

MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE'S

TODAY IN THE WORD

FEBRUARY 2004

Let the wise listen
and add to their
learning.

Proverbs 1:5

PROVERBS FOR OUR DAY

WISDOM: A CROWN OF SPLENDOR

Her name was Eppie Lederer. The daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, she was more familiar to many of us by her pen name: Ann Landers. “Ann Landers” and her sister “Dear Abby” ruled the advice columns for more than half of a century, trolling out anecdotal wisdom on everything from what to do with unruly children to how to patch up a failing marriage.



By the end of her long and successful career, Eppie had as many as 90 million readers in more than 1,000 papers and a running column in her hometown paper, the *Chicago Tribune*. But a recent article in *Chicago* magazine observed that Ann’s private life was not always so successful. Carol Felsenthal writes, “And yet, [Eppie] somehow could never apply the sensible

advice she gave others to the closest relations in her own life.”

Eppie’s marriage dissolved and she and her twin sister were in a feud that lasted for years. Felsenthal observes, “Like the shoe-maker’s daughter who had holes in her shoes, Eppie, an adviser to millions, seemed unable to confront problems in her own family. She encouraged her readers and her friends to tackle their problems head-on, but when hers hit too close to home and complicated her relationship with her husband or her daughter, she simply averted her eyes.”

But before we are too hard on her we do have to admit, don’t we, that it is easier to know wisdom than to live it out in our own lives. When it comes to wisdom, it is not better to give than receive. Perhaps that is why the book of Proverbs seems continually fresh to us, no matter how many times we read it. The 31 chapters are packed with verse after verse of advice on how to live a godly life. These words of wisdom constantly

stimulate my heart to live more wisely because they are not the advice of a human author, but come from God.

Wisdom is a process—a learning experience. Our modern minds want wisdom the fast way. We read self-help books hoping that someone wiser than ourselves will tell us what to do. How often we forget that the great wisdom of all is gleaned from the words of Scripture. We have access to wisdom that comes directly from the throne of God! Seeking God is the key to living a wise life.

One wise mother once said to her pastor, “It is not my ultimate goal for my children to be happy. It is my goal that they be good men and women who believe in and follow God.” This woman realized that true happiness does not come from following our “inner voice” or solving temporary problems. Instead, the goal of our life should indeed be godly wisdom, a life characterized by following God.

Not all of God’s wisdom makes us happy. In fact, some of it is hard to follow. But true wisdom is rewarded. The author of Proverbs states, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Prov. 1:7).

As we begin this month’s study of the book of Proverbs, remember that the book contains a treasure trove of wisdom, more than you will ever find by reading any advice column. Here is advice on sin, wealth, poverty, pride, humility, justice, laziness, love, friends, family, life, and death.

While the wisdom that is found here will not guarantee a happy life, anyone who seeks God’s wisdom will be rewarded: “She [wisdom] will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor. Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many” (4:9).

Stephen Stowell

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Sovereignty

Shortly after terrorists crashed two planes into the World Trade Center in New York City, the *Chicago Sun-Times* asked leaders from a variety of religious traditions to answer this question: “Why didn’t God intervene?” Some said that the reason was because God couldn’t intervene. Others made a distinction between God’s direct will and His permissive will. Still others argued that since God’s control is absolute, whatever takes place happens within the knowledge of God and is part of His plan.

The question posed by the *Chicago Sun-Times* focused on the divine attribute known as the sovereignty of God. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is the biblical teaching that God is both ruler and controller of all. He is the ultimate authority to whom every soul will be held accountable and the one who causes all things to work according to His purpose.

The apostle Peter emphasized both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. Speaking of Jesus, he declared: “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23).

Why Theology Matters

The attribute of divine sovereignty is the basis for the believer’s confidence that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Rom. 8:28). Because He is ruler over all, He alone has the power to establish the boundaries within which human actions occur. The fact that God is sovereign does not mean that He is pleased with everything we do. Nor does it mean that everything we do is good. It does mean, however, that nothing that occurs can thwart God’s plan or His good purpose for those who know Christ.

For Further Reading

To learn more about the sovereignty of God, read *Still Sovereign*, edited by Thomas R. Screiner and Bruce A. Ware (Baker).



MBI Today

NEWS OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS AT MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE
FEBRUARY 2004



What's Next: God, Israel, and the Future of Iraq

by Lisa Ann Cockrel

The tensions simmering in the Middle East have long attracted the attention and concern of evangelical Christians. The recent war in Iraq and heightened strain between Israel and its Arab neighbors has left many speculating about the region, its people, and their respective places in God's plan for the future.

To help Christians better understand current events within a biblical context, Dr. Charlie Dyer, senior vice president of education at Moody Bible Institute, has written a new book titled *What's Next: God, Israel, and the Future of Iraq*. In it he explores and explains the past, present, and future of the region based on his own extensive research and numerous visits to the area. We sat down with MBI's resident expert on this important region and asked him a few questions.

MBI Today: *You have an obvious affection for the Middle East and for Israel. Where does that come from? How did it develop?*

Dyer: I trace my love for the Middle East and for the land of Israel to two pivotal professors in college. One professor took a trip to Israel and then returned and shared with us the impact of the trip on his life. He convinced me that there was no substitute for first-hand experience and that a trip to Israel was an investment that would last a lifetime. The second professor is the one who forced me to look more deeply at the role that Babylon played in the Bible's historical drama. Together they helped ignite a spark of passion and interest within me for this region of the world.

In your book, you present a brief but informative history of the events leading up to and surrounding the formation of the nation of Israel. What one or two of these events do you think are crucial to understanding the current climate in this region?

Most people have no idea how critical the events of World War I and World War II are on the current crisis in the Middle East. The fall of the Ottoman Empire—and the mutually exclusive promises made to the Jews and Arabs by the Allies—helped set the stage for the current conflict. And the rise of fascism becomes a thread that joins the Nazi Germany of Adolf Hitler with the Baath party of Saddam Hussein.

Are there any areas that Israel now controls that Palestinians do not contest?

As with so much of the current Middle East conflict, this question illustrates the complexity of the problem. The best answer is to say, "It depends on the specific Palestinian you are talking to." There are moderate Palestinians who have stated publicly that they recognize the right of Israel to exist as a nation. Some would give Israel all of the land that they controlled after the 1948 War of Independence. Others would limit Israel to the land granted in the UN partition plan of 1947. But others, like Hamas, state publicly that they oppose an independent Jewish state on any land that previously had been conquered for Islam.



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Proverbs for Our Day

It's amazing enough that the wisdom of Solomon has stayed relevant to every culture in every millennium since he lived. But it is perhaps even more impressive that with each reading of the book of Proverbs in our own individual lives, its truth shines on our hearts with a fresh light, revealing something new to us each time.

As each day presents us with new challenges, Proverbs continually deepens our wisdom and understanding of how God would have us live.

And this month, we hope that *Today in the Word* will help you look at Proverbs in a whole new light, and that the power of God's Word will have observable applications in your life that will enrich your love for God and for others.

We also hope you'll help support the ministry of *Today in the Word* with a gift this month as you are able. This publication is made possible by friends like you, and your gifts bring an encouragement to fresh, biblical study to more than 200,000 people. Thank you for your partnership in the service of Christ and His Word!

**Thank you for your prayers
and support in 2003!**

MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE'S

**TODAY
IN THE
WORD**

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PRINTED ON 50% RECYCLED PAPER

*The fear of
the Lord is
the beginning
of wisdom.*

PROVERBS 9:10



TODAY AT MOODY

Our faculty members devote their lives to teaching our students

God's wisdom and truth. Please include in your prayers Moody's Pastoral Studies staff—John Koessler, Dwight

Perry, and Winfred Neely—as they train godly leaders for the church of tomorrow.

Read: Proverbs 1:1–7

TODAY IN THE WORD



Benjamin Franklin uttered hundreds of pithy sayings such as “a penny saved is a penny earned.” The little book, *The Wit and Wisdom of Benjamin Franklin*, preserves many of these short yet profound insights into life.

Sometimes the book of Proverbs, our focus this month, feels a bit like “The Wit and Wisdom of King Solomon”—a large collection of seemingly unconnected two-line sayings! Actually, Proverbs is part of a larger type of writing called “wisdom literature.” Far from presenting random sayings about what to do and what not to do, wisdom offers an integrated way of looking at every aspect of life. That’s not to say that wisdom directly addresses every situation we may encounter. Rather, wisdom teaches us how to live according to God’s will.

Proverbs 1–9 introduces the entire book of Proverbs. Today’s passage serves as the opening statement for this larger introduction. In this passage we are introduced to words and types of people that occur throughout Proverbs.

Not surprisingly, the first item listed is *wisdom* (v. 2), the key promise we can attain by studying Solomon’s proverbs. Notice that wisdom is linked with *discipline*, suggesting the idea of training, perhaps even hard training. From this training comes the understanding of *words of insight*. This involves attaining good common sense,

including the ability to discern between good and bad. Following naturally from this is the development of *good character* (v. 3), a quality of the person who knows just what to say or do in any situation. Finally, attaining wisdom gives *prudence* (v. 4), the idea of knowing the best course of action or knowing when to quit and when to press on.

Today’s passage also introduces several types of people. First, we meet the “simple” (v. 4), who are naive and lacking knowledge. As we will see, these are precisely the people for whom the book of Proverbs is written because they’re still teachable. Next, we meet the “wise” (v. 5), who continually learn more about wisdom. Finally, we meet the “fools” (v. 7), who reject wisdom and discipline.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



People often say that Proverbs presents “skills for living,” which is true—but this can also be misleading if we think of a skill as a technique that’s somehow external to our lives. For example, we can become skilled cooks or drivers without impacting our souls!

Proverbs offers us much more than a skill. The way of wisdom, which is what Proverbs really promises, is a whole way of life that integrates everything—family, work, emotions, church, even doing laundry—in such a way that’s full, pleasing to God, and life-giving to others.

Read: Proverbs 1:8–19

TODAY IN THE WORD



There's a popular bumper sticker that says, "I'm the person your parents warned you about." It's easy to chuckle over this, but today's passage shows that such an admission is really nothing to laugh about.

We begin with the command "Listen, my son" (v. 8), which evokes the common image of parents instructing their child, although these instructions were probably written by King Solomon. Recall that the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, promising him whatever he wanted (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon desired "a discerning heart to govern [God's] people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (1 Kings 3:9). Indeed, we read in 1 Kings 4:32–34 that Solomon wrote over three thousand proverbs!

Verse 8 says the same thing both positively (listen to instruction) and negatively (do not forsake teaching). This echoes what we read yesterday that fools are those who reject wisdom. As if to further encourage the child, this exhortation is likened to the beauty of a crown or a string of pearls.

The specific instruction given in this passage concerns a warning about people who could entice this child. Today, this might be a warning against getting involved with gangs.

Notice that these dangerous individuals appeal to the nearly universal desire to be a part of the "in-crowd." They say, "Come with us," and the repeti-

tion of "let's" strengthens this false promise of belonging. We can almost hear "Come on, everybody's doing this . . . it'll be cool!" In addition to community, these "gang members" promise gain (vv. 13–14). But clearly what they're up to is no good.

Rather than simply telling the child not to get involved with such people, the parent here paints a graphic picture of what these blood-thirsty individuals leave out of their smooth-sounding invitation: their evil ways lead to death. The trap they set is actually for themselves (v. 17). The invitation they offer in verse 11 becomes the description of their destiny. Even if these individuals don't lose their physical life, it's clear that they've lost their souls. No wonder, this parent says, "Avoid such people!"

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's passage records wise words given by parents to their child, but don't think that Proverbs only applies to the parent/child context. When it comes to wisdom, we're all children! This means that all of Proverbs is a word from our Heavenly Father to us as His children. In fact, many believers (Billy Graham among them) have made it their practice to read a chapter from Proverbs every day along with their regular Bible reading. This year might be a good time for you to start this practice as well.

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

1 CORINTHIANS 15:33



TODAY AT MOODY

Join us today for Founder's Week at Moody—its theme this year is prayer. Praise God for MBI's continuous tradition of faithfulness to the Bible and godly legacy! As you pray, bring before the Lord our President, Dr. Joseph Stowell, who opens Founder's Week.

He who scorns instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command is rewarded.

PROVERBS 13:13



TODAY AT MOODY

As Moody's Founder's Week continues, please pray for our students—that God will touch their hearts during this time with a deeper love for Him and for their lives to be shaped by the power of prayer.

Read: Proverbs 1:20–33

TODAY IN THE WORD



Peter Johnston's life looks very different today than it did fifteen years ago, when he was addicted to alcohol. Peter used to laugh at people who thought that the Bible had all the answers. What could an ancient book have to say to him? He didn't doubt that people who practiced what the Bible taught were good, but he was equally sure that they had no fun.

Things changed when Peter met a coworker who loved the Lord. Through this man, Peter began to see that God cared about him and that the Bible just might have a few things to say. Today, he describes God's Word and fellowship with other believers as an oasis. Proverbs 1:33 gives us a beautiful picture of this oasis.

Prior to this image, however, is the picture of wisdom calling aloud in a public square. In Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman, perhaps because the Hebrew noun for wisdom is feminine. In today's passage, Woman Wisdom stands on a noisy downtown street, crying out to those who have rejected her . . . people like Peter who didn't think that the Bible could have anything worth hearing. Verse 22 records her anguished lament over these individuals.

Recall that there are three types of people in Proverbs (see Feb. 1). The simple are those who are ignorant and lack moral direction. These people are still

open to instruction, but they are easily seduced and inclined toward evil. Notice that here they are parallel to mockers and fools. In other words, the simple are in a very dangerous place.

The following verses (vv. 24–30) describe the terrifying future for those who have rejected the opportunity to respond to wisdom's correction (v. 23). Recall that this passage is still part of the parents' instruction, so it's intended to create a horrific picture of the awful consequences of rejecting God's ways. Perhaps the parents had in mind an actual person who had scoffed at God for many years and who had no idea how to respond morally or spiritually to a major crisis. This isn't a pretty picture!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's passage can be succinctly summarized: trusting God leads to an oasis and rejecting Him leads to frenzy and despair.

No one can be fully prepared for any disaster, yet those who have trusted the Lord and sought His ways often find it easier to rely on Him when difficulties come. The New Testament describes this idea of dwelling securely with the Lord in terms of a peace that surpasses understanding (Phil. 4:7). So the best way to prepare for any disaster is to begin trusting Him fully today.

Read: Proverbs 2:1–22

TODAY IN THE WORD



A very unusual Olympics was held in Chicago last summer. Like most athletic competitions, participants came from all over to see how far they could jump, swim, and run. All the participants, however, were dogs jumping, swimming, and running after a ball!

There's an analogy to wisdom here. When a dog pursues a ball, it's as if nothing else in the world matters, or even exists. Proverbs encourages us to pursue wisdom with this same intensity.

Proverbs 2:1–4 stresses this. First, the “child” is told to accept the parent’s words, implying that receptivity is key. Next, the listener is told to store up wisdom, to turn one’s ears and apply one’s heart, and to pursue wisdom like hidden treasure. All this shows that seeking God’s wisdom takes real effort—but it’s more than worth it, because it brings understanding of the fear of the Lord.

Fearing the Lord means respecting Him for who He is, the only One who gives physical and spiritual life. By seeking wisdom, we grow closer to Him and enjoy His protection (vv. 6–8). We also experience a life characterized by rightly relating and speaking to others (vv. 9–10). And as we become more like Him, our own lives reflect these same qualities.

Wisdom protects us from a wasted life. Verses 12–22 give us examples to avoid through warnings about deception and

seduction. These two snares are personified as an untruthful man and an unfaithful woman. The deceiver (vv. 12–15) uses perversity to get what he wants. He’s a smooth talker lurking in the shadows!

The seductress also uses the power of words to promise life, but she delivers death. She lacks commitment, both to her husband and to the Lord. What a contrast these two are to our Savior, who is always truthful and always faithful!

Wisdom also keeps us on the path that leads to life (vv. 20–22). In the Old Testament, dwelling securely in the Promised Land foreshadowed eternal life in the New Testament. This promise is given to those who seek God, but it’s kept from those who reject Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Wisdom teaches us how to recognize and avoid deception and seduction. At one level, this means that we learn how to discern these pitfalls in others and avoid being ensnared by them. But by showing the outcome of these evils (ultimately the death of our souls), we are encouraged to avoid these snares in our own lives. This might mean recognizing that even “little white lies” can be quite dangerous, or that the seductive promises of life offered by some advertising are false.

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

MATTHEW 6:33



TODAY AT MOODY

Thousands of people have an opportunity to listen in to Founder’s Week globally thanks to Moody Broadcasting Network. Please join Robert Neff, Vice President of Broadcasting, in praising God today for using MBN to send out His Word across the world.

*No discipline
seem pleasant
at the time,
but painful.
Later on, how-
ever, it pro-
duces a bar-
vest of
righteousness.*

HEBREWS 12:11



TODAY AT MOODY

As we continue to pray for Moody's broadcasting ministry today, please add to your prayer list these additional members of the team: Phoebe Millis and Philip Shappard. Ask for God's blessing on their work.

Read: Proverbs 3:1-12

TODAY IN THE WORD



Sometimes Proverbs presents a very simple approach to life: if you do X, then Y will happen. This simplicity can be hard to reconcile with the complexity of our own lives. We wonder about faithful believers who die young, or others who are persecuted for their Christian witness. While we are still on this side of heaven, we know that the consequences of our fallen world still plague us, even as Christians. But Proverbs wants to emphasize that obedience to God's commands can lead to physical well-being, as today's passage makes clear.

Although this passage is addressed to one of Solomon's children, it clearly echoes our relationship with our Heavenly Father. What's more, we can be sure that the commands that Solomon taught his children were in fact the Lord's commands, which is what we are to keep in our hearts.

Verse 3 mentions two of the most importance words in Scripture. "Love" describes, above all, God's loving kindness, especially as a covenant-keeping God. "Faithfulness" means fidelity, loyalty, and steadfastness, also primarily of God. Here, we are encouraged to write these qualities into our own lives because this leads to a key goal of wisdom: a life pleasing to God and others.

Another emphasis of wisdom is to be honest about our

finite, human frailties and to admit that God does know everything. This is easy to say but often very hard to do. Notice the images that flow from surrendering to the Lord: clear direction (v. 6) and good health (v. 8). Indeed, modern medicine confirms that stress and anxiety are major health risks. Verses 9 and 10 offer us a true test of our trust. It's easy to say that we honor the Lord, but what we do with our financial resources demonstrates it.

After studying these commands, it's helpful to remember that God's discipline flows from His deep love, as our verse for today reminds us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The idea of writing something on your heart means to meditate on something, ponder it, memorize it, and let it become part of the fabric of your being. Psalm 119:11 reads: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." As we've seen today, putting God's commands, or His Word, in your heart has great benefits.

As we proceed through Proverbs, write out verses that speak directly to you and store these verses in your heart throughout this month.

Read: Proverbs 3:13–20

TODAY IN THE WORD



Deep in the
Superstition
Mountains of

Arizona lies a very famous buried treasure, dating back to the Spanish Conquistadors. Any clues to the secret location of this treasure, known as the Lost Dutchman's Mine, died with its owner, Jacob Waltz in 1891. Since then, numerous individuals have dedicated their lives to finding this treasure—but to date no one has found it.

In Proverbs, wisdom is likened to precious treasure. Unlike the Lost Dutchman's Mine, however, this treasure is available to all who make God's wisdom the main pursuit of their lives!

Today's passage is a praise song for Woman Wisdom and her benefits. Recall from our study on Proverbs 1:20–33 (see Feb. 3) that wisdom and folly are personified as women in Proverbs. As we noted earlier, this may be because the Hebrew word for wisdom is feminine. But it's also likely that describing wisdom as a person made this teaching more vivid and effective, especially if it was originally directed toward a young man, "my son." Thus Wisdom is the kind of woman a young man should seek; and foolishness, embodied in Woman Folly, is the kind of woman to avoid.

Many of God's eternal attributes are easier for finite humans to understand if they are personified. So as we read through today's passage, we

could substitute something like "God, His Word, and His ways" for "wisdom."

We see right away that Wisdom is more desirable than anything (vv. 14–15). We also find that honor, peace, life, and blessing flow from her (vv. 16–18). As you read these verses, you may be struck by the similarity to the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22–23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Some of these qualities are also found in the passage that we'll look at tomorrow.

From this passage we also learn that Wisdom (God's divine attributes) was active in creation (vv. 19–20). Strikingly similar statements are made about Christ in Colossians 1:16, "For by him all things were created."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



As we read through Proverbs, it's important to keep in mind that this book points

to truths that are made clear in Jesus Christ. Thus, much of Proverbs offers a picture of the believer's life in Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Although the Holy Spirit isn't mentioned in Proverbs, we could never grow in wisdom, or an understanding of the Lord and His ways, apart from the Spirit's work in our lives. And as John 10:10 reminds us, abundant life can only be found in Jesus Christ.

*I have come
that they
may have life,
and have it
to the full.*

JOHN 10:10



TODAY AT MOODY

Today, would you include in your prayers Moody's General Counsel Robert Gunter? Our prayer is that the Lord will grant him wisdom as he faces many decisions at his workplace every week.

Question & Answer

Q *Our pastor and the elders are not of one mind; they cannot seem to agree about the direction the church should take. Should I support the pastor or the elders?*

A Try to be a peacemaker, but if you *must* take sides stand by the elders. Rule in the church is vested in its elders. The pastor also should be recognized as an elder, but few, if any, church constitutions give him primacy over the group. He cannot buck the group and prevail.

The New Testament does not delegate authority to rule to a pastor separate from the elders, but to a plurality of men who exercise the two functions of elders: to oversee, and to shepherd (i.e. to pastor) the flock. In his talk with the elders at Ephesus, Paul said that the Holy Spirit had made them the elders. "The Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God" (see Acts 20:17, 28). In that text, Paul identifies elders and overseers as one and the same persons, charged with overseeing and shepherding ("pastoring") the flock.

Peter, who says that he himself is an elder, exhorts young men to obey their elders (1 Peter 5:1, 5). In a church that attempts to follow

the New Testament pattern, the pastor is one of the elders. He is not above them or below them; authority is vested in the group, of which he is a member.

Q *When I reprimand a relative for moral sin, he replies, "Jesus said, 'Judge not!' So stop picking on me." How can I explain that it is right to judge some things?*

A In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus tells the disciples what to do when a brother sins against them. The first step is to "show him his fault."

The apostle Paul taught the church in Corinth that it was their responsibility to judge a member who was committing flagrant sin. "Expel the wicked man from among you," he commanded (1 Cor. 5:12–13, see also Titus 3:10).

The words, "Do not judge," are part of a paragraph about hypocrisy (Matt. 7:1–5). Jesus rebuked His listeners for being upset about a "speck of sawdust" in another person's eye while ignoring a "plank" in their own. His language was figurative; the speck of sawdust stands for a relatively insignificant fault. A plank,

on the other hand, is something much more serious. A person who is guilty of serious sin is in no position to correct anyone else. Not until he has gotten rid of the plank is he qualified to "remove the speck" from his brother's eye.

Note that Jesus implied that for someone who had removed the plank in his own eye, it would be okay to remove the speck in somebody else's eye. Thus, His admonition not to judge was not a flat prohibition against judging.

Romans 14, especially verses 12 and 13, add another dimension to the subject. That chapter stresses several truths: first, sometimes we believers disagree about the meaning and application of biblical issues. Second, we must answer to God for our respective views, not to those whose interpretations may differ from ours. Third, for two reasons God alone is qualified to judge us: first, we are His servants, and, second, He alone knows our hearts. "Who are [we] to judge someone else's servant?" Paul asks. He might add, who are we to think we know someone else's motives?

In light of material in the Epistles, we interpret the warning not to judge as, "Do not judge another person's motives. He answers to God, not to you, and

God alone knows what is in his heart. But do not overlook conduct that is clearly sinful. Deal with it."

Q *Does the Bible say when the Age of Accountability begins?*

A Presumably, the question asks when a child becomes responsible for his or her sins and, therefore, must be converted (i.e. born again) or risk damnation in the event of death. The Bible does not answer that question. It speaks of accountability with reference to adults. Check passages such as Matthew 12:36; 25:14-30; and all the sermons or proclamations of the gospel in Acts.

The plain truth is that we do not know the age at which a child is mature enough to know that he must repent and believe the gospel for forgiveness. No doubt, the age varies with each child. In any case, should a child die prior to having this understanding, we can trust in the grace and mercy of God that little children do not go to hell.

*A person who
is guilty of
serious sin is
in no position
to correct
anyone else.*

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

ROMANS 12:18



TODAY AT MOODY

Robert Gunter leads a highly qualified staff of the Legal Department who love God and want to please Him with their service at Moody. Cassandra Blakely, Elizabeth Brown, Katalin Csaky, and Charity Russell welcome the support of your prayers today.

Read: Proverbs 3:21–35

TODAY IN THE WORD



Perhaps one of the best-known family feuds in American history was between the Hatfields of West Virginia and the McCoys of Kentucky. Animosity began during the Civil War when a Hatfield killed a McCoy. Later quarrels arose over stolen livestock and illicit unions, eventually leading to bloodshed. Certainly today's passage would have had much to say to these two families.

A series of practical applications follow naturally from the praise song that we looked at yesterday. First, the sound judgment and discernment offered by wisdom protect us from fear (vv. 21–26). Here wisdom is a guardian. Picture guardrails on mountain highways; far from curtailing our fun, these guardrails preserve our lives. If we were to ignore them, we would drive right off a cliff. So too God's wisdom keeps us from falling off the right path. If you have ever been around someone who has broken the law or somehow cheated, you may have seen the panic and fear that accompanies these actions. It can be hard to sleep at night with a guilty conscience!

Wisdom also teaches us how to act rightly toward our neighbors. First, we are encouraged to help out whenever and however we can. In the ancient world, neighbors often had to rely upon each other. If someone were in need, it was expected that others would

help. Second, we are exhorted to treat our neighbors with integrity (vv. 27–28). There's a trust that should exist between neighbors, and we are to honor that trust. We are also to refrain from false accusations, which often happens with gossip.

Verses 33–36 show us why we should do these things. Those who seek the Lord's ways receive His blessing and honor, but those who reject Him receive a curse and shame. Proverbs encourages us to look beyond the present and to see what lies at the end of the way of wisdom and the way of foolishness. This contrast between the wise and the wicked is one of the central features of Proverbs, and we will look at it more closely later.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's teaching about neighbors isn't just for the Hatfields and the McCoys—it's for all of us as we interact with neighbors, coworkers, and others. Often, however, because we don't feel forced to depend on our neighbors, we don't even know them.

So this passage challenges us to get to know those around us. Who lives next door or down the hall? Is there some way that you and your family could help? Maybe just the gesture of reaching out would be the best way to be a neighbor.

Read: Proverbs 4:1–9

TODAY IN THE WORD



There's a trend among couples planning a wedding to seek business sponsors willing to provide them with a cake, flowers, a wedding dress and tuxedo, and even wedding rings, for free. In exchange, these companies display a small plaque at the reception or are listed in the program. Why would any company willingly give away its products? Quite simply, because many businesses recognize that a good testimonial is very effective and often less expensive than many other types of advertising.

Today's passage provides a powerful testimonial for acquiring wisdom. Even previous generations chime in. The father recalls receiving his own father's counsel when he was young (vv. 3–4). Since both the father's and the grandfather's words are grounded in the Lord's commands, the cry here is really to seek the Lord and His ways fully.

It's hard to miss the main point of this passage—get wisdom! We could also translate this as “buy” or “acquire” wisdom. It's not as if wisdom were for sale, but this command stresses the importance of actively seeking wisdom. Wisdom isn't something to be pursued when there's nothing better to do! Wisdom is like the pearl of great price that is to be obtained regardless of its cost (Matt. 13:45–46). The repetition in verses 5 and 7 shows us that wisdom isn't about how smart

someone is, but rather about the decision to seek the Lord and make Him one's first priority.

Those who seek Wisdom are promised her protection and care. We first saw this idea in Proverbs 2:11–12 (see Feb. 4). This is another way of saying that wisdom prevents us from missteps and decisions that lead to destruction.

The supreme benefit of wisdom, however, is found in verse 4. Those who find wisdom find life. Notice that there are few “don'ts” in this passage. That's because as we seek the Lord and His ways, we are changed and become more like Him. We delight more and more in Him, and less and less in disobeying. In other words, our joy comes from doing His will and not our own.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's passage echoes Deuteronomy 6:1–2, which also links loving God and keeping His commands with finding life. What greater benefit could there be for seeking wisdom?

So take to heart the testimonial in today's passage. The first step is to fear the Lord (Prov. 1:9). Recall that this means seeing Him for who He really is as Creator and Redeemer. The next step is to seek His words and ways. If you are a younger believer, you might also seek an older Christian to help you along this path.

May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.

PSALM 40:16



TODAY AT MOODY

Dr. Richard Epps, Vice President of Stewardship, oversees the service of several departments in his division. Today, he requests your prayer support for the staff of the Planned Giving department—Eric Beckman, Crystal Davis-Landrum, Mary Lou Fritz, Lisa Larson, Bill Murphy, and Felicia Sewell-Mims.

*Choose for
yourselves
this day
whom you
will serve.*

JOSHUA 24:15



TODAY AT MOODY

Thank the Lord today for Franklin Ballenger's ministry of hospitality at Moody.

As Catering and Special Events Coordinator, he helps create the environment of care, God's love, and joy that our guests and visitors feel on campus.

Read: Proverbs 4:10–19

TODAY IN THE WORD



In “The Road Not Taken,” the poet Robert Frost ponders how his life might have been different had he made different choices. Frost concludes, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference.”

This poem reminds us of an important truth: life is a journey and the path we take makes all the difference. Not all paths lead to the same place. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are ultimately on the path to eternal life. But during our lives in this world, we make choices that lead either to abundant life or to spiritual dryness. Proverbs is like a road map that shows us what these two paths look like.

Today's passage develops this path metaphor. Yesterday we saw that those who sought wisdom found life—a promise echoed in verse 10. Here we see that the way of wisdom is a straight path (v. 11) because it leads to rightness or justice. Thus the way of wisdom allows one to walk unhindered by deception or fear of falling because of sin. Because wisdom leads to life, it's to be guarded and applied (v. 13).

In addition to seeking wisdom, we must avoid evil. We shouldn't put even our big toe on this path! This may seem overstated until we consider that initially evil rarely looks bad. In fact, most sins look adventurous and enticing . . . at first. But

Proverbs shows us what the end of the road looks like. And here, the end of the evil path really doesn't look that exciting. Here are people so consumed by greed, lust, revenge, or some other evil, that they can't even sleep at night. Unless they harm someone, they aren't content. We may call this thinking psychopathic today, but Proverbs shows that this is where the path of evil leads.

As if to drive this home, verses 18 and 19 compare the two paths. Using the familiar imagery of light and dark, the stark difference between the two paths couldn't be more vividly drawn.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



We would like to emphasize an earlier point: as believers, our ultimate destination is eternal glory with Jesus. But between now and then, we make choices that either promote or hinder abundant life. So it's worth considering which of these two paths you are on today. Are you asking the Lord to show you how to bless other people's lives, or are you harboring grudges and vengeful thoughts? These are hard questions. But if you know you're on the wrong path, it's not too late to change direction and head down the path to life!

Read: Proverbs 4:20–27

TODAY IN THE WORD



It has become commonplace in the last several years to acknowledge that proper diet and adequate exercise are crucial elements of preventing heart disease. In fact, a University of Pennsylvania study found that exercise worked like certain prescription drugs in preventing heart disease.

In our culture, however, this welcome emphasis on physically healthy hearts isn't combined with concern for spiritually healthy hearts. So consider today's passage an ad for Spiritual Heart Check America!

We begin with the oft-repeated exhortation to pay attention to the father's words, to listen and focus on them. In short, if we're looking at God's words, we won't be focusing on others' words. We see once again the importance of treasuring up God's Word, because His words bring forth life and health. It's been noticed that people who are angry or unforgiving often experience increased physical ailments. Verse 23 emphasizes this: the condition of our heart is to be protected at all costs.

Jesus taught the same thing. When the Pharisees accused His disciples of being unclean, Jesus replied, "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean'" (Matt. 15:11). Thus today's passages encourages us to monitor what we take in, not allowing an unfiltered stream to enter our

hearts through TV, movies, magazines, and other media.

As before, the command to store up wisdom is followed with promised benefits. The link between wisdom and well-being is illustrated using various body parts. Our mouths and lips are to be free from crooked, deceitful speech (v. 24). (We'll look more at the importance of speech later this month.) Our eyes are to focus straight ahead, suggesting that they shouldn't wander into affairs that don't concern us. *Straight* (v. 25) and *level* (v. 26) indicate integrity, righteousness, justice, and equity. Verses 26 and 27 could be summarized as follows: the level path is just and open for all to see; the crooked path is trying to get around something.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Speech often indicates the true condition of our heart. It's embarrassing to "slip" and to say something hurtful unintentionally, but this often reveals our true feelings. That's why it's good to be reminded that the condition of our hearts determines our words and actions. If we're embittered toward others, we will find it nearly impossible to serve them and to look for their best. But if we have been cultivating edifying thoughts about others, we're much more predisposed to love them through service and prayer.

*Above all else,
guard your
heart, for it is
the wellspring
of life.*

PROVERBS 4:23



TODAY AT MOODY

Bruce Cain, Vice President of Facilities Management, oversees the work of maintenance and construction on our campus—not an easy task considering the size of this downtown Chicago property. Encourage Bruce and his coworkers by including them in your prayers today.

I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

MATTHEW 5:28



TODAY AT MOODY

In January we started to pray for our Custodial Services staff. During the next three days we'll continue to lift them up in prayer, starting with Thomas Pizano, Chau Lai, Tailor Nguyen, and John Pettett who in December celebrated his 15th anniversary of service at the Institute.

Read: Proverbs 5:1–25

TODAY IN THE WORD



Boris Pasternak's powerful novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, traces the Russian

Revolution through the life of a young doctor, Yuri Zhivago, who is torn between love for his wife and family and overwhelming passion for a beautiful nurse, Lara. Zhivago loses everyone in the end and dies a tragic, lonely death. Among other things, this novel shows the painful consequences of adultery.

Yesterday we looked at the command to guard one's heart; today this exhortation is applied to marriage. The son is told to listen to his father's wise words so that his own lips might preserve knowledge. In stark contrast are the lips of the adulteress. With smooth words, she promises much, but the one who samples this fruit will find a bitter end instead of a sweet reward.

Proverbs never lets us forget that there's a future beyond the here and now, and so once again, we are challenged to ask, "Where does this particular path lead?" And the answer is clear: to death. Even the adulteress appears to have deceived herself on this point (v. 6).

The only course of action is to avoid her at all costs. Verses 8–14 graphically portray the perils of adultery. They show a wasted life filled with regret. What was relished in secret becomes publicly exposed ruin (v. 14).

Avoiding adultery is only half the command given here.

The young man is also to delight in his marriage. Water is a metaphor for sexual relations, also used in Song of Songs 4:12–15. In both passages, these streams of water are to be enjoyed only within the context of marriage. We shouldn't be surprised by the straightforward language here. We are physical, emotional, and spiritual creatures, and God's Word addresses all aspects of who we are created to be as human beings.

Although this passage describes a young man and an adulteress, it also applies to a young woman and an adulterer. This lesson remains the same: fidelity leads to God-given pleasures and life, but the path of the wicked leads to death (v. 23).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Some people try to interpret Proverbs 5 only spiritually, but that denies that we are created with physical bodies—and what we do with them is very important to God.

Verse 8 gives practical encouragement to avoid the temptation of seduction. This could involve joining another carpool or sitting somewhere else during church. Whatever it takes, flee from adultery! Today's passage makes it clear: adultery kills . . . emotionally and spiritually. Not just the adulterers are affected, but others are as well.

Read: Proverbs 6:1–5

TODAY IN THE WORD



According to a 2002 national survey, the average American household carries

\$9,000 per month in credit card debt. One credit counseling service said that many of its clients have over \$75,000 worth of credit card debt spread over a dozen credit cards. It's no wonder that other polls indicate that one of the leading causes of anxiety for many Americans is concern over their finances.

The specific situation in view in today's passage isn't clear, but it seems to involve one person pledging a security, or guarantee, to a creditor on behalf of another person. Striking hands (v. 1) probably means that the deal was sealed with a handshake or something similar. Pity for another person might have lead to this sort of arrangement (Prov. 17:18). In this case the son seems to be acting unwisely by taking on another person's financial obligations in such a way that his own financial security is jeopardized.

It's important to keep in mind that Proverbs encourages us to give to the poor when we can, so this verse isn't discouraging generosity. But this passage warns us against becoming vulnerable to unlimited liability.

The words *trapped* and *ensnared* found in verse 2 cue the reader that this describes a bad situation. Also verse 3 exhorts quick action to get out of this ill-advised business agreement or venture. In fact, we could translate the word *go*

as "hurry" or "exert yourself." In other words, the required action must occur immediately—there's urgency here (v. 4). What's more, we're told not to allow pride over our poor choice to hinder us from taking action at once. This is saying, "Don't even sleep until this debt is paid."

The message here encourages freedom from unwise business agreements or financial obligations. Regardless of the specific situation represented here, it's imperative to get out of the traps that such indebtedness brings.

Today's passage may seem like a sharp break from yesterday's exhortations against adultery. But underneath both passages lies an important truth: be content with what you have.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Our culture often encourages us to push or even extend limits, especially

when it comes to spending. But Proverbs exhorts us to live within our limits. When it comes to finances, this means distinguishing between what you need and what you can't afford. Make a budget, and keep it! People who live within their budget often have more joy, if only because they aren't worrying about their finances. If you need sound financial counsel from biblical perspective, check out resources on the Internet (for example, www.crown.org).

*Simply let
your 'Yes'
be 'Yes,'
and your 'No,'
No.'*

MATTHEW 5:37



TODAY AT MOODY

Continue to uphold in your prayers today the Custodial Services employees: Jose Rivera, Gabriel Rodriguez, Dennis Sanders, Oakley Smith, and Francis Stewart. May the Lord give them peace and joy in their walk with Him.

*Whatever you
do, whether in
word or deed,
do it all in the
name of the
Lord Jesus.*

COLOSSIANS 3:17



TODAY AT MOODY

In conclusion of our prayers for the Custodial Services department this month, thank the Lord with us for the faithful service of Cathy Sywulka, Brian Taylor, Lang Tran, and John Williams.

Read: Proverbs 6:6–19

TODAY IN THE WORD



There's a funny cartoon about a "typical" workday: 8:00 - arrive and greet coworkers; 8:30 - sit at desk; 9:00 - make a photocopy and visit coworkers along the way; 9:30 - coffee break; 10:00 - return to desk; 10:30 - bathroom break; 11:00 - return to desk; 11:30 - call coworkers to confirm lunch plans; 11:45 - get ready for lunch; noon - leave for lunch. The afternoon schedule looks pretty much the same. Every office seems to have someone well-practiced in this routine.

Such a work ethic would be incomprehensible to an ant. An ant doesn't need an office manager or supervisor to prod it along; it simply does whatever it takes to get the job done. An ant is internally motivated, unconcerned by its annual bonus or who might be watching it. What's more, an ant is a long-range planner. With outside temperatures soaring, it prepares for the upcoming winter months. No wonder then, that the ant is described as the ideal worker.

Not so the sluggard, whose lack of planning leads to sudden poverty. Instead of setting aside money for unexpected needs and expenses, he's spent it all!

From laziness, the focus shifts to corruption (v. 12). The reference to many parts of the body stresses the extent of this corruption. First, the scoundrel has a corrupt mouth, described

elsewhere as deceptive or crooked speech (see Prov. 2). Next, this person somehow uses his eyes, feet, and fingers for wickedness. This could reference some type of magic or secret signals to an accomplice, indicating that this corrupt man is a cheater. In fact, we see that this man's actions spring, unprovoked, from his corrupt heart, which is intent upon creating discord between people. His downward spiral finally leads to death (v. 15).

Today's passage concludes with what is called a numerical proverb. This list has many parallels to the one we just looked at, but here we also see explicitly that such actions are hated by the Lord. That alone is motivation to avoid them! Notice especially that pride and lying are on par with murder. That's something for us to consider.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's teaching applies whether you are currently employed or not, for all of us "work," whether at home, at school, or at a job. Take a minute to identify your own work situation. Now ask yourself if laziness or a tendency to cut corners has crept into your attitude toward work. Then review the list given in Proverbs 6:6–19. If you find room for improvement in any of these areas, thank the Lord that His Word prompts correction before it's too late.

Read: Proverbs 6:20–35

TODAY IN THE WORD



It's not uncommon for women to receive jewelry on Valentine's Day. In past generations, women frequently received heart-shaped lockets that contained a small photograph of the beloved. These lockets would be passed along to the next generation.

Like a precious locket, wisdom is a beautiful adornment for anyone—male or female. Unlike jewelry, wisdom guides and watches over its wearer. Once again, this passage begins with the familiar exhortation to heed the parents' teaching. The constant repetition of “keep,” “listen,” “obey,” “pay attention,” and the like underscores the necessity of continually reminding oneself of God's words. These instructions aren't to be read once and then forgotten. These words of life are to be read and reread again.

A very important aspect of wisdom is revealed in this passage. We often think of wisdom in terms of what we should do when we are stuck and uncertain how to proceed. Indeed James 1:5 encourages us, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God . . . and it will be given to him.” But notice that verse 22 of our passage today says we'll be guided and guarded by wisdom as we walk into various situations and even when we sleep.

This is another way of saying that when we treasure God's wisdom in our hearts, it will impact every aspect of our lives.

In fact, wisdom will be like someone speaking to us (v. 22).

This image of guiding wisdom is compared to a lamp, or more specifically a light that illumines the right path when it comes to sexual propriety. Verses 24–29 echo many of the truths presented in Proverbs 5. Once again we see the power of words to entrap and the dire consequences for those who dishonor their marriage vows. Even today, we hear this same idea: “If you play with fire, you'll get burned.” Unlike a hungry person who steals food (yet still must repay), the person who is hungry for another's spouse has no defense. Indeed, this individual will receive shame and wrath.

Clearly, the “locket” of wisdom worn in one's life does much more than look pretty. It protects every aspect of our lives.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The clear teaching of today's passage is to avoid adultery. As noted earlier, the Bible is clear about this, and it vividly portrays the dangers of marital unfaithfulness.

Given the focus of this day on love, let's revisit the idea presented a few days ago in Proverbs 5 (see Feb. 11). Whether or not you are married, pray for the marriages that surround you. The strength or weakness of these relationships affects many people in addition to the spouses. Praise God for His love and trust Him for what's yet to come.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

HEBREWS 13:4



TODAY AT MOODY

This weekend Moody sponsors a Valentine's Marriage Retreat in Schaumburg, Illinois. Please pray for this special time and ask for God's blessing on marriages.

*All other
sins a man
commits are
outside his
body, but he
who sins
sexually sins
against his
own body.*

1 CORINTHIANS 6:18



TODAY AT MOODY

As you go to prayer today, remember the Institute's finances and God's provision of all our needs through friends like you. Also lend your prayer support to Richard Campbell, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, who heads this area of Moody's Operations branch.

Read: Proverbs 7:1–27

TODAY IN THE WORD



Joanie never thought she would have an affair. She was raised in a Christian home and sought to instill a moral foundation in her children. At first, she understood when her husband Ralph worked late; after all, money was tight. But after years of postponed dinners and little adult interaction, she felt lonely. She never thought much about her chats with an unemployed neighbor, but as time went on, she looked forward to talking with him more and more. Before long, their friendship had become an adulterous affair.

Like several previous sections, Proverbs 7 concerns the perils of adultery, but today's passage also includes a vivid story. Like Joanie, this young man in our passage ventured into a very dangerous situation.

The young man displays his lack of judgment by visiting a place where trouble abounds, especially at night. The woman's lack of honorable intentions is clear from her dress and the fact that we only find out later that she's married. What's more, she's coarse and defiant, and has a reputation for playing around. Her comment about peace offerings (v. 14) was likely meant to lure the young man into thinking that she was properly religious. In any event, she flatters him into thinking that he's special (v. 15), and her real motives soon become clear (v. 18). As if to allay his fears, she assures him that her husband is safely

gone. Here we find the content of the smooth words alluded to elsewhere in Proverbs.

The dramatic conclusion shows that, far from a tantalizing evening, this young man is like a senseless animal led to slaughter. He doesn't realize that his actions will cost him his life.

The moral of this story (vv. 24–27) may refer to physical death, although more likely it warns of the emotional and spiritual death that comes from unfaithfulness. People may “get away” with adultery, but only in a limited sense. Proverbs shows us repeatedly that the path of wickedness eats away at one's conscience and causes little parts of one's soul to die. This path is “a highway to the grave” (v. 27).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



This is the fourth extended teaching in Proverbs concerning adultery. Marital fidelity is very important because of God's purposes for marriage and what it teaches about His relationship with us.

If you have committed adultery, God's forgiveness extends even here, although there are still consequences. If you've been hurt by adultery, God can heal the broken-hearted. If you are tempted toward an extramarital affair, keep in mind verse 27—adultery always destroys, if not physically, then for sure spiritually.

Read: Proverbs 8:1–21

TODAY IN THE WORD



Pike Place Market in Seattle is the oldest continuously operating public market in the United States. For nearly a century, patrons have walked its crowded aisles between hundreds of vendors who hawk their products, crying out for passersby to purchase freshly caught fish or beautiful Washington State tulips. Spreading out over nineteen acres, it's one of Seattle's busiest and most popular locations.

If you substitute wisdom for vendors, you get the image in today's passage. Wisdom is like one calling out in a crowded marketplace, only she doesn't limit herself to just one location. She is found at crossroads and other places where people congregate (v. 3). Her invitation goes to both the simple and foolish. The first group is open to instruction, but also open to destruction. They are inexperienced and uninformed and could head either way. The second group willfully chooses to be ignorant by rejecting wisdom. The phrasing of verse 1 suggests that although Wisdom calls out, few people are listening.

Although Wisdom can be found in the most down-to-earth places, her character is completely godly. Notice how her words are described: worthy, right, true, just, and faultless (vv. 6–9). What a contrast to the smooth, dripping deception that we have seen on the lips of the seductress! No wonder Wisdom

is more valuable than precious metals and gems (cf. Prov. 3:13–15).

The second part of today's passage begins another praise song for Wisdom. As we read along, we're meant to be inspired by Wisdom. She dwells with prudence, meaning that she is shrewd and resourceful. Wisdom not only knows what to do, she knows the best way to do it. Her knowledge and discretion show that fearing the Lord also means hating all that He opposes, every form of evil.

In addition to her character, we find that she impacts even the powerful. Those who love her find honor and success. Unlike the seductress whose path leads to death, Wisdom's path is righteousness and justice. As we'll see more clearly tomorrow, this praise actually presents a picture of Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The marketplace image here emphasizes a key point: wisdom reveals itself in everyday circumstances. We don't need to remove ourselves from the pressures and complexities of life to try to find God's wisdom. Instead, we find that as we encounter various stretching situations and seek the Lord in the midst of them, the truth in His Word becomes more real and applicable to us. The question, "Does not wisdom call out?" (v. 1) confirms this idea—wisdom is continually available to us, if we will only pay attention to it.

Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

COLOSSIANS 2:2-3



TODAY AT MOODY

Through our Media ministry, MBI shares the good news of Christ's resurrection with thousands of people every day. Dr. Larry Mercer oversees the work of our Media branch, a service for which he needs wisdom daily. Please include him in your prayers.

*For by him
all things
were created:
things in
heaven and
on earth,
visible and
invisible.*

COLOSSIANS 1:16



TODAY AT MOODY

Today marks the beginning of Share 2004 for our Moody Radio stations in Florida—WKES and WRMB. Bring to God in prayer this important time of fund-raising for these stations, and if you live in Florida, you can bless your Christian station with your support!

Read: Proverbs 8:22–36

TODAY IN THE WORD



Someone once said that the only way to make ourselves big is to minimize God.

The minute that we focus on God's splendor and magnificence, however, we realize just how tiny we really are. The second half of Proverbs 8 helps us regain this proper perspective.

Recall that yesterday we saw Wisdom as a woman calling out in crowded city places to those passing by. Rising up from this clatter is a beautiful song in praise of Wisdom that began in Proverbs 8:12 and concludes in today's passage.

As we read this passage, it becomes clear that it differs greatly from other passages that we've read. This beautiful poetry describes the unique relationship that Wisdom has with the Lord. We see that Wisdom has always been with God, from "before the world began" (v. 23). To use another term, we could say that Wisdom is pre-existent, which helps to explain the vast extent and depth of her knowledge and counsel. Next, we trace Wisdom's presence at creation, beginning with heaven (v. 27) down to the very foundations of the earth (v. 29). But we also see that Wisdom was not just working alongside God, she was brimming with delight in all that God was doing in "his whole world" and in humanity (v. 31). Although the text doesn't say this directly, we can sense God's equal delight in Wisdom.

At the end of this poem,

Wisdom herself addresses the "sons" for the first time, just as the father had done previously. She reminds us that those who eagerly anticipate her arrival will be blessed—they will experience great happiness. Indeed, they will receive life.

This song stirs our souls and fills our imagination with lofty images. But it's also mysterious and makes us ask, "Who is this Woman Wisdom?" Although there has been much debate concerning this point, many believe that Proverbs 8 offers a figurative reference to the person of Christ and His role at creation. As we said before, Wisdom personified makes it easier for us to understand eternal qualities about God, just as we can "see" God through the incarnation of our Lord Jesus.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



In the Old Testament, especially in wisdom literature, earthly life is often

emphasized and the Lord is sometimes concealed. But in the New Testament, heavenly life is frequently emphasized and our Lord is revealed.

You can see by reading through Colossians 1:15–17 today and making a list of the parallels between this New Testament passage and Proverbs 8. For example, Proverbs 8:35 says, "For whoever finds me [wisdom] finds life." Now compare this with 1 John 5:12.

Read: Proverbs 9:1–18

TODAY IN THE WORD



Imagine finding a beautiful, gold-embossed envelope in your mail. Upon opening it, you learn that you've been invited to a prestigious dinner at the White House along with leaders from around the world. You begin to imagine the beautifully set tables with fine linen and fresh flowers and wonder what culinary specialties you'll be enjoying. It's an honor of a lifetime!

Proverbs 9 concludes the introduction to the book of Proverbs. We see again the emphasis that wisdom leads to life and foolishness leads to death. This chapter urges a decision—it presents two banquet invitations and asks us to consider which one we'll accept.

We begin with something like an invitation to the Ritz (vv. 1–6). Not surprisingly, the gracious hostess is Wisdom, who has built a house for this banquet. Nothing is overlooked, from expensive meat to carefully prepared wine. She sends her own servants personally to deliver her invitations. Her honored guests are those who lack judgment, the very ones who need wisdom. The only condition for accepting this invitation is to leave foolish ways behind.

Next we receive an invitation for dinner at the equivalent of a garbage dump (vv. 13–18). Our deceptive hostess has a loud mouth and knows no shame. Nothing is said about Folly building her house. Folly hangs out in her doorway, call-

ing out. This reminds us of a prostitute who seeks to lure passersby from the straight path. In verse 16 she utters the exact same invitation as Wisdom in verse 4. This cautions us that lies can initially sound like the truth. Notice also that Folly has even stolen the meal that she offers! Wisdom works hard to prepare for her guests, but Folly is lazy. What's worse, Folly's place isn't really a house—it's a morgue. Her guests end up dead.

In between these banquets, we find an exhortation to decide which one we'll attend (vv. 7–12). The outcome of either choice is then illustrated. A “mockery,” or wicked person, rejects correction and wisdom. These are the people who accept Folly's invitation. The wise, on the other hand, are teachable and desire correction. These are the people who end up at Wisdom's fine table.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's passage shows us that both wisdom and foolishness call out to us.

As we compare what each offers, we might wonder who would ever reject wisdom's invitation.

To answer this, consider qualities of those who accept Wisdom's invitation. First, they are willing to leave their foolish ways behind, including refusing to forgive or receive forgiveness, an insistence on being right, or persistence in some destructive habit. Second, they receive instruction, input, and even rebukes from others. Finally, they fear the Lord.

Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!

REVELATION 19:9



TODAY AT MOODY

Dr. Charles Dyer, Senior Vice President of Education, requests your prayer support for our teaching young people the unchanging Word of God, grounding them in His truth, and building them up in “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

*The tongue is
a small part
of the body,
but it makes
great boasts.
What a great
forest is set
on fire by a
small spark.*

JAMES 3:5



TODAY AT MOODY

The staff of the Enrollment Management/Academic Records department follows the progress of our students throughout their study at MBI. Give special thanks to God for the dedicated service of Margaret Creech, Susan Ewing, Leonor Gemoto, Yvette Ibrahim, and David Lee.

Read: Proverbs 10:1–32

TODAY IN THE WORD



“A man who will trim the facts for you will trim them as easily against you; and a career or a life may hang on a word,” wrote Bible scholar Derek Kidner. This insight could have come straight from Proverbs, which has much to say about the power of speech.

Unlike Proverbs 1–9, the large middle section of the book from Proverbs 10:1–22:16, “The Proverbs of Solomon,” has no obvious structure. Instead, short sayings jump quickly between various topics.

Proverbs 1–9 helps us detect larger themes that run through this part of Proverbs.

Recall that Proverbs 1–9 contrasts the path of wisdom that leads to life and the path of foolishness that leads to death. Vivid metaphors and stories taught us how to recognize these two ways, those who travel on them, and where they ultimately lead. In Proverbs 10:1–22:16, we again find the wise and the foolish starkly contrasted. For example, we see that the Lord rewards the wise, but the foolish are punished; the wise receive abundance from God, but the foolish are poor; the wise receive honor, but the foolish receive shame; and the wise are diligent, but the foolish are lazy. Keep in mind that Proverbs often presents issues from a this-side-of-heaven perspective, whereas the New Testament complements this with an eternal perspective. This helps us understand that some

rewards and vindication won’t be seen until we’re with the Lord.

One of the most important themes running through this section of Proverbs concerns the power of language. Speech reveals what’s truly going on in a person’s heart. For example, verse 13 says that wisdom is on the lips of the discerning. In others words, if a person has been seeking knowledge and discernment, then the words he or she utters will reflect this.

Conversely, a fool’s speech reveals perversity (v. 32). Fools utter words of destruction (v. 18), but the words of the wise are precious (v. 20). In short, the words of the wise bring forth life (v. 21), and the words of the fool lead to ruin (v. 14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The impact of speech is powerful: the wise person’s words promote well-being and order, but a fool’s words sow discord and chaos.

Review today’s passage, focusing on the impact of the wise person’s speech and the fool’s speech. Now consider how you might incorporate more of the wise person’s speech. How can your words be a fountain of life (v. 13), or nourish many (v. 21)? Pray that the Lord will show you how to speak what is “fitting” (v. 32). If you have time, read through Proverbs 11–13 for more examples.

Read: Proverbs 14:1–15:33

TODAY IN THE WORD



The life and death of Todd Beamer has been an inspiration to millions. When terrorists hijacked American Airlines flight 93 and planned to crash it in Washington, D.C., Todd and several other hostages forced the plane to crash in a deserted field before its mission could be completed. Who knows how many lives were spared because of their courage?

Sometimes we look at acts of heroism such as this and somehow think that they are extreme or isolated events. But as people who knew Todd reflected on his life, it became apparent that his actions were entirely consistent with his overall character—he died the way that he had lived his life. The choice that Todd Beamer made on September 11, 2001, flowed naturally from thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of choices that he had made previously in his life.

One of the themes through Proverbs is this idea that our character is reflected and shaped by the choices that we make. Yesterday we looked at choices regarding speech, and today's passage continues this theme. Let's take a step back and try to form a composite sketch of the wise person's character and contrast it with the fool's character. As we'll see, nearly every verse in today's passage shows the profound difference between the wise person and the fool.

The wise fear God, and thus they flourish and enjoy

health and joy. They are careful, thoughtful, and even-tempered. Their actions build up others and they are kind toward the needy. They work hard and prosper, and are a delight to their family.

Now consider the foolish. They despise God and experience His reproof. They are impulsive, impatient, and quick-tempered. Their actions tear down others and they oppress the poor. They are lazy and bring shame upon their families. What a difference!

As we mentioned before, sometimes Proverbs can seem overly simplistic. But these short proverbs were like pegs that parents gave to their kids on which to hang the lessons of life. They were meant to describe character traits in black and white in order to make an impression on their children.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



One's true character is revealed in actions and speech.

Yesterday we focused on the impact of our words, but today's passage pushes us to consider how both our speech and actions reveal our character.

Consider Proverbs 15:18. Now think of a recent family quarrel or a dispute in the office. Were you the hot-tempered one who incited the situation, or were you the patient one who brought calm? The choices that we make in these situations ultimately form our character in a particular direction.

For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

LUKE 6:45



TODAY AT MOODY

Today, as you pray, please also remember these Enrollment Management employees: Melanie Monteclaro, George Mosher, Brian Talbot, Bethanne Tremper, and Timothy Wiegert. We value all the efforts and time they give to serve our students' education.

*Fear the Lord
your God...
walk in all his
ways... love
him... serve
the Lord your
God.*

DEUTERONOMY 10:12



TODAY AT MOODY

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” This verse from Psalm 119 underscores the commitment in teaching the Word at our Undergraduate School where Dr. Thomas Cornman is Vice President. Today, pray for him and his staff.

Read: Proverbs 16:1–33

TODAY IN THE WORD



In their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, authors George Lakoff and Mark

Johnson write, “The essence of metaphors is understanding . . . one thing in terms of another.” For instance, we use “up” to talk about positive things, as in “Things are looking up!,” and “down” to refer to negative things, as in “They’re down on their luck.”

Proverbs is rich in metaphors. The picture of a path to describe one’s life is a metaphor that occurs repeatedly. The path metaphor refers to the entire conduct of a person’s life, all the choices that make up a person’s character. We’ve already seen this in the description of wisdom as the path to life and foolishness as the path to death.

At one level, this path is determined by choices that are either right or wrong. In Proverbs, the right path always begins with the fear of the Lord, which enables a person to avoid evil (v. 6). Those who reject the Lord not only walk the path leading to destruction, but they also take others down with them (v. 29).

But the path of wisdom goes beyond “right” or “wrong.” Consider the following scenario. You’ve been asked to coordinate a new outreach ministry. You love evangelism and want to see your church grow, so how could saying “yes” ever be wrong? Well, perhaps you have several small children, or you have

elderly parents who need daily care . . . and you’re already in the choir. Given this, the wisest choice might be to decline the offer at this time. It wouldn’t have been “wrong” in a sinful sense to have accepted it, but you probably wouldn’t have flourished in it in addition to your other responsibilities during this season of your life. The way of wisdom considers all of life in such a way that brings abundant life. The end of this way is a life that pleases God and benefits people—it is a life that brings life to others.

This abundant way of wisdom is expressed in verse 20 and 22: “Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers. . . . Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



As today’s verse shows, the path metaphor is found throughout

Scripture. Jesus Himself applies this metaphor when He says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The key is to commit everything to the Lord (Prov. 16:3). Are there decisions that you are facing that require the kind of wisdom that leads to fullness of life? Then ask the Lord to reveal clearly all the factors involved, pray, and seek out the counsel of wise individuals.

Read: Proverbs 19:1–20:50

TODAY IN THE WORD



The traditional family has come under attack in recent history. Some

Communist regimes even separated young children from their families, claiming that the state was better able to raise them. Even today some argue that the family is obsolete.

Instructions about the family run throughout Proverbs, but we're focusing on Proverbs 19–20 today. We've already seen the importance of the family in Proverbs 1–9, even though the topic wasn't addressed as directly as it is in later chapters. In the introductory chapters we saw the example of children receiving instruction from their parents about the nature of life and how to succeed in it. Proverbs 19:27 reminds us how important this is. Proverbs also shows that discipline is essential for the formation of a child's character. Parents who discipline their children actually give them hope (v. 18).

Proverbs doesn't present a picture of discipline that's harsh, but rather it is redemptive and instructive. In fact, Hebrews 12:8 says that if we didn't receive God's discipline, we wouldn't really be God's children. The author of Hebrews links discipline with God's love and quotes Proverbs 3:11–12.

The impact of parents on their children goes beyond their words. In Proverbs 20:7 we see that the blameless character of a parent is a lifelong blessing to a

child. Obviously how we live is just as important as what we say. Later, in verse 11, we see that a child's developing character is revealed by actions.

We've also seen the importance of family in the repeated warnings about adultery throughout Proverbs 1–9. Not only does adultery adversely affect marriage partners, but it also brings grief upon an entire family. Because the family is so important, it must be protected and nurtured.

Family members are expected to honor and take care of each other. That's why a child who fails to show this respect is shameful (Prov. 19:26) and can bring ruin to a parent (19:13). The path to wisdom brings abundant life and order, but argumentative family members bring constant irritation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Most parents want to give the very best to their children.

Proverbs suggests that the best legacy that we can give to our children is the kind of life we live (Prov. 20:7). Our godly character is the most precious gift that we can give.

If you have children, you may naturally think about the kind of character that you want them to have. But Proverbs encourages you to think just as much about your own character. Even without children, your good character is the best legacy you can leave to those around you.

*Our fathers
disciplined us
for a little
while as they
thought best;
but God disci-
plines us for
our good that
we may share
in his holiness.*

HEBREWS 12:10



TODAY AT MOODY

Our Training department helps our employees learn and grow personally and professionally in their workplace through Employee University and various seminars. We are grateful for the service of the Department Manager, Keith Hadley, and ask you to support his ministry in prayer.

*It is I who
made the
earth and
created man-
kind upon it.*

ISAIAH 45:12



TODAY AT MOODY

Edward Cannon, Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer, lends his leadership skills to all departments with knowledge, professionalism, and dedication. We are thankful that the Lord led him to MBI and ask for strength and wisdom in accomplishing his work.

Read: Proverbs 20:22–21:3

TODAY IN THE WORD



The story is told about a revengeful man who was recently arrested.

This man had been rejected by a graduate school several years earlier. He blamed a professor, and for the next few years, he called him about ten times a night—always during the middle of the night.

This account shows how we often take revenge for ourselves rather than trust God to bring about justice. One of the major themes in Proverbs is the Lord's sovereignty. And letting the Lord avenge is where many people have a hard time trusting God. Whether through human courts or His own final courtroom, the final say belongs to God, for He hates injustice and dishonesty (v. 23).

Even though we make choices for which we're responsible, our steps are ultimately directed by the Lord. Perhaps that's why this section contains proverbs about the king—reminding us that even powerful people are under the Lord's sovereign control.

The depth of the human heart (including our own) is hard to know. That's the point of verse 24. Only the Lord truly knows hearts (v. 27). We can conceal things from others, but we can't conceal them from God. The lamp of the Lord may refer to God's Word and His Spirit working to show us who we really are and who God is. Some reject this idea of the Lord's sovereign leading

because they feel it limits individual freedom. Proverbs indicates that both our choices and God's direction are at work in our lives. We can be grateful for God's gracious intervention that protects us from wrong, such as rash promises (v. 25).

In Proverbs we see a picture of the ideal king, who reveals God's intention for human government. Notice that a wise ruler acts justly (v. 26). Like chaff, law-breakers are separated from those who keep the law. But even a powerful ruler is still under the sovereign control of the Lord (21:1). Indeed, for all humans, only the Lord can truly see the motives of the heart (v. 2). In the end, the two key qualities of love and faithfulness (see Feb. 5) are what matter to the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Some things in God's Word are beyond comprehension. That doesn't mean that we don't wrestle with the reality of human freedom and the complete sovereignty of the Lord. But it does mean that, at a certain level, we just have to accept that these two truths hold together.

The tension between these truths can comfort us, however. We do our best to discern a course of action, through prayer, God's Word, and wise counsel. Then we trust that God will direct our plans, and we step out in faith.

Read: Proverbs 22:17–24:22

TODAY IN THE WORD



One of the first things that a newly elected president does is to choose a cabinet. Political pundits pay close attention to these choices because they know that the president's "inner circle" can have a profound impact on policy decisions. In fact, when important presidential decisions are analyzed, often the focus is as much on the advisers as it is upon the president.

Today we begin looking at a new section in Proverbs, "Sayings of the Wise." In the previous section, topics were often mixed together with no apparent order, although we observed several repeated themes. In today's section we see instruction from one individual.

In the ancient world, words of wisdom were highly prized. In 1 Kings 4:29–34 we read that Solomon's wisdom was world-famous. But the Israelites who carefully preserved Solomon's words also appreciated foreign wisdom writings. Many scholars believe that today's passage reflects an Egyptian wisdom tradition that was adapted for life in Israel and belief in the one Lord God. This shows us that wisdom, because it reflects God's truth, transcends cultures. This may be why some missionaries have found Proverbs to be a helpful bridge for the gospel.

Today's passage opens with a familiar exhortation, the necessity of applying wisdom to one's life (22:17). As we have noted before, this repeated com-

mand to pay attention shows us that cultivating a wise life takes effort—it won't "just happen." In this section, in addition to familiar themes, some important new ideas are introduced.

Proverbs 23:1–8 warns us about the dangers of aspiring after the rich and famous by revealing the true nature of those preoccupied with wealth. The one who lusts after this lifestyle ends up in a very precarious place! This section also has much to say about the poor. Although they are vulnerable, they must not be exploited or crushed, for the Lord Himself defends their case (22:22–23; 23:10–11).

Finally, this section contains an important passage on the effects of alcohol (23:29–35). Anyone who has seen the effects of alcohol abuse knows first hand the sad picture presented here.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Our culture puts a great deal of emphasis on material wealth. Houses and cars get bigger and bigger!

Now there's nothing necessarily wrong with wealth. In fact, the Lord works through many wealthy Christians to support ministries and churches. But if you're not wealthy, it can be easy to long for the apparent freedom that money promises. Proverbs 23:4 is very helpful. If wealth comes, fine, but don't kill yourself trying to obtain it! Memorizing Philippians 4:12 can be a helpful antidote to the temptations toward materialism.

*Know also
that wisdom
is sweet to
your soul; if
you find it,
there is a
future hope
for you, and
your hope will
not be cut off.*

PROVERBS 24:14



TODAY AT MOODY

As Senior Vice President of Operations, Timothy Ostrander has many duties and decisions facing him every day. He will appreciate your prayer support for wisdom in carrying out his responsibilities at Moody.

*Do not fret
because of
evil men or
be envious
of those who
do wrong; for
like the grass
they will
soon wither.*

PSALM 37:1-2



TODAY AT MOODY

Moody Aviation Flight Instructors train missionary pilots to bring the “living water” of Christ’s love to dark places across the planet. Lift up in prayer this noble mission of instructors: Jay Bigley, James Bostrom, James Conrad, and Steven Persenaire.

Read: Proverbs 26:1-28

TODAY IN THE WORD



A few years ago, the book *Dealing with Difficult People* became a best-seller.

If today’s passage were a book, it would be entitled, *Fools, Sluggards, and Troublemakers: Recognizing Difficult People*.

Recall that Proverbs presents three types of people. The simple are open to instruction, and Proverbs was written for them. The wise receive and apply wisdom. They flourish and are a blessing. The foolish, however, reject God’s wisdom. They deceive and seduce others. In the end, they come to ruin.

Today we see that fools come in many flavors! Before looking at this unsavory crowd, recall the twofold purpose for these sayings. First, they reveal fools’ true nature so that we won’t be ensnared by them. This doesn’t mean that we don’t love and pray for such people, it just means that we’re careful in our dealings with them.

Second, these proverbs caution us to avoid these characteristics in our own lives. Proverbs gives us “black and white” portraits of certain types of individuals to make these traits very clear to us. Within any one of us, both wise and foolish traits vie for control, and we need to be able to distinguish between them.

The first section reviews the nature of fools (vv. 1-12). The rod (v. 3) underscores how fools resist instruction . . . you can’t even beat sense into them. Because a fool is stubborn and

lacks sense, it’s pointless to debate him (vv. 4-5). In fact, to do so will make him think he’s wise! But, in fact, a fool’s “wisdom” is lame and ineffective. Verse 11 graphically shows that fools like being obstinate. Clearly foolishness is a choice, not an IQ level.

When it comes to irresponsibility, the fool’s cousin is the sluggard (vv. 13-16). He invents perils to get out of work so that he can stay in bed (vv. 13-14). Because of his excuses, he can’t see that the problem is really his own laziness.

Another close relative to these two is the troublemaker (vv. 17-28). He meddles in other people’s affairs and stirs up gossip. He says malicious things and then hides behind, “Just kidding!” What a dangerous way to handle relationships!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



It’s easy to read today’s passage and say, “Wow! I know someone like that!”

or “That describes So-and-So perfectly!” But it’s much harder to read these proverbs and ask, “How am I like a fool, a sluggard, or a troublemaker?”

These verses speak about our tendencies to justify our character flaws or rationalize our sin. After all, we can tell ourselves that everyone tells “little white lies.” Each of today’s portraits challenges us to root out these traits from our own lives.

Read: Proverbs 27:1–27

TODAY IN THE WORD



The “how to” industry is big business! Thousands of books are published annually instructing people how to do any number of things, from making money to decorating your home. One topic that frequently comes up in advice columns or magazine articles is how to find meaningful relationships, including how to find friends.

As we’ve seen, Proverbs is much more than a “how to” book, yet it’s not surprising that God’s Word would have much to say about how to find good friends. As we’ll see, the focus in Proverbs is on how to be a true friend.

For one thing, being a good friend means not being boastful (v. 2). No one wants to hear someone go on endlessly about his or her own accomplishments. There’s certainly a place for sharing successes with one’s friends, but there needs to be balance. As a wise old person once said, “A person wrapped up in himself makes a very small package!”

Being a good friend also means being honest. It’s easy to say things that you think people want to hear or things that will make them like you, but Proverbs shows us that honesty between friends, even when it’s painful, is a gift (vv. 5–6). Love that conceals is not really love at all, because who would want a friend to persist in a bad habit or

some area of sin? Verse 14 refers to insincere (loud) words of blessing uttered at the wrong time (early in the morning). This type of insincerity and insensitivity is like a curse. A good friend, however, is like sweet perfume (v. 9). There’s joy in sincere fellowship as well as in honest challenging that helps us mature (v. 17). A good friend is also faithful, available at a moment’s notice to help out (v. 10).

The importance of friendship weaves through Proverbs. We see that a good friend is sincere, faithful, and concerned for others’ welfare.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



If we were to write a “how to” book on friendship based on Proverbs, we might call it *Love, Blessings, and Honesty: Being a True Friend*.

Using a concordance, do a study on friendship in Proverbs. What are other qualities of true friends? What are the blessings of friendship? (See especially Prov. 17:17 and 18:24). Proverbs also talks about things that destroy friendship, such as insensitivity (Prov. 25:17, 20), not knowing when to stop (Prov. 26:18–19), and “fair-weather” friendship (Prov. 14:20; 19:4, 6–7).

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

PROVERBS 27:17



TODAY AT MOODY

Today, please continue to keep in your prayers Moody Aviation Flight Instructors: William Powell, Alvin Rice, Ronald Royce, Travis Schanely, and Matthew Zeigler. Ask for good health, peace of mind, and especially safety in flights.

We have not stopped asking God to fill you with knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom.

COLOSSIANS 1:9



TODAY AT MOODY

Will you also pray for the ministry of our computer specialists under the leadership of Frank Leber, Vice

President of Information Systems? May the Lord help them to deal with the day-to-day challenges of cyberspace.

Read: Proverbs 30:1–33

TODAY IN THE WORD



The English author John Bunyan once said, “In prayer, it is better to have heart without words, than words without heart. Prayer will make a man cease from sin.” The prayer of Agur, recorded in today’s passage, is clearly a prayer that urges us to cease from sin, especially arrogance.

This section begins with a desperate plea for wisdom because of the profound limits of human understanding (vv. 1–4). Humility is crucial for pursuing wisdom and receiving instruction. The response to this plea begins with God’s perfect word and a twofold prayer focusing on honesty and humility. The supplicant wants to be spared from circumstances that would damage his character by enticing him to either arrogance or thievery.

The exhortation against slander (v. 10) precedes four verses describing arrogance and insolence. Each of these mini-portraits is the opposite of godly character. This is followed by an almost comic picture of the leech’s twin daughters (v. 15). Like a blood-sucking leech, greed drains the life from a person. The following four images, however, are anything but funny. They show that a greedy appetite is insatiable and tragic.

The rest of this chapter contains four sets of proverbs, each comparing four things. The number four may indicate the universal nature of the observations. First, we begin

with four things that cause marvel (vv. 18–19). In sharp contrast to the natural way of these wonders is the unnatural way of the adulteress (v. 20). Second, we find four situations that are universally feared (vv. 21–23). Third, we find four things that appear to be weak, but which in reality are remarkable. Ants know how to provide for themselves; conies (small mammals) know how to shelter themselves; locusts know how to organize themselves; and lizards know how to find their way into palaces! The final group of four are those who move with stately dignity (vv. 29–31).

These are natural things that cause wonder or unnatural things that cause horror. The concluding verses suggest that arrogance and evil are unnatural and produce undesirable results.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Although this is the first prayer that we have seen recorded in Proverbs, we have hinted several times previously that prayer and wisdom go hand in hand. In Proverbs, prayer is often assumed. Just as the Holy Spirit leads us into God’s wisdom, so too prayer opens our hearts to receive it.

Agur’s prayer for integrity and humility is essential for our pursuit of wisdom. Without purity of heart, we are unable to perceive truth rightly. Without humility, we are unable to see our need for truth.

Read: Proverbs 31:1–9; 16:11–15

TODAY IN THE WORD



It's seems appropriate during February to consider an event from the life of

George Washington.

In 1789, Gouverneur Morris urged Washington to seek the presidency. In his appeal, Morris wrote: "No constitution is the same on paper and in life. The exercise of authority depends upon personal character. Your cool steady temper is indispensably necessary to give a firm and manly tone to the new government."

This type of personal character is exactly what is urged in the "Sayings of King Lemuel." As we have seen before, the importance of godly leadership is stressed in Proverbs. Although we don't have a monarchy in the United States, we can still apply these profound insights to leadership in general.

If we were to attend management training or a leadership seminar today, we probably wouldn't hear the exhortations found in verses 3 through 7! But these verses depict poor leadership, which abuses power to indulge in personal lusts. Sadly, history brims with political leaders infamous for their sexual exploits. Solomon himself fell prey to this temptation. 1 Kings 11:4 says, "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God." This section also warns against alcohol abuse, and we could extend this warning to any form of substance

abuse. Because leaders need clear thinking, anything that prevents this should be avoided.

The final two verses outline the essence of true leadership. Rather than abuse their power, those in leadership have an obligation to assist the helpless. Today we might call this group "marginalized," or "disenfranchised." These people are without representation in society; it might include the homeless or the mentally incompetent. Leaders are urged to protect these individuals.

Proverbs 16 emphasizes that godly leadership is based on righteousness. Wise leaders value and seek honesty. Elsewhere, Proverbs teaches that when leadership ensures justice and fairness for the poor, stability follows (29:4, 14). Recall from our study on February 23 that the qualities of love and faithfulness keep a leader safe (20:28).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Justice is a concern that runs through the entire Bible, not just Proverbs. In

Proverbs, however, this theme is prevalent, and is often bound up with righteousness, equity, honesty, and integrity. All who seek wisdom will eventually manifest these characteristics. Because of the great responsibilities placed on leaders, these qualities become all the more important. If you have some type of leadership role, pray that these qualities will grow in you. At the same time, pray that those who are in leadership will mature in these areas.

*Speak up
for those
who cannot
speak for
themselves.*

PROVERBS 31:8



TODAY AT MOODY

Lloyd Dodson, Vice President of Human Resources, appreciates the prayers of the Moody family in his work of leading a team of dedicated Christians who serve all MBI employees, faculty, and students.

*Wisdom . . . is
first of all
pure; then
peace-loving,
considerate,
submissive,
full of mercy
and good fruit,
impartial and
sincere.*

JAMES 3:17



TODAY AT MOODY

Concluding our prayer journey, let's bring to the Lord in prayer everything the book of Proverbs taught us this month. Thank the Lord for the power of His truth and for His wisdom that is available to His children today.

Read: Proverbs 31:10-31

TODAY IN THE WORD



An acrostic poem takes a word and uses each letter of that word to begin a

line in the poem. For example, an acrostic poem about God might look like this:

- G – Gracious
- O – One
- D – Deliverer

Proverbs 31:10-31 is an acrostic poem; each line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

For centuries, godly women have aspired to emulate the outstanding woman of virtue described here. And although it's possible that this poem depicts the ideal woman, it's also likely that this is a final portrait of personified Woman Wisdom whom we met in Proverbs 1-9. Recall from Proverbs 9:1 that Woman Wisdom built her house; today's passage lets us look inside! This beautiful poem also helps summarize some lessons we've learned this month.

We see right away that noble Wisdom is more precious than gems, just as we saw throughout Proverbs, especially 3:13-15. She is trustworthy and brings blessing and goodness to those who embrace her. Recall the praise song for Wisdom's numerous blessings, the most important of which is life itself (see Prov. 3:16-20).

She is diligent and provides for her family. This is like the little ant that puts the slug-gard to shame (Prov. 6:6-8)! Her dealings are far-reaching and profitable, yet she uses her profit to help the poor. As we

saw yesterday, concern for the disadvantaged runs deeply throughout Proverbs. We also see that Wisdom is kind and has a healthy perspective on life (v. 25). Her character reflects strength and dignity. Finally, Wisdom is eager to instruct others. This ties together two important themes in Proverbs: the power of speech and the call to godly leadership.

Like the children and husband in this poem, we too rise up and call wisdom blessed. Interestingly, in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ruth follows Proverbs, offering an example of wisdom lived out! But we also know that the perfect incarnation of wisdom is seen in our Lord Jesus, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



As a way to wrap up our study through Proverbs, why not write your own acrostic poem using the word *wisdom*?

Look back over Proverbs and our studies and find insights into wisdom that particularly spoke to you. Then using the letters in the word *wisdom*, write out your poem, using each letter of the word to begin a line of your poem. Since acrostic poems are a way of remembering a series of teachings, you can use your poem to help you direct your steps along the way of wisdom.

On what basis do Palestinians officially make their claims to the disputed land? And on what basis does Israel officially stake its claim to the land?

The Palestinians and Israelis both use historical and religious arguments to stake their claim to the land. The Palestinians say that they have been in possession of the land since the seventh century A.D., claiming a 1,300-year right of ownership. They also lay claim to Jerusalem and the former Temple Mount because it is the third holiest site in Islam. Israel claims the land as the undisputed, historic homeland for the Jewish people. They also claim a continuous presence in the land, including Jerusalem, since the time of King David, 3,000 years ago. And the most holy site in all Judaism since the time of King David has been the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the site of the temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod the Great.

Why do you think that Muslims and Arab Christians are so opposed to the existence of the State of Israel? Is this just about land or is it something bigger?

It is a much larger issue than simply real estate. One of the doctrines held in common by Arab Christians and Muslims is a doctrine that we call “replacement theology.” That is, they believe that God has replaced the previous monotheistic religious system with theirs. So the Arab Christians believe, for the most part, that God set aside Israel and replaced the Jews with the Christians. The Muslims then believe that God set aside Christianity and replaced it with Islam. By the way, this view has been held by many—but, thankfully, not all—branches of Christianity through the centuries.

The reemergence of Israel—a group supposedly rejected by God—controlling land that these Arabs believe was given to them by God, creates a crisis of faith. Were they wrong about God and His plan? Is God angry with them? Is this an affront to their God that He expects them to rectify? To accept the existence of Israel on this land

requires a change in theology that few Arab Christians or Muslims are willing to make.

America has been a presence in this region for a while now. In your opinion, what is one of its biggest policy mistakes and one of its biggest policy successes?

I believe our biggest policy success was the courageous decision by President Harry Truman to recognize the new State of Israel in 1948. The most consistent ally that the United States has had in the Middle East for the past half century has been Israel.

I believe our biggest policy failure has been our inability to understand the history of the Middle East. America has always been a forward-looking nation, and we are simply not as conscious of history. Our insensitivity to past conflicts—like the Crusades—causes us to make decisions that are misunderstood.

Should Christians be concerned about the plight of Palestinian refugees? Why or why not?

We most certainly should! One of the basic tenets of Christianity is that God cares for the poor and dispossessed—they are the ones to whom Christ ministered most. And if God cared enough for them to send His Son to die on the cross for their sins, how can we have any less of a concern? The refugees have, for the most part, been victims of a conflict over which they have had little personal control.

I do believe, however, that we must distinguish between concern and responsibility. The 1948 War of Independence produced an almost equal number of Jewish and Palestinian refugees. We don’t hear much about the Jewish refugees because the new nation of Israel accepted responsibility for taking them in . . . giving them new homes, new jobs, and helping them start new lives. For whatever reason, the surrounding Arab countries chose not to accept the same level of responsibility. They confined most of the refugees to squalid camps, and as a result the Palestinian refugee problem has continued to fester.

MBI Today

NEWS OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS AT MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

Where does Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida fit into this conflict?

Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida represent a brand of Islamic fundamentalism that takes the Quran's statements about jihad very seriously. They see all forms of Western influence in Islamic countries—from fashion trends to movies and media to social values—as attacks against Islam. Their goal is to eliminate, through armed struggle, all such influence and to create an Islamic society governed by strict adherence to Islamic law. They are opposed to the existence of the State of Israel, but they are also opposed to the pro-Western governments in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

What does Scripture say about the future of the Middle East? What does it say will happen there?

The Bible says much about the future of this part of the world. While trying to avoid being too simplistic, let me share four specific snapshots of what the Bible says about the future of this region.

First, the Bible says that an apparent peace treaty will be implemented for the Middle East. It will be brokered by a leader from Europe, not the United States, and it will seem to provide peace for Israel and her neighbors.

Second, the Bible says that the peace will greatly disturb a group of countries not involved in the process. Those countries—which today are linked by their acceptance of Islamic fundamentalism—will launch a sur-

prise attack against Israel at a time when the Jewish state is unprepared militarily. Heaven will intervene with “acts of God” such as an earthquake, a flood, and volcanic eruptions to destroy the attackers.

Third, the Bible says that Jerusalem will become the eye of the future storm about to break out on the world. The coming leader from Europe will break his agreement and seek to control the entire region. Eventually, he will lead an armed coalition against Israel, pushing toward the city of Jerusalem.

Fourth, the Bible says that Jesus will return to earth to set up His kingdom in this region. His feet will stand once again on the Mount of Olives. True, lasting peace will come to the Middle East only when the Prince of Peace finally arrives.

If you could tell people just one thing about Israel, what would it be?

I would tell them that they need to visit! Americans have preconceived stereotypes about the Middle East that we hold to our harm. Visit the land and get to know some of the people—Jews and Arabs. You will find that your perspective on the Middle East will change dramatically once you experience the land and the people. ■

For more information about the future of the Holy Lands, read *What's Next: God, Israel, and the Future of Iraq* available at your local Christian bookstore.

This Month at MOODY

February 2-7

Founder's Week Conference

Moody Memorial Church
Chicago, Illinois

February 2

MARRIAGE SEMINAR—

Toward a Growing Marriage with Gary Chapman

First Baptist Church
Brandon, Florida

February 13-14

Valentine's Marriage Retreat

Hyatt Regency Woodfield
Schaumburg, Illinois

February 28

MEN'S CONFERENCE—

Walk Worthy

Chagrin Falls, Ohio

February 28

Church Music Workshop (Hand Bells)

MBI Campus, Chicago, Illinois

For More Information on
Seminars and Conferences,
Call 1-800 DL MOODY.

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Moody Trusts and Estate Planning Seminars

UPCOMING SCHEDULE

WKES Area Seminars

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Holiday Inn

2701 E. Fowler Ave.

Tampa, Florida 33612

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church of Orlando

106 E. Church St.

Orlando, Florida 32801

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Holiday Inn Express

6600 S. Tamiami Trail

Sarasota, Florida 34231

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Holiday Inn

3260 U.S. Hwy 98 North

Lakeland, Florida 33805

You Do Have A Will!



You do have a will—whether a will you have prepared yourself or one prepared by the state where you reside at the time of your death. This “will of intestacy” is an attempt by the state to write a will for everyone; it is very inflexible and does not consider the individual needs of your family.

Obviously, you need to have your own will, but how do you get the process started? Moody Bible Institute can help you get organized with their publication, *Will Planning Kit, Because You Care Enough*. The guide explains the will planning process with ten important steps to completing your will. The second portion of the guide includes forms that you can use to prepare for meeting with your attorney. The will planning process will go much better if you are prepared prior to that meeting.

As Christians the Bible encourages us to be good stewards of the resources that God has blessed us with, so preparing a will is an important part of that stewardship. If you want to be a good steward, you can begin by requesting a free copy of Moody's *Will Planning Kit, Because You Care Enough*, by either calling us at 1-800-801-2171 or by checking the box on the attached reader reply panel to request a copy of the *Will Planning Kit*.

