

Let's play a little game. I'm going to start some sentences and you're going to finish them for me. Ready? "A penny saved is a penny \_\_\_\_\_"; "Look before you \_\_\_\_\_"; "Practice makes \_\_\_\_\_"; "Opposites \_\_\_\_\_"; and April showers bring \_\_\_\_\_". Very good! What do all these sentences have in common? They're all common, modern proverbs. That means that they're short, meaningful sayings that are generally true and are intended to help us live a good life. Long before Readers Digest started publishing tips for getting grape juice stains out of clothing, and even longer before the internet started bringing us more of the same as "life hacks," the Bible brought us proverbs.

I say that proverbs are generally true because it's very easy to think of situations in which they're not. For example, a penny saved is hardly a penny earned when the inflation rate is 100 times greater than the interest earned. It's generally good to look before you leap, and yet, when you're trying to cross a busy street, sometimes "he who hesitates is lost." If practice makes perfect, why is it that I'm so imperfect in the many things I do every day? Opposite do often attract, and yet it's also true that "birds of a feather flock together." And finally, April showers usually do usher in beautiful May flowers- except in Minnesota when April sometimes brings thunder snow instead.

Proverbs are short, meaningful sayings that are generally true and intended to help us live a good life. They have practical value. The same is true for many of the Biblical proverbs. For example, there is great wisdom in Proverbs 22:6: "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it."<sup>1</sup> By all means, if you have the privilege of teaching children, then please do everything you can to raise them on the best path, as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This proverb, however, isn't a promise that every child will follow the path we lead them to. That part is up to them and God's Holy Spirit. Still, proverbs are generally true. And like the many "protips" we see on the internet, although many of them should be obvious, it's astonishing how seldom we follow them.

The Biblical proverbs are not just a random collection of wise sayings. They're organized, or rather, punctuated, with a handful of proverbs that provide a context for

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 22:6 New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

understanding all the others. One such collection of proverbs addresses the “fear of the Lord.” We see it first in Proverbs 1:7: “Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”<sup>2</sup> and again many times throughout proverbs and, in fact, the entirety of the Bible.

Before we hear more proverbs, let’s try to get a general handle on what it means to “fear” the Lord. As I suggested in the Early Word, “fear of the Lord” doesn’t mean that we should all be cowering in fright from a vengeful God hurling lightning from the clouds. It most likely means reverence, awe, obedience, and a right recognition that God is our creator and master and that we are God’s creatures. For example, in Deuteronomy 10:12, we read, “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. And you must always obey the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.”<sup>3</sup>

The punctuation of Proverbs with “the fear of the Lord” means that all the wisdom that the book of Proverbs has to offer us is ultimately meaningless apart from a right relationship with God. The fear of the Lord is always the beginning of true knowledge, and a right relationship with God always has to come first in the way we read and attempt to live any of the Biblical Proverbs. Let’s read Proverbs 2 now, considering this new understanding of what “fear of the Lord” might mean. I’m starting with verse 1 in the New Living Translation. **{Read Proverbs 2:1-11, NLT}**

Proverbs 2 makes it clear that the fear of the Lord isn’t just an attitude, it’s an active way of life. It requires searching out the wisdom of God as if we were searching for buried treasure with a metal detector on a beach. It requires concentration and active listening. And it requires that we ask God for godly wisdom.

That’s how King Solomon got his wisdom, by asking God, and by preferring wisdom to earthly treasures. What steps are you taking in your life to seek out God’s wisdom? We all need God’s wisdom if we hope to truly understand what it means to live with fear of the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 1:7. Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 10:12-13. Ibid

And what do we stand to gain from this? Why should we bother seeking, listening, and asking? Proverbs 2 tells us that we gain these things: common sense, protection, understanding, and joy, having clarity about the right way to live. Doesn't that sound like something worth having? Then why aren't you seeking it more eagerly?

The fear of the Lord in the remainder of the Proverbs is associated with long life, wisdom, good judgment, security, humility, and honor. It's contrasted with the love of evil, pride, arrogance, corruption, perverse speech, wickedness, and inner turmoil. As I read some selections from these proverbs, listen to see if one or more of them speak to your heart this morning. Pay attention to nudges of the Holy Spirit on your heart, or impressions or feelings you experience as you listen. Let's assess how we're doing with our fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 8:13: "All who fear the Lord will hate evil. Therefore, I hate pride and arrogance, corruption and perverse speech."<sup>4</sup> Living in fear of the Lord means embracing humility over arrogance and pride, honesty and righteousness over corruption, and speaking Godly words instead of perverse speech. How are you doing so far?

Proverbs 9:10: "Fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment."<sup>5</sup> Living in fear of the Lord means hearing, reading, and understanding God's Word, and learning to apply it in practical ways to our daily lives. Our judgment becomes good because it's based on God's wisdom rather than our own.

Proverbs 10:27: "Fear of the Lord lengthens one's life, but the years of the wicked are cut short."<sup>6</sup> This one may be more difficult for you to accept. It's so easy to think of counter examples, like long-lived people who say and do wicked things. But think of it like a doctor telling you that you'll live longer if you stop smoking. While that's not always true, it is generally true. Living in the fear of the Lord entails living in wise ways that generally expose one to fewer foolish risks.

Proverbs 14:26: "Those who fear the Lord are secure; he will be a refuge for their children."<sup>7</sup> Living in the fear of the Lord means that we've invested ourselves in the only

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<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 8:13. Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 9:10, Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 10:27, Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 14:26, Ibid

one who will never let us down. Unlike the things of this world that will rust and decay, the wise trust their eternal future into God's hands.

Proverbs 14:27: "Fear of the Lord is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death."<sup>8</sup> This proverb is similar to 10:27. Making wise choices in life means, in part, avoiding foolish risks.

Proverbs 15:16: "Better to have little, with fear for the Lord, than to have great treasure and inner turmoil."<sup>9</sup> How many of us know that the more stuff we have to manage, maintain, upgrade, and insure, the more we're likely we are to toss and turn at night. Living in the fear of the Lord means centering ourselves in God, not in our belongings or wealth.

Proverbs 15:33: "Fear of the Lord teaches wisdom; humility precedes honor."<sup>10</sup> One of the great paradoxes of the Christian life is that we find honor in the eyes of God when we take the low road of humility, serving others as if they had more honor than ourselves. Living in the fear of the Lord means living humbly.

And Proverbs 23:17: "Don't envy sinners, but always continue to fear the Lord."<sup>11</sup> This is a real challenge, because with the advent of the internet and social media platforms, it's easier than ever to see something about someone's life that we envy. Even when a person appears to be living a godless life, we can be tempted to covet something about their lifestyle. But living in the fear of the Lord means desiring the things of God more than the things of the world.

So how did you do? How well are you living in the fear of the Lord? If you find yourself lacking in many of the areas mentioned today, don't despair. King Solomon may have had more wisdom than anyone else in the world, but we have the grace of Jesus Christ. If "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,"<sup>12</sup> then surely the love of Jesus Christ is the completion of knowledge. For wisdom and discipline is good, knowledge and understanding are excellent, but they find their perfect fulfillment in Jesus, who lived and died, that we might have peace with God. It's not too late to dust off your spiritual metal

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<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 14:27, Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 15:16, Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 15:33, Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 23:17, Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 1:7. New Revised Standard Version.

detector and begin your treasure hunt for God's wisdom. I believe that God meets us wherever we are, eager to join us on the journey of discovering more of God. May it be so for each of us today.

Please take some time now to reflect on your embrace of God's wisdom. How are you living in the fear of the Lord?



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