,
and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,
(22) for you will heap coals of fire on his head,
and the LORD will reward you.

Proverbs 27:6; 29:5

(27:6) Faithful are the wounds of a friend,
but the kisses of an enemy are excessive.
(29:5) The one who flatters his neighbor spreads a net
for his steps.

DAY FOUR:**Proverbs 14:7**

Leave the presence of a foolish person,
or you will not understand wise counsel.

Proverbs 23:9

Do not speak in the ears of a fool,
for he will despise the wisdom of your words.

Proverbs 26:3-6

(3) A whip for the horse and a bridle for the donkey,
and a rod for the backs of fools!
(4) Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
lest you yourself be like him.
(5) Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.
(6) Like cutting off the feet or drinking violence,
so is sending a message by the hand of a fool.

Proverbs 27:3

A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but vexation by
a fool is more burdensome than the two of them.

DAY 3:**The wise respond properly to enemies****OBSERVATION**

1. Enemies sometimes use what tactic(s)? (27:6b; 29:5)
2. How are we to treat an enemy in distress? (See 24:17; 25:21.)
3. According to 16:7, the Lord's favor can cause what to happen?

INTERPRETATION

1. What is the implied advice we should take away from the descriptions in 27:6b and 29:5?
2. What is meant by "heap coals of fire on his head" (25:22)?
3. What are the two options for interpreting 16:7b? (See the study notes.) Which do you prefer and why?

APPLICATION

1. Have you ever been the victim of an enemy's deceit? What lessons did you learn from the experience?
2. Have you ever shown kindness to an enemy? How did it turn out? How did you feel afterward? Would you do it again?
3. How can you reach out to enemies without being naïve? (In other words harmonize Proverbs 16:7 and 25:21-22 with 27:6 and 29:5.)

DAY 4:**The wise keep their distance from fools****OBSERVATION**

1. What advice does 23:9 give?
2. The consequences of hiring a fool as a messenger are compared to what in 26:6?
3. According to 26:4-5, how is one to answer a fool?

INTERPRETATION

1. Explain how the description of the fool in 27:3 supports the advice given in 23:9.
2. Explain how the description of the fool in 26:3 supports the advice given in 26:6.
3. Explain the apparent contradiction in 26:4-5. (For help, see the study notes.)

APPLICATION

1. How do we harmonize the advice of the proverbs (avoid fools at all costs) with the Bible's basic message that we should love others?

God's Word teaches:

The wise know how to relate to friends, neighbors, enemies, and fools

- The wise understand the dynamics of genuine friendship
- The wise treat their neighbors properly
- The wise respond properly to enemies
- The wise keep their distance from fools

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

The Wise Know How to Relate to Friends, Neighbors, Enemies and Fools

Introduction

A popular song written in the 1960's contains these lyrics: "I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain . . . I am shielded in my armor, hiding in my room, safe within my womb. I touch no one and no one touches me. I am a rock, I am an island" (from the song "I Am A Rock," by Simon and Garfunkel). Life would be a lot simpler if we could just shut ourselves in and not have to deal with people. Yet even if it were possible, would a life without other people be worth living? God designed us to be relational, not isolated. As Tony Dungy says, "Relationships are ultimately what matter--our relationships with God and with other people."¹ Joe Ehrmann agrees: "Life is about relationships. It's about the capacity to love and be loved."² God Himself is a Triunity—one God in three persons, united by love.

He expects his image bearers to relate properly to one another as we mirror his essence. As coaches, you work in a world where you are constantly in contact with people, including administrators, fellow coaches, student athletes, and their often demanding parents. In the setting of athletics, friendships can develop and thrive as coaches and players bond together for a common cause. But whenever you're in contact with lots of people, especially in a competitive setting, some will cast you in the role of an enemy. In between the poles of friends and enemies, there is a large group we call neighbors, people

we rub shoulders with on a regular basis and with whom we must get along in order for life to work. A coach must relate properly to all of these people. Proverbs has a lot of good advice about how to do this. It gives us insight into the nature of genuine friendship, tells us how to be a good neighbor, and advises us on how to respond to enemies and dangerous, destructive people (called "fools").

Day one: The wise understand the dynamics of genuine friendship

Proverbs 17:17; 18:24;
27:6, 9

The late Jack Twyman was an NBA Hall-of-Famer, but his greatest play was made off the court, not on it. During the final game of the 1958 season Twyman's teammate Maurice Stokes fell to the floor and hit his head. He was knocked unconscious, but came to and finished the game. That night on the flight home, Maurice had a seizure and went into a coma that lasted for weeks. He woke up paralyzed; his promising career was over. He would spend the next six years in a hospital. David Whitley describes the situation Maurice faced: "Stokes had \$9,000 in his bank account. He was single, and what family he had was in Pennsylvania and in no financial shape to help." Enter Jack Twyman. Whitley explains: "Twyman applied to become Stokes' legal guardian.

A judge granted the request. That allowed Twyman to handle the bills, apply for workman's compensation and chop through the paperwork. Twyman was far more than Stokes' bookkeeper, however . . . Twyman would sit by Stokes' bed, calling out letters. When he got to the right one, Stokes would blink. That's how they built words

and shared conversation." Jack also organized NBA fundraisers to help defray Maurice's expenses.³ When asked why he did all this, Jack simply said, "That's what friends are for." In fact, Jack was inspired by Maurice's courage and always felt he received more than he gave from the friendship. He said: "He [Maurice] taught us a lot. We learned a lot from him. We're honored to have had the opportunity to be associated with him."⁴ Jack understood that loyalty is the essence of friendship. Proverbs 17:17a states it simply: *A friend loves at all times*. One often thinks of family members as protectors who provide security in a pinch, but Proverbs 18:24b says: *there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother*. The verb translated "sticks closer" refers to staying close to someone as a sign of loyalty and affection. In fact, Moses commanded Israel to "stick close" to the Lord by worshiping him alone (see Deut. 10:20, where *NET Bible* translates the word, "be loyal").

Friends are committed to saying and doing what is best for one another. Often that means sharing good advice. Proverbs 27:9 says: *Ointment and incense make the heart rejoice, likewise the sweetness of one's friend from sincere counsel*. Ointment refers here to olive oil, which ancient Israelites enjoyed rubbing on their skin. For us men it would be comparable to the fresh feeling of splashing on some aftershave lotion. Incense refers to a sweet smelling aroma. For us it might be the smell of a delicious Thanksgiving feast cooking in the kitchen. Just as these things delight our senses of touch and smell, so the wise advice of a friend delights the heart and soul. But if you truly want the best for someone, you will be honest, even if initially it hurts your friend. Proverbs 27:6 puts it this way: *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive*. Enemies may

use excessive flattery to make you think they are a friend, but a faithful friend knows that sometimes it is necessary to inflict a “wound”. The word used here refers to a bruise or wound that is severe, but not fatal. In this case, it is a wound that inflicts temporary pain for the other person’s good. At the height of his drug addiction, Rangers’ outfielder Josh Hamilton didn’t know where to turn. He went to his grandmother’s house because he knew she loved him unconditionally.

Sure enough, “Granny” took him in, but Josh kept using. Finally one night Granny, Josh’s best friend in the world at that moment, delivered a painful wound. She said to him: “I can’t take this anymore, Josh. I can’t sit here and watch you kill yourself, and I can’t sit here and watch you hurt all the people who love you. We’re all dying inside because of what you’re doing to yourself. You are such a good boy. There is so much good you could do with your life, and instead you’re wasting it. I will not let it happen under my roof. If you’re going to continue to do this, I’m kicking you out. It’s your choice.”⁵ Josh went to his room and opened a Bible—it fell open to James 4:7: *So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you.* Josh decided to fight back against his demons. As he says, “With God and Granny by my side, I white-knuckled my way through the first week.” He persevered. He says: “Through it all, Granny stood beside me.”⁶ True friends like Granny know when to wound, but they also stick close and love at all times.

Day Two: The wise treat their neighbors properly-

Proverbs 3:27-28; 11:12; 25:16-17

Genuine friendships are at the core of life and give it spice. But let’s face it, we usually have

just a few close, intimate friends. Most of the people we know are casual acquaintances—the people we rub shoulders with on a regular basis. The Bible calls these people “neighbors” and says that we must love them as ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9). Jesus was once asked, “Who is my neighbor?” To answer the question, he told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). By story’s end, the answer was clear—everyone is my “neighbor.” The proverbs give practical advice on how to treat our neighbors.

Proverbs 3:27-28 tells us we should keep our obligations to our neighbor: *Do not withhold good from those who need it, when you have the ability to help. Do not say to your neighbor, “Go! Return tomorrow and I will give it,” when you have it with you at the time.* The first line of verse 27 reads literally, “Do not withhold good from those who own it,” that is, from those who have a legal and/or moral right to our aid.⁷ In ancient Israel this would have included family members, as well as the poor and needy, who were protected by the Law of Moses. However, given Jesus’ broadening of the definition of “neighbor,” we can safely say that we are morally obligated to help everyone we possibly can. The word “good” can include financial help, but it is general enough to cover other forms of tangible aid. Money isn’t the solution to every problem; some people may need help that will require our time and expertise. We all know what it feels like to get the “run around,” when people who could help us if they wanted to pass us off to someone else or tell us to come back later. We should never do that to our “neighbor.”

Proverbs 11:12 warns us about how we should speak to our neighbor: *The one who denounces his neighbor lacks wisdom, but the one who has discernment*

keeps silent. The first line of the proverb reads literally, “the one who despises his neighbor lacks wisdom.” The focus is on our attitude, but since the next line of the proverb mentions silence, it’s clear that words are in view. The first line is talking about despising someone verbally by insulting or belittling them. It’s unwise because, in addition to being cruel, it’s a good way to start a fight and turn a neighbor into an enemy. We can all remember times when someone despised us verbally, insulting us or putting us down. When that happens, it deeply wounds our spirit. The wound resists healing and can easily get infected with discouragement, bitterness, and a desire for revenge. And even if it does heal over with time, it’s like a scab, which can be pulled off, reopening the wound and the pain. Sure, we all feel like unloading at times, but this proverb reminds us: “If you can’t say something good about somebody, don’t say anything at all.”

In addition to helping our neighbors and not verbally assaulting them, we also need to make sure we know our social limits. Proverbs 25:17 says: *Don’t set foot too frequently in your neighbor’s house, lest he become weary of you and hate you.* In other words, “Don’t overstay your welcome.” We all need our privacy and space. In fact, too much of you or me has the potential of making a neighbor an enemy. The preceding verse (25:16) illustrates the point: *When you find honey, eat only what is sufficient for you, lest you become stuffed with it and vomit it up.* Honey is sweet, but, like all sweets, too much of it causes an upset stomach and maybe even a smelly mess. It’s the same with neighbors. No matter how pleasant you think you are, you need to make sure your neighbor doesn’t get fed up with you.⁸

Day Three: The wise respond properly to enemies- Proverbs 16:7; 24:17-18; 25:21-22; 27:6; 29:5

It would be nice if we always got along with everyone and everybody regarded everybody else as a neighbor. But the truth is that we will always have enemies, even if we try our best to keep the peace. After all, Jesus had enemies—lots of them. Once again, the proverbs honestly face reality. They assume we'll have enemies, but they give us insight into how to deal wisely with them. When you have enemies, it's important not to be naïve. Our enemies are committed to bringing us down, but they often disguise their intentions so that we'll lower our guard and become vulnerable. Proverbs 27:6b, after talking about the faithful wounds of a friend, says: *but the kisses of an enemy are excessive*. Along similar lines, Proverbs 29:5 warns: *The one who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps*. Enemies will sometimes use “kisses” and flattery, but they are really like a hunter spreading a net for his prey. In 1938 British Prime Minister Neville

Chamberlain returned from Munich with a peace agreement signed by Adolf Hitler. Chamberlain, who called himself “a man of peace from the depths of my soul,” felt he had achieved “peace for our time.”⁹ All he had done was give Hitler more time to build his military. A year later Hitler invaded Poland and Chamberlain had a war on his hands, one that almost destroyed Britain. Winston Churchill, who succeeded Chamberlain, had predicted this would happen, because he recognized an enemy when he saw one. Churchill said about Chamberlain: “He looked at foreign affairs through the wrong end of a municipal drainpipe.”¹⁰ Enemies are out there; we need a clear eye to see them.

Ultimately we are dependent on God for protection. And God does vindicate his own. Proverbs 24:16 says: *Although a righteous person may fall seven times, he gets up again, but the wicked will be brought down by calamity*. But when our enemies are under judgment, how should we respond? Proverbs 24:17-18 says: *Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and when he stumbles do not let your heart rejoice, lest the LORD see it, and be displeased, and turn his wrath away from him*. There is a time to rejoice, when God brings his full and final justice down upon hardened, unchanging, evil enemies (see Ps. 58:10-11; Prov. 11:10). But it is unwise to rejoice too soon for that is (1) morally wrong in God's sight (v. 18a reads literally, “lest the Lord see and it is evil in his eyes”), and (2) may prompt God to let up on the enemy. When we gloat we are trying to get vengeance and make the punishment worse. But justice and vengeance are God's job, not ours. Let's be honest. We really love to get revenge. I can still remember sweep tagging a baserunner in the mouth as

compensation for his spiking me as he slid into second. There's something so satisfying about it. I love movies where revenge is the main theme. (Charles Bronson and Clint Eastwood could really dish out vengeance!) But these proverbs force us to check our attitude. God doesn't need our help when it comes to justice. If you want justice, don't gloat.

Proverbs 25:21-22 goes one step further: *If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you*. It is one thing not to gloat over a suffering enemy; it is another to reach out and show him kindness. The meaning of verse 22 has been debated. One option is to understand it along the lines of 24:18, taking the coals of fire as a symbol of judgment. Your kindness, when spurned, makes him more guilty and adds to his punishment.

Another option is that the coals of fire bring pain to the enemy's conscience, causing him to repent and seek reconciliation. But maybe the language is flexible enough to cover both options. The “coals of fire,” in the form of kindness, may bring pain to the enemy's conscience and shame him into seeking peace. But if he is hardened, your kindness will magnify his hatred, add to his guilt, and intensify his punishment. Either way, God will reward your act of kindness, for it mirrors his kindness toward his enemies (see Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 5:10). Ideally, we should always desire to be at peace with enemies. Proverbs 16:7 says: *When a person's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he even reconciles his enemies to himself*. The meaning of the second half of the proverb is debated. But this much is clear: Reconciliation with an enemy is the goal. (For a discussion of the options, see the interpretation note.) I was riding in the car with my

Interpretation Note: There are two ways to understand the second half of Proverbs 16:7: (1) The *NET Bible* takes the subject of “he reconciles” to be the person whose ways are pleasing to the Lord. In other words, those who live in a way that pleases God seek to be peacemakers, reaching out to enemies.¹¹ (2) The *NIV* understands God to be the subject of the verb in the second line: “When the LORD takes pleasure in anyone's way, he causes their enemies to make peace with them.” In this case, one of the ways the Lord rewards the godly is by disarming their enemies. Waltke interprets this to mean that God causes the enemies to surrender.¹²

father one cold winter day, when we saw a man standing on the side of the road; his car had broken down. I recognized him and knew that my father disliked him. In fact he considered him an enemy; the man had done some unkind things to my father in the past. But my father stopped, invited him to get in, spoke kindly to him, and took him home. Later he explained to me that Jesus wants us to be different from our enemies and to be kind to them. My dad walked the talk that day and it made a lasting impression on me.

Day Four: The wise keep their distance from fools- Proverbs 14:7; 23:9; 26:3-6; 27:3

Out there among our neighbors and enemies, there are people who are particularly disruptive and dangerous. Proverbs calls them “fools.” The proverbs give a detailed composite of the fool. Fools are easy to spot by their speech and actions. They think they’re smart, so they refuse advice and reject discipline. Their folly is so ingrained, you can’t even beat it out of them. Fools are hot-tempered, argumentative, and dangerous. They have no moral conscience or sense of guilt. They lack self-control and don’t plan ahead, so they usually squander away their money. They embarrass their parents and destroy their families. Fools eventually self-destruct because they despise and reject wisdom.¹³ According to Proverbs 14:7, the wise should keep their distance from fools: *Leave the presence of a foolish person, or you will not understand wise counsel.* It is futile to share wisdom with a fool. Proverbs 23:9 says: *Do not speak in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.*

Each Fall I share the gospel with people at the State Fair of Texas. One time I asked a young

man if the thought of going to Hell concerned him. He flippantly replied, “No, I’m looking forward to catching some rays and getting a nice suntan there.” It was obvious he didn’t believe in Hell and his cocky reply branded him a fool. Jesus said that sometimes people will just trample our “pearls” under their feet (Matt. 7:6). Fools often show how much they despise wisdom by getting angry. Proverbs 27:3 says: *A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but vexation by a fool is more burdensome than the two of them.* The phrase “vexation by a fool” could be translated, “a fool’s anger.”¹⁴ A fool’s anger is so irrational and intense, it becomes an emotional burden. If you tried to haul a heavy stone and a big bag of sand at the same time, you’d soon get exhausted and you’d end up with some sore muscles. Having to endure a fool’s anger does the same thing to the spirit.¹⁵

If wisdom dictates that we keep our distance from fools and their combustible tempers, then it certainly makes sense that we not rely on them. Proverbs 26:6 says: *Like cutting off the feet or drinking violence, so is sending a message by the hand of a fool.* Send a message with a fool and something bad will happen—he either won’t deliver it, or he’ll insult and infuriate the recipient. The thought of having my feet amputated or, if it could be liquefied and bottled, drinking violence repulses me; the pain would be unbearable. But the consequences of relying on a fool to accomplish something important are just as bad. You might think that a fool, if treated with a little patience, could be rehabilitated. But Proverbs 26:3 says: *A whip for the horse and a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the backs of fools!* You might be able to tame a fool, like you would a wild horse or donkey, but only if you exert a great deal of energy. In fact, the only way to get a fool to do what is right is to beat him. Is all the effort really worth it? Frankly

coach, foolish athletes can take years off your life. Letting go of a foolish athlete you want to change because of his potential, could very well add years to your coaching career. It’s admirable to want to change people, but sometimes we just need to cut bait and leave it to God.

Unfortunately, life sometimes forces us into a corner, where we have to respond to fools. Proverbs 26:4-5 gives this advice: *Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you yourself be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.* At first the advice seems contradictory, but both statements are true. (See the interpretation note.) If forced to answer fools, you don’t speak with the same angry, foolish spirit they exhibit, but you do expose them for what they are—fools. Once, when I was sharing the gospel, a sarcastic atheist approached and said, “You Christians are hypocrites; you just talk, but don’t help people.” I calmly asked him to name the hospitals in Dallas. He said “Medical City” and then wanted to stop. I insisted that he continue; he hesitatingly said: “Methodist, Presbyterian, Baylor.” I then asked: Who started these? (Baylor is a Baptist hospital, by the way.) He stopped his ranting and I shared the gospel with him. I refused to counter his bravado with my own, but I did calmly yet firmly force him to see that his accusation was ridiculous.

Interpretation Note: The key to resolving the apparent contradiction in 26:4-5 is to understand “according to” in two different ways. As Fox explains, in verse 4 “according to” means, “with behavior similar to his” (angry shouting and insults), but in verse 5 it means, “with an answer appropriate to his particular folly” (a wise refutation of his nonsense).¹⁶

The wise recognize four keys to success and security

- Foresight, combined with diligence, is often the key to one's security
- Foresight, combined with ingenuity, is often the key to one's security
- Unifying in a common cause is often the key to success
- Exploiting the resources we possess is often the key to success

Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:23; 30:24-25**Proverbs 6:6-8**

(6) Go to the ant, you sluggard;
observe its ways and be wise!

(7) It has no commander, overseer, or ruler,

(8) yet it prepares its food in the summer;
it gathers at the harvest what it will eat.

Proverbs 19:23

Fearing the LORD leads to life,
and one who does so will live satisfied;
he will not be afflicted by calamity.

Proverbs 30:24-25

(24) There are four things on earth that are small,
but they are exceedingly wise:

(25) ants are creatures with little strength,
but they prepare their food in the summer.

"God created us to be interdependent. We were not designed to go through life alone. We become so much more when we come alongside others—and we make them better, too."

- John Wooden,

Life Wisdom from Coach Wooden, p. 55

DAY 1:**Foresight, combined with diligence, is often the key to one's security****OBSERVATION**

1. What are the apparent weaknesses of ants (6:7; 30:25a)?

2. What action of ants marks them out as wise (6:8; 30:25b)?

3. What are the results of fearing the Lord (19:23)?

INTERPRETATION

1. Why do you think the author used ants to illustrate wisdom? What wise traits did he see in them?

2. How is fearing the Lord comparable in principle to what the ants do to assure their security?

APPLICATION

1. Recall a time from your coaching experience when planning ahead really paid off.

2. What are some practical ways that you as a coach can model the fear of the Lord for your players?

3. Memorize Proverbs 30:25 and ask God to help you use it with a young person.

Proverbs 18:10; 30:26

Proverbs 18:10

The name of the LORD is like a strong tower;
the righteous person runs to it and is set safely on high.

Proverbs 30:26

rock badgers are creatures with little power,
but they make their homes in the crags.

A TRUE COACHING STORY

"At the beginning of each cross country season I instruct my runners what to do when they finish a run in practice or in a meet. Whenever they finish, they are to encourage the rest of the team members that are still coming in. In practice, that may involve the first runner going back as far as a half mile to run with the last runner coming in. A couple of years ago my team decided to do the same thing in a meet with the runners they competed against. A mother from another school was so impressed she wrote our school a thank you letter; she could not believe that athletes would encourage their opponents in this way. I read the letter to my team and reminded them of the verse, 'he who honors me, I will honor.'"

"If you want to coach you have three rules to follow to win. One, surround yourself with people who can't live without football. I've had a lot of them. Two, be able to recognize winners. They come in all forms. And, three, have a plan for everything. A plan for practice, a plan for the game. A plan for being ahead, and a plan for being behind 20-0 at half, with your quarterback hurt and the phones dead, with it raining cats and dogs and no rain gear because the equipment man left it at home."

- Paul "Bear" Bryant;

<http://www.coachlikeapro.com/coach-paul-bear-bryant.html>)

DAY 2:

Foresight, combined with ingenuity, is often the key to one's security

OBSERVATION

1. What is the apparent weakness of the rock badger (30:26)?
2. What action of rock badgers marks them out as wise?
3. To what is the Lord compared in 18:10?

INTERPRETATION

1. Why do you think the author used rock badgers to illustrate wisdom? What wise traits did he see in them?
2. How is the Lord, as described in 18:10, comparable to the crags in which the rock badgers live?

APPLICATION

1. Recall a time from your coaching experience where ingenuity really paid off.
2. Recall a time when the Lord proved to be a tower of protection for you in a time when you were vulnerable. Consider sharing this with your players.

DAY THREE: Proverbs 30:27; Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12**Proverbs 30:27**

locusts have no king,
but they all go forward by ranks;

Ecclesiastes 4: 9, 12

(9) Two people are better than one because they can reap more benefit from their labor.

(12) Although an assailant may overpower one person, two can withstand him. Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.

DAY FOUR: Proverbs 21:22; 30:28**Proverbs 21:22**

The wise person can scale the city of the mighty and bring down the stronghold in which they trust.

Proverbs 30:28

a lizard you can catch with the hand,
but it gets into the palaces of the king.

TRIBUTE TO LAY LEADERS

We at Coaches Outreach love all of our lay leaders because we know they love their coaches. One of them, Mike Janszen (who is now with the Lord), served eight years as a lay leader. He had a ranch not far from Glen Rose, Texas. He arranged for a coach from the inner city of Dallas to bring his team to spend the day at the ranch. What a day it was! Mike and his son, Tully, worked hard to set up an obstacle course. He divided the team up into "teams." One of the obstacles was a seven foot tall round hay bale the players had to go over one by one. Can you imagine two skinny DB's trying to get a huge lineman over the bale? The kids had a ball as they learned about overcoming obstacles as a team. This team had a great season that year.

DAY 3:**Unifying in a common cause is often the key to success****OBSERVATION**

1. What is the apparent weakness of locusts (Prov. 30:27)?

2. What action of locusts marks them out as wise?

3. What are the benefits of two people over one (Eccles. 4:9, 12)?

INTERPRETATION

1. Why do you think the author used locusts to illustrate wisdom? What wise traits did he see in them?

2. How does Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12 support the lesson(s) taught by the locusts?

APPLICATION

1. Recall the most unified team you've coached. What were the keys to achieving that unity? What was the pay off?

2. Coach, think outside the box with the other coaches and, using just the illustrations in Proverbs 30:27 and Ecclesiastes 4: 9, 12 to stimulate your thinking, come up with a new way to help players practically learn the importance of unity.

DAY 4:**Exploiting the resources we possess is often the key to success****OBSERVATION**

1. What is the apparent weakness of the lizard (30:28)?
2. What action marks the lizard out as wise (30:28b)?
3. What is a wise person able to accomplish (21:22)?

INTERPRETATION

1. Why do you think the author used lizards to illustrate wisdom? What wise traits did he see in them?
2. How does 21:22 support 30:28? (What do both proverbs teach about the benefits of wisdom?)

APPLICATION

1. Recall a time from your coaching experience when you beat an athletically superior team by exploiting your resources to full advantage. How do you convince a team that this is possible? What sacrifices must be made to make this happen?
2. How can you use today's proverbs to motivate a less talented team or player to be confident and succeed?

God's Word teaches:

The wise recognize four keys to success and security

- Foresight, combined with diligence, is often the key to one's security.
- Foresight, combined with ingenuity, is often the key to one's security.
- Unifying in a common cause is often the key to success.
- Exploiting the resources we possess is often the key to success.

MY PURPOSE STATEMENT:

*As a result
of this study,
my prayer
is for God
to help me...*

Record this purpose statement on page 102.

Last Week's Prayer Results

This Week's Prayer Requests

Winning Wisdom

The Wise Recognize Four Important Keys to Success and Security Introduction

When I was a boy, I had a dog named Mickey; he was part German shepherd and part beagle. He liked to hunt woodchucks (some call them gophers or ground hogs) in the nearby fields. Woodchucks are cautious; they have two holes several feet apart. They feed in the area between the holes, so they are never far from safety. Mickey knew how to hunt woodchucks. He would always begin down wind, so the woodchuck couldn't pick up his scent. If he had to, he'd circle way around just so he could start in the right spot. He would lie in the deep grass for several minutes waiting until a woodchuck appeared and grazed its way to a point halfway between its two holes. Then Mickey would move forward as if in slow motion, always keeping as low as possible. If the woodchuck looked up, Mickey froze. When the distance was right, he would spring into action like a rocket and it was a mad dash to see if he could reach the woodchuck before it reached its hole. The woodchucks usually won, but on days when Mickey won, it all ended quickly. Mickey knew how to finish the job. As I watched all this from a distance, I learned some things—lessons about foresight and caution from the woodchuck and lessons about strategy, patience, and timing from Mickey.

According to the wisdom books of the Old Testament, we can learn much from observing God's creation. Job challenged his "friends" to observe the animals, for they have lessons to teach (Job 12:7-10). Later God answered Job's challenge and directed his

attention to the animal world as he explained to Job the reason for his suffering (Job 39). Proverbs also draws lessons from the animal kingdom. In Proverbs 30:24-28 we learn lessons from little, seemingly insignificant creatures. The wise teacher Agur (who wrote this chapter) says: *There are four things on earth that are small, but they are exceedingly wise* (30:24). Agur was living in difficult times, when people were rebellious, corrupt, proud, and greedy (30:11-20). The disintegration of the social order was threatening the stability of his world (30:21-23). But Agur says we can survive such times if we learn from these four wise little creatures. By observing their behavior, we learn principles of how to be secure and successful. The principles apply in all situations and in all walks of life. As a coach you certainly are already aware of these principles; they are fundamental to success in athletics. But hopefully you will enjoy being reminded of them from a fresh perspective. We also need to think about how these principles apply at a deeper, spiritual level.

Day one: Foresight, combined with diligence, is often the key to one's security

Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:23;
30:24-25

I'm not crazy about ants. Here in Texas we have fire ants that bite hard on contact. Several years ago I declared all out war on fire ants and the battle continues to rage on. But Agur viewed ants differently; he saw wisdom in their behavior. So did Paul

"Bear" Bryant. He was asked what made his "system," which produced 323 wins and six national championships, so successful. Here's how he answered: "I told them my system was based on the 'ant plan,' that I'd gotten the idea watching a colony of ants in Africa during the war. A whole bunch of ants working toward a common goal."¹ Agur was impressed with the foresight of ants: *ants are creatures with little strength, but they prepare their food in the summer* (30:25). Earlier in Proverbs, Solomon also spoke of their foresight: *Go to the ant, you sluggard; observe its ways and be wise! It has no commander,*

Interpretation Note: There are many types of ants, but the harvester ant, which is prevalent in Palestine, is likely in view in these proverbs. It stores grain in its nest. W. M. Thomson describes the ants he saw in Palestine: "Ants pilfer from the floor and the granary—they are the greatest robbers in the land. Leave a bushel of wheat in the vicinity of one of their subterranean cities and in a surprisingly short time the whole commonwealth will be summoned to plunder. A broad, black column stretches from the wheat to their hole and you are startled by the result. As if by magic, every grain seems to be accommodated with legs and walks off in a hurry along the moving column."² Since modern science has discovered that ants have tremendous strength for their size and have a well-structured social order, these proverbs may seem inaccurate. But they reflect the human perspective. It's a case of the "language of appearance," comparable to biblical references to the sun rising and setting. In comparison to human beings, ants do not seem strong. When you watch them, you don't see any bosses barking out orders. Waltke observes: "The ant has no need of such a person to decide his duties and to settle disputes about the timing, distribution, and order of labor . . . Rather than having external leaders who both organize the work with regard to its nature and its timing and see it through to completion, the ant possesses a God-given wisdom to work and, just as significantly, to order it wisely"³

WEEK 12 Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:23; 30:24-25, Eccl. 4:9,12 - Study Notes

overseer, or ruler, yet it prepares its food in the summer; it gathers at the harvest what it will eat (6:6-8).

You'd think that ants' size would limit what they could accomplish, or that their lack of leadership would leave them paralyzed.

After all, what would the world do without politicians, kings, and bosses to dream up bright ideas and bark out orders, right? But God has given them survival instincts. Ants are realists; they know that winter is coming, when food will be scarce. So they plan ahead. Their realism and foresight produce diligence and teamwork. They all pitch in and work hard, so that their community will have what it needs.

Coaches know the importance of foresight. The reality is that the future is uncertain. You never know what a game holds; balls can and often do take funny bounces. The wise, realistic coach, like the ant, plans ahead. But we need to probe deeper. In addition to the coaching lessons that Bear Bryant learned from ants, there is a spiritual lesson. Judgment, like the winter, is coming. To be safe when judgment comes, we must plan ahead. We do this by fearing the Lord, as Proverbs 19:23 reminds us: *Fearing the LORD leads to life, and one who does so will live satisfied; he will not be afflicted by calamity.* For Christians, fearing the Lord begins by trusting Christ as Savior and then continues through faith and obedience. In your strategic role of a coach, you have can teach young men and women the importance of planning ahead, not only in sports, but in all of life. And think of the payoff, when you see your former players living out those principles as they build strong families, lead productive lives, and serve the Lord. The coaching profession probably won't make you rich, but I don't think you'd trade the opportunity to make a lasting impact on young people for all the money in the world.

Day Two: Foresight, combined with ingenuity, is often the key to one's security-

Proverbs 18:10; 30:26

The next little creature mentioned by Agur is the rock badger, also known as a coney or a hyrax or a "rock rabbit." They were around back then and there are still a lot of them living in Israel today.⁴ Rock badgers look like guinea pigs; they have grey-brown fur, are about twenty inches long, and weigh six to ten pounds.⁵ Agur describes them well: *rock badgers are creatures with little power, but they make their homes in the crags.* The rock badger's natural enemies are a scary lot—jackals, snakes and especially eagles. Rock badgers, like ants, are realists. They know instinctively that they are small, weak, slow, and can't fight.

They were never meant to live in the fields, where they would be vulnerable. This realism breeds foresight and ingenuity. They do not succumb to their natural limitations. Instead they live in elevated, rocky places, where they find protection in inaccessible crevices. God has even given them padded paws that act like suction cups when they walk on rocks. They live in communities of anywhere from ten to eighty. They graze together and post sentries who get a good vantage point and sound an alarm (a high trill) if a predator is spotted.⁶ So there is much to learn from the behavior of rock badgers, including the importance of realism, foresight, ingenuity, and community (or teamwork).

Coaches know the importance of ingenuity. Coach Steve Owen gives us one of the best illustrations of this. His New York Giants were ready to face the undefeated Chicago Bears in the NFL championship game, a team that

had beaten them twice. The night before the game a freezing rain left the field looking like a skating rink. One of Owen's players suggested that sneakers would provide better traction than the normal footwear. Should Owen do the unconventional and have his players wear basketball shoes? He decided he would; he sent his equipment manager, Abe Cohen, on a quest for sneakers. But there were no stores open on Sunday so it took Cohen a while to find some. He didn't get to the game until halftime; the Bears led 10-3. When the Giants put the sneakers on, Bears' coach George Halas scoffed and told his players to "step on their toes." But the Giants, wearing their secret weapon, scored 27 points in the fourth quarter to win the 1934 NFL championship in a game that came to be known as the "sneakers game." The Bears' Bronco Nagurski said: "We were slipping and sliding around and they were running all over us. They just outsmarted us." "Outsmarted" is just another word for ingenuity, and, in this case, it made the difference between defeat and victory.⁷

Steve Owen—a clever man who knew how to gain a fair advantage when others lacked foresight. As I was preparing to write these studies, Tommy Maxwell gave me a book to read, entitled, *Football's Greatest Coaches*.⁸ It was written in 1955 and tells the stories of college football's greatest coaches from the early years. As I read through it, it became obvious to me that the history of college football coaching is really a history of ingenuity. Coach after coach made innovations, from the forward pass to the split-T formation, that gave them a fair advantage and exploited their team's strengths, while diminishing their weaknesses. It's as if they had all studied the behavior of the rock badger, which knows very well how to "outsmart" its opponents. You, as a coach, have the opportunity to teach and

model the importance of foresight and ingenuity to your student athletes, both on and off the field. They will need both as they face the challenges of life. But like the ant, the rock badger teaches us a spiritual lesson as well: Once you honestly understand your own limitations and your vulnerability in a hostile world, you need to find shelter. In the end, it's really not so much about the rock badger as it is the rocky cliff where he lives. All the ingenuity in the world wouldn't help, if God hadn't put those rocks there. So it is with us--apart from God we would be toast. Proverbs 18:10 says it this way: *The name of the LORD is like a strong tower; the righteous person runs to it and is set safely on high.* Sometimes in the Old Testament the Lord's "name" is used for God himself, for his name reminds us of his character. The name translated LORD (Hebrew, Yahweh) means, "he is." It speaks of his protective presence with his people--he is with us. He is our tower; we can run to him and be safe, just as the rock badger finds safety in rocks. In the midst of all the competitive challenges you face, isn't it good to know you have a rocky cliff, a

tower--not just for this life, but for eternity? The most important thing you can ever do for your athletes is to introduce them to that Tower and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Day Three: Unifying in a common cause is often the key to success

Proverbs 30:27

The late historian Stephen Ambrose tells how he, as a boy of twelve, went deer hunting with his dad and several other World War II vets. They worked as a team: "Two men would go to the far end of the wood, two others would post up along the sides, two more would stand on the edge of the near end. The other six would march through the wood, shouting to drive the deer out so the posted men could get a clear shot. After they got their deer, they became the drivers and others were put on post. We all got our deer." But Ambrose laments, "They don't hunt that way in northern Wisconsin today. Hunters go out as individuals, most often building a platform in a tree for their stand."⁹ Through their experience in war, these vets had learned the value of teamwork. It was essential in battle to stay alive and it is essential in all walks of life, especially athletics.

Agur was impressed with the "teamwork" of locusts, a third little creature that teaches us about wisdom: *locusts have no king, but they all go forward by ranks* (30:27). Locusts have no king or leader who barks out orders. Yet they are organized into a mighty team, moving in unison with a single goal. They come in huge swarms,

march in ranks, and wipe out vegetation in a matter of minutes. Locusts teach us that unifying in a common cause can make a group invincible. The locust seems to know that it is nothing by itself; it would be easy to swat one locust out of the air and crush it under foot. But God has wired locusts to know instinctively that there is strength in numbers. As Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12 says: *Two people are better than one because they can reap more benefit from their labor . . . Although an assailant may overpower one person, two can withstand him. Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.* Two can accomplish more than one and two are not as vulnerable as a single, isolated individual. And if a third person is added, the unit becomes even more secure, like a rope with three strands. God himself is a Triunity--three persons working in unison as one God. He has rigged his world to reflect himself. Lone wolves have a hard time making it in God's world; you're better off running with the pack.

We live in a very "I, not we" kind of world. Athletes often focus on their individual performance. When he came to the Yankees, Alex Rodriguez had a hard time grasping Joe Torre's team concept. Torre says: "Seeing his personality concerned me because you could see his focus was on individual stuff." Torre told him: "The expectations with the Yankees are about winning, and people aren't really concerned about what your stats are."¹³ A coach's job is to get players to focus on what can be accomplished by the group. Jim Thompson says: "Occasionally in my years of coaching, things have clicked and the individual players have become a unit, functioning as if with a common brain."¹⁴ This happens with guys in battle. My dad was a fighter pilot in World War II. His squad had to work together, flying in formation and then attacking their targets as a team. As they put their lives on the line

Interpretation Note: A locust swarm across the Red Sea in 1889 covered approximately two thousand square miles. According to estimates, in a swarm there are about 120 million locusts per square mile.¹⁰ Jerome, an early Christian writer, describes a locust swarm that he saw: "When the swarms of locusts came, and filled the lower region of the air, they flew in such order, by the divine appointment, and kept their places as exactly, as when several tiles . . . are skillfully placed in a pavement, so as not to be a hair's breadth out of their several ranks."¹¹ Others describe them this way: "The roads were covered with them all marching in regular lines, like armies of soldiers." "They seemed to be impelled by one common instinct and moved in one body . . . They seemed to march in regular battalions, crawling over everything that lay in their passage, in one straight front."¹²

together, they bonded. One day my dad got a letter from home telling him that his dog, his faithful friend since childhood, had died. My dad started crying. His fellow pilots asked him what was wrong. When he told them, they all started crying too. Brave, tough, skilled fighter pilots crying together because they had become one in mind—when one hurt, they all hurt.

Joe Ehrmann identifies “three basic realities of a great team: We belong to each other; we need each other; we affect each other.”¹⁵ Mike Dowling, who played for Ehrmann, learned the lesson. As he reflected on what he would miss most about playing football, he thought of the huddle: “I love the huddle. There’s such a strong feeling of co-dependency when you’re all in there together. There’s nothing like it in any other sport I’ve played . . . Even the shape of it is perfect . . . a tightly wound circle. Everybody has their own ambitions and their own wants, but we all share the same desire too. You can just look in everyone’s eyes and see that, and then once you realize how much everyone else wants it, that makes you want it even more.”¹⁶

Of all the lessons we can learn from little creatures, Agur would probably tell us this one is the single most important, for we see it with the ants, who work together, the rock badgers, who build a community, and the locusts, who march in unison. You have the privilege of instilling the value of teamwork into your players. If your players learn the lesson well from you, they’ll take it with them into their families, jobs, and communities. It’s a lesson they need to know if they’re going to live wisely in a world where God values unity and where he is building and working through his “team,” a group of Christians that Jesus called “my Church” (Matt. 16:18).

Day Four: Exploiting the resources we possess is often the key to success- Proverbs 21:22; 30:28

Each night during the summer we have guards at the front and back doors of our house. They eat any intruder that crawls or flies. Sometimes they decide to join us inside; they like to run up the walls and across the ceilings. They are a type of lizard known as a gecko, the fourth little creature mentioned by Agur: *a lizard you can catch with the hand, but it gets into the palaces of the king* (30:28). Geckos are usually small—three to six inches long. Though a terror to insects, they don’t look impressive. Yet they are capable of getting into a place where most of us would never be allowed—a king’s palace. Of course, they don’t knock on the king’s door and ask to be admitted. They use their God-given physical endowments to get in, stay in, and enjoy the luxurious setting. Their small size allows them to sneak through gaps and cracks in and under walls and doors. Geckos have adhesive feet; they quickly climb walls and hang upside down on high ceilings where they can’t be reached.

They teach us a lesson that you can apply personally and in turn pass on to your players: Don’t succumb to your limitations; exploit your resources to your advantage. You may not be able to make yourself any taller or faster, but you can play the hand you’re dealt to full advantage. This is what wise people do because they know that in the end, wisdom prevails over sheer natural endowment. And wisdom will make you a great coach. Proverbs 21:22 pictures the value of wisdom this way: *The wise person can scale the city of the mighty and bring down the stronghold in which they trust*. Those who have superior natural endowments may seem invincible, but the wise person

figures out a way to bring them down. You can reach out to the less talented, teach them to work wisely with what they have, and empower them to face life with confidence because in the end wisdom beats muscles.

Some of the most heart-warming sports stories are those where an athlete overcomes obstacles and limitations to succeed. Jamie Moyer is one of those. In 2012, at the age of 49, he became the oldest pitcher in major league history to win a game. Over his career, he has won a lot of games (269 and counting). He doesn’t do it with a blazing fastball. He has three speeds: slow, slower, and slowest. But he exploits the strengths that he does have: pinpoint control, good movement, and the ability to keep hitters off stride by changing speeds. Of course, great coaches have been doing the gecko-thing forever. Every year during March Madness it happens. A team with less talent from a no-name conference beats a top-ranked team by using a wise plan that stresses patience and teamwork, in the form of screens and passes that lead to good shots for good shooters. Along the way, they do other wise things, like drawing charges. They win together, with their brains.

Let’s summarize the lessons learned from Agur’s four little creatures: The wise become secure through foresight, diligence and ingenuity, and they succeed by unifying in a common cause and using the resources available to them. Put another way, the message is: “Plan ahead! Work hard! Be creative! Unify with others who share your goal! Identify and exploit the resources you possess!”

Achieving Success God's Way: Review

- Before closing your study of Proverbs, review the themes from each section below. Then, write down (1) a principle or theological truth you remember from the lesson; and (2) one way you will apply it in your personal life or coaching ministry. Feel free to review your previous answers. Come ready to discuss.

Week 1 - Godly Wisdom is Essential for Success in Life

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 2 - Your Response to Wisdom Determines Your Destiny

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 3 - Controlling Your Temper is a Mark of Genuine Wisdom

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 4 - God Opposes Pride and Rewards Humility

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 5 - The Wise Control Their Tongue and Use it to Encourage Others

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 6 - The Wise Have a Proper Perspective on Work

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Achieving Success God's Way: Review

Week 7 - The Wise Have a Proper Perspective on Work: Part Two

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 8 - The Wise Have a Proper Perspective on Material Wealth

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 9 - Genuine Sexual Fulfillment is Found Only Within Marriage

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 10 - Sober Thinking is Necessary When Facing Sexual Temptation

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 11 - The Wise Know How to Relate to Friends, Neighbors,
Enemies, and Fools

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

Week 12— The Wise Recognize Four Keys to Success and Security

- *PRINCIPLE:*

- *APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:*

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Endnotes

ZERO WEEK

1. Waugh, p. 146-149
2. Dungy, p. xviii
3. Ehrmann, p. 6-8
4. Ibid., p. 50-51

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1. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, p. 238
2. Dungy, p. 57
3. See Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13
4. Dungy, p. 99
5. http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/mensbasketball/2010-06-04-john-wooden-obit_N.htm?csp=34
6. Dungy, p. 156
7. "Why Worry When Your Assistants Are Lombardi, Landry" Los Angeles Times, January 27, 1987 (http://articles.latimes.com/1987-01-27/sports/sp-1644_1_phil-simms)
8. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 179-180
9. See Prov. 2:6; 3:5-6; 14:12, as well as 1 Cor. 3:19; James 3:13-17
10. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 187-188
11. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 84-85
12. <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/look-out/bullying-bus-monitor-sparks-amazing-compassion-campaign-video-143135242.html>
13. Dungy, p. 11
14. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 195-196
15. Dungy, p. 220
16. <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/09000d5d829f0155/article/nfl-saints-motivated-by-dog-the-bounty-hunter>

WEEK 2

1. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 96
2. Ibid., p. 98
3. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 209.
4. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 102
5. Clifford, p. 43
6. Jill Ewert, "Bold and Beautiful," *STV (Sharing the Victory)*, March 2010, p. 12
7. Maxwell, p. 143
8. Clavin and Peary, p. 312
9. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 785
10. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 110
11. Waugh, p. 146-149

WEEK 3

1. Tebow, p. 136
2. Ehrmann, p. 64-65
3. See Prov. 12:15; 15:5; 18:13; 19:3; 20:3; 26:11; 27:22; 29:9

4. Kidner, p. 111
5. Ehrmann, p. 203-204
6. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 838
7. McKane, p. 635
8. *Life Wisdom from Coach Wooden*, p. 86
9. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 629
10. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 37-38
11. Clifford, p. 162
12. Waltke, *Proverbs 15-31*, p. 37
13. McKane, p. 635; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, pp. 837-838

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1. "Miami Welcomes James, Wade, And Bosh With Huge Celebration," News One, July 10, 2010.
2. Clavin and Peary, p. 224-225
3. Ibid., p. 126
4. Michael Smith, "McNabb: T.O. situation was about money, power," ESPN NFL, February 2, 2006.
5. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 690
6. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 42; Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 114
7. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 865
8. Ibid., p. 866
9. Ehrmann, p. 8
10. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 346
11. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 168-169
12. Clifford, p. 154
13. Tebow, p. 13-14
14. Spurgeon (Sermon number 2232, p. 603)

WEEK 5

1. Ehrmann, p. 46-47
2. Ibid., p. 203
3. *Life Wisdom from Coach Wooden*, p. 78
4. <http://billwalton.com/john-wooden>
5. Dungy, p. 179
6. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 396-397
7. *Life Wisdom from Coach Wooden*, p. 17
8. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 615
9. Ehrmann, p. 192
10. *Life Wisdom from Coach Wooden*, p. 19
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2. Dungy, p. 210
3. Ibid., p. 57
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6. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 772
7. Clifford, p. 241

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2. Kidner, p. 145
3. Dungy, p. 213
4. Clifford, p. 116; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 522-25
5. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 523-524
6. Dungy, p. 212
7. <http://www.ericliddell.org/eric-liddell/recollections-by-people-who-knew-him/dr-david-j-mitchell>
8. Dungy, p. 58
9. <http://www.centennialtouchdown-club.com/>
10. Tommy Cox, "Don't Confuse Activity with Productivity," "Point After," newsletter, 1995-96

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1. Ortlund, p. 174
2. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 649
3. Clifford, p. 54-55
4. Dungy, p. 8
5. Marx, p. 99
6. *Life Wisdom from Coach Wooden*, p. 74
7. Waltke, *Proverbs 15-31*, p. 411
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2. "Pitino: Truth Will Come Out at Trial," @ ESPN Men's Basketball online site, August 27, 2009
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4. Hopkins, p. 95-98
5. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 203
6. Garrett, p. 94
7. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 739
8. Ibid.

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1. Kahn, p. 146-47
2. See Prov. 14:15; 18; 19:25; Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 111-112
3. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 372
4. Clifford, p. 88
5. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 385-386
6. Anderson, p. 89-90

WEEK 11

1. Dungy, p. 5
2. Ehrmann, p. 112
3. David Whitley, "Remembering Jack Twyman, the greatest teammate in the history of the NBA" at <http://aol.sportingnews.com/nba/story/2012-06-01/jack-twyman-maurice-stokes-foundation-tim-duncan-karl-malone-cincinnati-royals>
4. Paul Newberry, "Jack Twyman and a life worth remembering," http://www.times-standard.com/ci_20754291/column-jack-twyman-and-life-worth-remembering
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6. Ibid, p.163-164
7. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 266-267; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 164-165
8. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 785
9. http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Neville_Chamberlain
10. *The Quotable Churchill*, p. 84.
11. McKane, p. 491
12. Waltke, *Proverbs 15-31*, p. 14-15
13. See Prov. 1:7, 22, 32; 10:1, 21, 23; 12:15-16, 23; 13:16, 19; 14:1, 3, 9, 16-17, 24; 15:2, 5; 16:22; 17:12, 16, 21; 18:2, 6; 19:13, 29; 20:3; 21:20; 24:7; 26:3, 7, 11; 27:22; 29:11
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15. McKane, p. 609
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4. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/14405051>
5. www.zootorah.com/hyrax/hyrax.pdf
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7. <http://www.nfl.com/videos/nfl-network-top-ten/09000d5d804988e8/Top-Ten-Weather-Games-The-Sneakers-Game>. To read about the game, see Dave Anderson, "Sports of the Times; Giants-Bears: Snow, Ice and Wind," The New York Times, January 13, 1991 <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/13/sports/sports-of-the-times-giants-bears-snow-ice-and-wind.html>
8. Pope
9. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 471.
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14. Thompson, p. 282
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16. Marx, p. 158

About the NET Bible

The following is a description of the NET Bible, taken from Bible.org:

The NET Bible is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than 25 biblical scholars – experts in the original biblical languages – who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Most of these scholars teach Old or New Testament exegesis in seminaries and graduate schools. Furthermore, the translator assigned to prepare the first draft of the translation and notes for each book of the Bible was chosen in every instance because of his or her extensive work in that particular book – not only involving teaching but writing and research as well, often extending over several decades. Many of the translators and editors have also participated in other translation projects. They have been assisted by doctoral students and advised by style consultants and Wycliffe field translators.

THE IMPACT OF COACHES OUTREACH



COACHING WITH CONVICTION

About the Author

Bob grew up in Black River, New York. He played baseball in high school and at the State University of New York at Brockport, before transferring to Syracuse University, where he majored in history and journalism. Bob intended to become a sportswriter, but the Lord put a strong desire to study the Bible into his heart and guided him to seminary after his graduation from Syracuse in 1973. He earned the M.Div. and Th.M. degrees from Grace Theological Seminary and completed his doctorate at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1983. He began teaching while a grad student and just completed his 32nd year at DTS, where he serves as Chair and Professor of Old Testament Studies. Bob has authored five books, with two more on the way, and has written dozens of academic articles and book reviews dealing with the Old Testament. He was a translator and the Senior Old Testament Editor for the *NET Bible*, the translation used in Coaches Outreach playbooks.



Bob has remained active in sports. He estimates he played over 300 softball games during the 90's. A torn ACL ended his career, but he reached his goal of playing shortstop at the age of 50. For five years he was involved in various capacities in the athletic program at Lakewood Presbyterian School in Dallas, including athletic director, assistant varsity boys basketball coach, and assistant varsity girls basketball coach. He has spoken to the Rangers and Yankees in Baseball Chapel and has twice been the speaker at Coaches Outreach marriage retreats. This Fall he looks forward to a new challenge--coaching a Little League team in Plano.

Bob is active in Lake Ridge Bible Church (Mesquite), where he teaches an adult Sunday class. Three members of the class serve as lay leaders for Coaches Outreach in Mesquite high schools. Bob has been happily married to Deb for 37 years. Their son Doug (31) and his wife Jenny are professional counselors and their daughter Stephanie (27), who is looking forward to a March 2013 wedding to Chip who works in the finance department at the Town of Sunnyvale and hopes to begin a teaching career soon.

About our playbooks

Coaches Outreach has been helping coaches study the Bible since 1987, but it was in 2002 that the Coaches Playbook Study Series began. It is specifically designed to help coaches and their spouses learn to study the Bible for themselves. These playbooks are free to any coach participating in a study at his or her school. They are also free to coaches' spouses on request. In consideration of our donors who make the printing of these books possible, we ask that, if you take a book, you use it.

Coaches Outreach playbooks sometimes study topics (Christlike Leadership), particular genres (the Parables), or biblical characters (The Life of Joseph). But most often they study a book of Scripture (1 & 2 Kings, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Daniel, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians). Regardless of the subject, Coaches Outreach Bible studies always go verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, to teach the whole truth of Scripture in context. We believe that if people get into the Word of God, the Lord will change them.



Books from past series are not for order, but will be re-released from time to time, interspersed with brand new playbook material every year. If you've missed a past playbook, just stay in a coaches study; it will come back around—and there's more coming every fall and spring semester!