

## Proverbs To Live By

- Turn to Proverbs 1:1

*The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: 2 To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; 4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— 5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, 6 to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.*

*7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:1-7 (ESV)*

- When talking about religion, you often hear two words that are used together in the same conversation or setting, but they mean different things. The words are **orthopraxy** and **orthodoxy**.
- Their meanings are fairly simple: Orthodoxy means “right belief” or “correct doctrine.” Orthopraxy means “right practice” or “correct behavior.”
- Scripture is full of admonitions to demonstrate both correct doctrine and correct practice.
- We should believe right things, and this should adjust our behavior. As Christians, we are saved by grace through faith (our beliefs).
- We are not saved simply because we do correct or good things, BUT (and this is a big BUT) our beliefs should affect our behavior. The validity of our confession should be reflected in our behavior.
- In the verses from Proverbs we just read, verses 2-6 weave orthodoxy and orthopraxy together in this way: wisdom, instruction, and understanding leads to wise dealing, prudence, and discretion in our actions and decisions, and the avoidance of foolishness in our daily lives.
- *The Proverbs aren't true because they work; they work because they are God's truth.*
- I heard a preacher say that the truths in proverbs, both the longer instructional passages, and the short, pithy sayings, describe how God would behave if He became a man and walked this earth. They reflect His character.
- I think we could confidently say they describe how Jesus walked, talked, and dealt with people in His life, even in the years before His public ministry.
- Verse 7 sums it all up nicely: the fear of the Lord is the foundation or gateway into a world of right living. Fools do not fear the Lord (their orthodoxy is off), so they can't believe the right things that lead to correct behavior.
- With that background, I'd like to talk about some proverbs that have been foundational for me in my life.

- Are you like me? Are there little quips or sayings that you repeat at appropriate times? Pearls of wisdom that help in decision-making or that confirm wise decisions?
  - A stitch in time saves nine.
  - All that glitters is not gold.
  - Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.
  - You don't spit into the wind.
- Here's a story that might provide a helpful analogy: Dad taught me to play Euchre back when I was in high school. He enjoyed playing with me and my friends when they came over...especially Donna because she was and is so competitive.
- At first the game was a confusing mess.
  - You play with only half a deck.
  - You have a partner, but you can't talk or strategize together.
  - The suit that is the highest, the trump suit, changes with every deal.
  - Jacks, not Aces, are the highest cards, but only if they are in the trump suit.
- The rules made no sense to me. The orthodoxy of the game was hard to grasp.
- But after a while I started to catch on. I was learning to play but not very well. So, strategy became the focus.
- Dad helped me learn to play wisely by introducing a few principles to apply that guided my playing.
- If you don't know the game, it's too complicated to teach in this setting, obviously.
- You'll just have to trust me when I say that these principles, these "Dad Rules" provided a good strategic framework from which to operate. Here are a few:
  - "Play 'em like you got 'em." Play your strongest cards first when you have the lead.
  - When you don't have the lead, play the weakest card possible that still might win the trick. If you can't take the trick dump your lowest card.
  - You can usually count on your partner for one trick in each hand.
- As I said, those key principles really helped me, and they still help me, to be competitive as I play. They provide good gaming orthopraxy, if you will.
- They guide me when, otherwise, it might be hard to know what to do when the pressure is on and my partner is glaring at me from across the table.
- In a similar way the book of Proverbs is a book of key principles for correct practice in life. They are life's "Dad Rules" given to us by our loving heavenly Father.
- Sure, lots of people fumble through life, losing some, winning some, getting in trouble here, getting lucky there.
- This is why the Proverbs are helpful. Every saying in the book of Proverbs is true. Every one of them are from the throne of God and remember...the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

- If we consistently apply the wisdom in these proverbs to the game of life, we can be assured that the outcome will, ultimately, be good.
- I have found that I reference some proverbs on a regular basis more than others. This will be true for everyone who reveres God's word
- Our walks are unique and our stations in life vary. My life is different than yours.
- Would you bear with me as I share my top seven proverbs...the ones I can quote by heart and that I depend on most often?
- My hope is that you might be inspired to read through the book of Proverbs (there are 31 chapters, so you can read the entire book in a month).
- As you do, take note, and even write down, those proverbs that have found a home in your own orthopraxy.
- You'll discover that some quips you have said over the years, if they are true, are probably reflected in more than one proverb.
- Because Proverbs is God's word, you might try to adjust the wording you use to reflect the way it is stated in scripture as you apply them and share them with those you love.
- So here are my top seven. To make it easier to navigate, I'll refer to them in the order they are found in the book. (one disclaimer...I memorized most of these back when I used the New American Standard Bible as my preferred version. I'm quoting them in that version, but the wording is similar in most).
- Get your Bible, your phone, or your tablet ready and let's explore some Proverbs:

1. ***Proverbs 3:3-4 - Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.***

- It's so easy to remember...kindness and honesty in all your dealings will help you to be successful whether you are an accountant, a grandparent, a realtor, a school teacher, a custodian, a nurse, or a pastor.

- As the proverb says, kindness and truth will earn you favor and a good reputation in the sight of people and in the sight of God.

- Jesus, according to John 1:14 was "full of grace and truth." Jesus drew people to Himself. His reputation was stellar. But he was hated by those who had evil motives. Don't let wicked people deter you from being kind and honest.

- Repeat after me: Do not let kindness and truth leave you.

2. ***Proverbs 10:19 - When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.***

- If you talk a lot, you will eventually say something stupid or offensive. It's unavoidable.

- Proverbs 17:28 says "Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise;"

- Back when I was a new Christian, my pastor at the time said he had a word for

me. He recommended I reflect on it, pray about it, and strive to put it into practice (make it my orthopraxy) at all times.

- The word was this: "Be quick to listen, slow to speak and, then again, slow to speak." This is taken directly from James 1:19. I'm grateful for his admonition.

- I needed to hear it because I'd gotten into a foolish habit of spewing off the top of my head whatever came to mind. Much of it was youthful foolishness. It was life-changing advice for me.

- Repeat after me: When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable.

3. ***Proverbs 11:3 - The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.***

- That same pastor quoted the first half of this verse to me at another time in my young Christian life.

- I had gotten in a fender-bender which was not my fault. I took the car for several repair estimates, knowing that the insurance company would pay for the repair at the body shop I chose.

- So, what did I do? Two of the three estimate I got were at high-end facilities that gave pricey estimates. The third shop was just average and had a reputation for doing ok work.

- I told my pastor that I was going with the shop that gave the highest estimate, but I was going to take the check and do the repair myself. I thought I was being shrewd and frugal. I asked him what he thought.

- He said, "The integrity of the upright will guide them," and then he sat quietly, waiting for my response. It pierced me like a knife. Even so, I tried to justify my plans, but the more I blabbered, the more ashamed I felt.

- Was I a man of integrity? If I were paying for the repair myself, would I take my old Ford Granada to the body shop at Mercedes Benz of Lexington, Kentucky for repairs?

- A God-honoring Christian walk demands integrity in all our dealings.

- Repeat after me: The integrity of the upright will guide them.

4. ***Proverbs 11:14 - Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.***

- This one is easy but difficult to apply because our pride can get in the way.

- My father and mother made this real for me as I went through adolescence and young adulthood.

- If I made key decisions on my own, without consulting them or other mature adults, the outcome was not always very positive. By humbling myself and seeking advice from those wiser than me I learned to avoid painful and embarrassing mistakes.

- And, as the Proverb says, going to more than one person for advice provides

perspective that is hard to gain otherwise.

- In my professional career as an educator and school administrator, I discovered that putting many heads together was an efficient way to plan and problem solve. At Millersport Elementary we had a big banner on the wall that said “None of us is as smart as all of us.”

- People are smart in different ways. By tapping into the strengths of others we can gain insight and learn wisdom.

- Repeat after me: In an abundance of counselors there is victory.

5. ***Proverbs 15:16 - Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.***

- This is one that I don't quote exactly as it is written. My boys, when we are discussing a major purchase they are considering, can expect me to remind them that “The more you own, the more troubles you have.”

- Look, it's not wrong to own things. But the bottom-line truth is that everything requires maintenance, some things require insurance, many things require payments, and most things break when it's the least convenient.

- There is a reason why Jesus, apparently, owned nothing.

- At a minimum, by considering the truth in this proverb, at least it will help you to guard against impulse buying. Stop and consider “Is the benefit of owning this thing worth the complications it might add to my life?”

- So, to avoid trouble, own as little as possible. If you don't mind the trouble, go ahead and buy that camper. And get a new toolbox while you're at it because you're going to need it.

- And remember to fear the Lord, as the Proverb says, because everything that happens to your new camper is under His sovereign control!

- *Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.*

- Repeat the simplified version after me: The more you own, the more troubles you will have.

6. ***Proverbs 18:17 - The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him.***

- The way I've memorized this is “One man's story sounds right until another steps up to challenge him.”

- Ok, I'm talking about myself a lot, but allow me a little more foolishness, as the Apostle Paul said when listing his credentials.

- I've got a doctoral degree in Leadership from Andrews University. I studied Leadership theories for 4 years. I read dozens of research journal articles and wrote papers about leadership topics.

- This is one example where the orthodoxy I learned about leadership didn't

emphasize enough the orthopraxy reflected in this proverb.

- I've determined that, based on my experience, this is leadership principle number one. It should also be number two and number three.

- The biggest, most destructive, and most embarrassing leadership decisions I've made and witnessed in my life were because this pearl of wisdom was ignored.

- There is ALWAYS another side to every story. If you react before you examine all sides, you are setting yourself up for a fall.

- Proverbs 25:2 says "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter."

- If you lead anyone as a parent, grandparent, coach, employer, politician... whatever, you will do yourself a great favor if you always determine to seek out every side to a story before making a decision.

- This principle can be applied to so many other areas as well...political beliefs, marital and family relationships, even things advertised on TV or social media.

- Political ads usually tell only part of a story in order to villainize an opponent.

- Repeat after me: One man's story sounds right until another steps up to challenge him.

7. ***Proverbs 27:17 – As iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.***

- In order for iron to sharpen iron, the iron pieces must be rubbed together causing friction and heat.

- In my career as a schoolteacher, and especially as an administrator, I frequently had to remind myself and others that where there are people, there are problems. There will be disagreements and conflict. It's inevitable.

- Don't despair. God reminds us in this proverb that problems are opportunities to grow and become wise.

- We sing "Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come..." If we were honest, most of those dangers, toils, and snares involve other people, many of whom we love, and most of whom resisted us in some kind of conflict at one time or another.

- It's how we learn to truly love and respect each other; by encountering problems and working through them with the best interests of others in mind.

- And remember my examples above where my pastor proactively confronted me in order to help me grow.

- Repeat after me: As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

- There are many other proverbs we could examine and discuss. Here are some honorable mentions:

- ***Proverbs 13:20 - He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.***
  - ***Proverbs 15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.***
  - ***Proverbs 15:3 - The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.***
  - ***Proverbs 16:28 (NIV) - A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.***
  - ***Proverbs 20:22 - Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.***
  - ***Proverbs 22:29 - Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men.***
  - ***Proverbs 27:1 - Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.***
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- In conclusion, perhaps you've heard the expression "All truth is God's truth." While this is accurate in principle, it might mask why things are true in the first place.
  - It's not like truth exists on its own, floating around in space until we discover it and apply it to our lives.
  - As I said earlier: The Proverbs aren't true because they work; they work because they are true...they are God's truth. Things are true because God designed them that way.
  - Turn to Proverbs 8. In this chapter, wisdom, truth, understanding, and prudence are personified. Wisdom speaks for herself. If I could give an assignment for this coming week, I'd have you read and reflect on Proverbs 8 as wisdom explains that she was there, at God's side, when God created the heavens and the earth.
  - For now, let's close with the last 5 verses of Chapter 8:32-36:
    - ***"And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. 33 Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. 34 Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. 35 For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, 36 but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death."***
  - Close with prayer.