

<b>Series:</b> The Book of Proverbs	<b>Reference:</b> Proverbs 3:1-2; 30:7-9	<b>Title:</b> A Well Ordered Life	<b>Date:</b> 01.08.23
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings primarily from King Solomon. This 7 week series we begin today looks at wisdom & themes within it, considering practical areas where God's wisdom can shape & change how we live. We'll see that a well-ordered life brings contentment. The question today is, what are our life priorities? And a followup question may be, if someone took inventory of our lives, would they be too crowded for Jesus?			

### Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings, primarily from King Solomon. For 7 weeks we'll be looking at themes within it; at areas where God's wisdom can shape & change how we live. We'll notice, a well-ordered life brings contentment. The question today is, what are the priorities of our lives? If someone took inventory of our lives, would they find them too crowded for Jesus?

*Proverbs 3:1-2 says...My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, <sup>2</sup>for they will prolong your life many years & bring you peace & prosperity.*

Keeping God's commands stored up in your heart takes time & intentionality. Time spent in the Word. Reading. Meditating. Memorizing. Praying. But there's payoff...

**Firstly, we gain a prolonged life.** Immersion in the Word promotes overall health & better choices lowering unnecessary risk. A life immersed in God's Word diminishes wrongful desires, addictions & unhealthy destructive behavior.

For instance, the Brookings Institution identified 3 ways to avoid poverty...1. Graduate high school. 2. Don't have children outside of marriage. 3. Get a full-time job. Three themes emerging from a Christian ethic as defined by Scripture.

We're called in scripture to grow in knowledge, work hard, and reserve sex for a lifelong union with a spouse of the opposite sex. And we know, multiple sexual partners brings a risk of disease, unnecessary stress & heartache. Saving yourself for marriage, as it turns out, isn't antiquated thinking, it's good advice, since those who do so & stay married are happier in the long run - despite all our jokes about marriage. Study's show people of strong practicing faith who make better choices are significantly more well-rounded & happier overall, especially in a marriage marked with faith & fidelity.

Research shows, of American adults who follow these three simple rules, only about 2 percent are in poverty & nearly 75 percent have joined the middle class, earning \$55k, or more per year. There are other influences at play, but following them guides us away from poverty & toward the middle class or better.

Today, more than 40% of American children, including more than 70% of black children & 50% of Hispanic children, are born outside marriage. Combined with the high divorce rate, this means half of children will spend part or all of their childhood in a single-parent family. As hard as single parents try to give kids a healthy home environment, children in female-headed families are four times as likely to live in poverty which is associated with a wide range of negative outcomes in children, including school dropout & out-of-wedlock births.

Interestingly, The marriage culture seems to be alive & well for those with a college degree. These families usually have enough money to afford good schools & provide a stable family environment which allows children to flourish.<sup>1</sup> This success is due to the communal family life with strong values & work ethic; one which supports & fosters further good decisions. The problem we face now is that society has all but obliterated the discussion of personal responsibility, demanding that all our ills are due to systemic societal problems beyond the individuals control. Whereas scripture always calls us to personal responsibility in choices made.

**Secondly, we gain peace.** Immersed in the Word, we find it harder to live in anxiety, bitterness & fear, developing a greater resilience than others. Christians have, not only a solid greater purpose now, but also for the future bringing a more positive outlook. Our simple theological belief of a savior who makes us new in this moment & will return to renew all things as it was intended to be, sustains the believer like nothing else can. In the meantime, building a solid life with healthy choices shores up a network of family & friends who care, love & support us along the way.

My family's far from perfect. But, overall it's a blessing to be a part of an immediate & extended family which values these things & has made good choices. Watching my children choose spouses from faith-filled non-divorced families gives me peace. That's not to say that someone can't turn the ship around if they have a broken past, since God's in the redeeming business, but it does say that good choices over time do make it easier!

**And thirdly, it brings prosperity.** When we hear the word prosperity we usually think of great wealth. But that's not what the Scriptures mean. So, it's not to say God will make you rich, rather that you'll be whole, healthy, well-balanced & stable. Rich in friends, family, having abundance, financial stability, etc. Hard work, consistency, good choices & a healthy lifestyle, as it turns out actually do pay off. Scripture directs towards a balanced life, not one of extremes, since it's in the extremes that we get into difficulty.

In Proverbs 30:7-9 for instance, the writer begs the Lord for exactly this in regards to wealth saying...*Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die: <sup>8</sup>Keep falsehood & lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. <sup>9</sup>Otherwise, I may have too much & disown you & say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor & steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/three-simple-rules-poor-teens-should-follow-to-join-the-middle-class/>

Make me honest & give me what I need, no more, no less. It's not sinful to be wealthy or poor, but these extremes do bring about temptations we'd normally not face. Wealth numbs, giving a false sense that we're self-made & self-reliant, that we don't need anything - and the first to go is a reliance on Christ. I've advised my children some basic things about work including that they shouldn't seek riches, but fulfillment in Christ. Simple things things like...Express a right attitude. Stay informed. Respect your boss & coworkers. Evaluate & improve yourself. Come early, stay late. Offer to take on additional work. And don't complain. All arising from a Christian ethic.

My son-in-law explained, that college graduates have taken to getting a job, then immediately searching for another one to get a signing bonus & a slightly larger salary. Doing this over & over in the pursuit of wealth which only fosters distrust & will eventually bring economic collapse. But, this is also partly in response to companies becoming less personal, putting profit over people, treating employees like a commodity rather than a person. Next week we'll look at the story of Abigail Disney, and how, under her grandfathers watch, Disney paid a decent wage enabling a worker to provide for their family, own a home & retire with some security. Something she says has now changed in Disney & other companies.

In excising the Biblical God from society, we devolve into self-centeredness & toward chaos. In our selfishness, when we don't get our way, we quit & never work through issues. It's always someone else's fault, personal responsibility & character are no longer the goal, only personal gain & desire. We truly need to immerse ourselves again in Scripture, allowing God to define our character & choices in relationships & work.

The American Bible Society has released findings in their annual State of the Bible report, highlighting cultural trends regarding spirituality & Scripture engagement. It shows that Americans who consistently read & apply the Bible have greater levels of hope & resilience.

John F. Plake, of the American Bible Society said, "Our research continues to confirm that consistent Bible reading leads to hope & greater flourishing. Christians know that Jesus offers us full life; there's no surprise here. But for those who are questioning their faith or even who need reassurance after a hard season, the data validates that applying the truths of Scripture leads to better health, better relationships, and a higher sense of purpose & meaning - all while bringing us closer to God. To put it simply: the Bible's message is not only spiritually transformative; it also transforms how we experience life on earth. There is restoration & healing in the Word of God, and we urgently need to point our hurting neighbors toward that life-changing truth."

The Bible makes a significant difference in well-being as measured by the Human Flourishing Index. Scripture Engaged people reported levels of flourishing much higher than those who don't read the Bible. This includes Happiness & Life Satisfaction, Mental & Physical Health, Meaning & Purpose, Character & Virtue, as well as Close Social Relationships. In every one of those five areas, the scores of the 'Scripture Engaged'

significantly exceeded those of the ‘Scripture Disengaged’, including financial & material stability. When trauma sufferers are Scripture Engaged, they experience higher levels of well-being than those who have no report of trauma & are not engaging the Bible; trauma still has a serious impact, but Scripture Engagement brings a resilience which promotes Human Flourishing more than trauma hurts it.<sup>2</sup>

Last week we started the new year by saying, new opportunities await those who keep their eyes on Jesus - developing the habit of turning the pages of Scripture to find their place & purpose in the story of God. God’s given us His manual of hope, we’re invited to unpack its message & grow in knowledge.

This idea of hiding God’s Word in our hearts has always been an important theme for ancient Israel & Christians throughout the centuries. In the Shema of Israel, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, it says...*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

We see the importance of immersion in God’s Word, then & now. In ourselves, impressing it on our families, our children & homes, at all times. But...if we take inventory of how we spend our time, what would that reveal?

Right now, Americans on average watch 3 or more hours of TV a day. Social media averages 2.5 hours or more a day & 7 hours a day on the internet! Adding all that up it’s 12.5 hours, add 8 for sleep & we’re already at 20.5 hours with 3.5 hours left in a day! When do we work, let alone immerse ourselves in Scripture!

A young man on Youtube did what he called a Dopamine Detox where he fasted from social media for 6 months. Deleting all social media apps. He was about 15 years old & had grown up in the age of social media - he’d never known life without it. He said he gained two things from this...

**Firstly**, a great sense of gratitude & wellbeing. He said & I quote, “Bruh, I feel awesome!” He gained a sense of gratitude for life he’d never known before, where you just wake up & think life’s beautiful. He said he’s now often overtaken with a deep sense of giddy happiness which makes him teary eyed with joy at times.

**Secondly**, he mentioned the time he gained & what he did with it. He never realized how much time he wasted on social media, and when he gave it up, he suddenly went into a period of personal holistic growth. The things he did now with his time were

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<sup>2</sup> <https://news.americanbible.org/blog/entry/corporate-blog/new-report-finds-human-flourishing-scores-have-risen-to-pre-pandemic-levels>

healthy activities. Learning, working, pursuing physical health, appreciating things at a greater level, etc. He simply couldn't put into words how much this did for him.<sup>3</sup>

If he added a daily time in the Word of God, I think he'd find life even more fulfilling. He'd put a face to all that is good behind the creation he now enjoys more deeply!

We all fight this battle for time, meaning & character. Sadly, many have succumbed, thinking they're taking the easier route, but they're not. Maybe we should listen to Coach Taylor from the TV show *Friday Night Lights*, who wants to win, but wants his players to develop in character even more. **At one point he said...“Every man at some point in his life is gonna lose a battle. He's gonna fight & he's gonna lose. But what makes him a man is that in the midst of the battle, he does not lose himself”**<sup>4</sup> True.

**In *Harry Potter & the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione Granger wants to take more classes than can fit into her schedule.** So she's given permission to use a special, magical device called a Time Turner. It lets her take a class, then go back in time & take another class that was scheduled simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> Some of you're thinking, “That'd be great!”

As neat as it may sound, it reflects the fact we tend to fill our schedules to overload. Then complain there's not enough time in the day to do what we want! Odds are most would like a Time Turner, simply to be able to do more things. Maybe we just need to order our time differently.

**The movie *Yes Day* (directed by Miguel Areta [Netflix, 2021]) focuses on the Torres family, Allison & Carlos, and their three kids. The parents have lost themselves in the busyness of life. They used to be fun! But now they're enslaved to their schedules. Their kids feel it too. After an eye-opening parent/teacher conference, the family decides to have a 'yes day' in which (with some boundaries) the family will say yes to the kids requests. By the end, the parents have found a zest for life again, the kids have more respect for their parental wisdom, and everyone has a better sense of which priorities actually matter.**

**The Bible's book on how to live wisely, is Proverbs. Proverbs 3:1-2 speaks of a long, peaceful life. No one at the end of their life wants to say, “Well, I wasted the time I had.” We yearn for the life this proverb describes. The key to that contentment's found in following God's commands to spend our time wisely, as seen this in Ephesians 5:15-17... “Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.” To understand the Lord's will, means to ingest His**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS6QBarL9UQ>

<sup>4</sup> quoted in Liz Hersey, “Friday Night Lights: Coach Taylor's Most Inspirational Quotes,” *ScreenRant*, May 16, 2019, <https://screenrant.com/friday-night-lights-coach-taylors-10-inspirational-quotes/>

<sup>5</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* [London: Bloomsbury, 1999]

Word breathed out to you in the Scriptures on a consistent basis. Pushing away other voices, allowing God the time to speak into your life, choices & character.

Proverbs 3 reminds us of the importance of remembering & keeping. We remember God's commandments, then act on that remembrance. Keeping God's commandments is a matter of life & death. We might say, "It's too hard!" or "I'm too busy to follow Jesus," but doing that would be like a lifeguard who remembers all the techniques to save someone from drowning, but doesn't act on it when the opportunity presents itself. Remember & keep God's commandments - prolonged life, peace & prosperity will come. You won't necessarily get rich, but it will be better than the alternative.

A well-ordered life can be found in determining right priorities & putting those first. What's most important to you right now? How's that reflected in the ways you spend your time & money? Proverbs 30:7-8 shows us wise understanding when it comes to our possessions & the potential monopoly they can claim on us. *The author asks two things of God: to surround him with truth & to provide only what's needed, with an interesting reason for the second request... "Otherwise, I may have too much & disown you & say, 'Who is the Lord?'"*

When life's filled with our possessions, or a pursuit of material gain, it becomes too crowded for Jesus. We buy large houses to fill with things, fill that one up & do it again. We post our possessions on Instagram with a #blessed & just have to have the newest & latest thing. Where's Jesus in the midst of this kind of life?

Looking again at verse 8... "*give me only my daily bread*" We realize, Jesus is our daily bread. It's in an encounter with the living Jesus in which we get a foretaste of complete contentment. Jesus is all we need. He's more than enough. He's turned our poverty into riches & redeemed our time. In Him, we've found the one thing in life which matters most. Is He your first priority?