

Norman C. Schwab  
Yacolt EV Free  
September 23, 2001

## Proverbs in the Big Picture Proverbs

This past year we have spent a very practical, challenging, sometimes convicting time in the book written by one of the wisest men who ever lived. Inspired by God, Solomon's words of wisdom in practical living were recorded for us to read and follow in the book called Proverbs. I have talked with many of you who have enjoyed reading a Proverb a day, 30 Proverbs on your walk toward the way of wisdom. Some of you have come to me amazed at the different things you see in the Bible even after the 7th, 8th, 9th month of reading through the book of Proverbs. The exciting thing about the Bible is how active, how relevant it is to hit us right where we live. The Bible never changes but..different circumstances in our lives cause us to look at the Bible in different ways

My purpose this morning is for us to look back over the past few months and evaluate what God has been trying to teach us. Where have I been challenged to grow from the study of His Word? What areas am I thinking more wisely now than I was 12 months ago? Where do I still have places that need to grow? Where am I hiding from God's strong but corrective hand? What areas can I look back and celebrate the changes that God has brought in my life. God is in the change business. And most of us who are pursuing God might be discouraged that we are not where we want to be, but pleasantly surprised that we certainly are not where we once were.

I love to get out into God's creation in the outdoors. I enjoy backpacking into the country where you don't see a lot of campers. Hiking through the forests, wading across the creeks, along the steep cliffs. Back and forth up the switch back trails, dark deep plunging valleys....through the thickets where you can only trust the trail is going the right way. Those are all great, but what I enjoy the most is when the trail takes me up to the high mountain ridges. Its a perfect place to stop and rest and also to look back. Look back at the beauty I've just hiked through and see it from a different perspective. For the past few months

we have been hiking through Proverbs, wading across streams, and trudging up difficult sometimes scary pathways. Areas of the trip have challenged us. Sometimes we get discouraged just sit down on that log next to the trail and give up. The trail has exposed some of our struggles, our weaknesses. But it also has encouraged us as we get stronger from the struggle and we see where we have changed and walked away with more spiritual muscle than before we started this journey. And that is my hope this morning. That we see the areas where God has worked to tighten and steel our spiritual muscles and the areas maybe where we still need to work out a bit more. We will look back over the major themes of Proverbs from our high vista point to enjoy and evaluate our trip so far. For that is it. Just our trip so far. We have many other exciting and fascinating trails to walk on in our journey with God. Its all about trust isn't it? So pray with me this morning. (Pray)

Proverbs places its purpose right up front in the first few verses of the book. Right after the authors name in verse two it states the purpose. "To know wisdom and instruction. The whole reason Solomon wrote the book is so that the readers of the book might become wise and instructed in the way of wisdom, the path of living skillfully on this earth. That's wisdom = skillful living. Instruction carries with it the idea of discipline. That is the disciplined path to obtain wisdom. Just reading this book a couple of times through is not going to make you wise. Just sitting through a sermon series in the book of Proverbs is not going to make you wise by itself. It will take discipline to grow and become wise. Just like an Olympic athlete works out hard and trains and beats her body into submission. So the Word of God is a gymnasium, a work out room. Its not Gold's gym. This baby is God's gym and as we work out what our Divine Personal Trainer is prompting us...as we follow His guidance, model and direction..its then we begin to see results and say. Yes I like the character that is starting to show. And people around us are beginning to notice. You sure seem a lot more patience these days...have you been working out in God's gym? You sure seem a lot better able to handle your anger lately. Have you been working out in God's gym? People have begun to notice that we are not near as bitter as we once were. People have notice we are able to handle conflict a lot better. People begin to notice that we are managing our money with greater skill. We

are balancing our time more effectively. We seem to be more compassionate to those who are poor or without much of what we have. We seem to carry ourselves with greater confidence but at the same time we have greater humility. The world no longer spins around just our own whims and desires, and we are actually becoming more and more other people focused and yet we feel no bitterness at this change, in fact we are feeling more freedom, more joy, more significance and purpose than we ever have before. We have a greater purpose and drive and desire that seems to be springing from a spiritual source and foundation. Have people noticed you've been working out in God's gym? Maybe you have noticed others growing stronger spiritual muscles, have you told them, encouraged them. Do it. This week write a note to someone you have noticed spiritual strengthening in them.

We are walking down the path of wisdom. Having discovered what a holy privilege it is...as it starts with God. Chapter one verse 7 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. As we have right thinking about God. We put Him in proper place as Almighty God of the Universe and at the same time direct Lord and in control of our own life. As we say "yes" to God, as we tune in our spiritual antenna's to hear his direction. As we "Fear" God more than all the other fears in our life...we are then motivated to obedience and actually daring to live out the truth of His word. That's where wisdom, real wisdom begins when we put feet to our facts that we know. When we allow God's way of doing life to control our entire life. When we allow Him to take precedence over everything else that competes for control of our affections, of our will, of our mind, of our emotions. We then discover wisdom from the One who created our hearts, and minds and will and affections and soul.

The book of Proverbs talks about three responses to the way of wisdom. Three people. Actually the fourth in the wise response. There is the naive, those who just don't know the right way to skillful living. They are ignorant of the truth. The problem is that ignorance is not bliss. It can become painfully dangerous and even deadly. For what you don't know can really hurt you because ignorance keeps you from walking the right path, the path of wisdom and life. Proverbs is talking directly to those who simply do not know. For the naive they need to wake up.

The next group Proverbs tends to take a shot or two at are the fools. They are fools not because they have a low IQ. It is not an intelligence problem. The Biblical fool may in fact enjoy a reputation of success in the world. He is a fool not because he doesn't know, but because she has chosen to reject and attempt to do life his own way. The fool leaves God out of his life. "The fool has said in his heart...there is no God." And she lives like it. Independent. The world revolves around me. Proverbs says the fool is wise in his own eyes and thinks he has it all together but is helplessly deluded.

The third kind of person Proverbs addresses is the scoffer or mocker. Arrogant, critical, A rebel against God in every way. Tearing down truth. Ted Turner is the classic scoffer. It seems like one of the most impossible things in the world that Ted Turner would actually open his eyes and understand wisdom and God's truth. Yet.. His wife got it and is now a believer. Maybe you know people in your life that seem like they would be the last persons to ever become spiritually wise. And yet..I've head the stories how God has worked in man of your lives. Messed up going your own way. Cruising along thinking everything was fine. Lacking purpose significance and direction...wondering what this life was all about...and then the Spirit of God came and implanted a desire to seek God. The spirit of God whispered in your ear. "Do it" Seek after God. For Jesus is the way the truth and the life. You did it and now no longer are you naive, or foolish or a scoffer. Now you are beginning to take a hike down the trail of wisdom, following in obedience to your guide and guide book, the Bible.

In our look back over the vista views of Proverbs we see not only the introduction and clear purpose of the book but we also see key, prominent places that put the whole trip making sense. Turn with me in your Bibles to Proverbs 3:5,6 the crown jewel of all Proverbs and probably one of the top ten most memorized verses in the Bible. The wise one who is intent on pursuing God's way, God's wisdom will often take this verse on as a challenge to grow, to encourage and direct their priorities and direction. Follow God and everything else seems to fit into place. Lets read that verse Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart and do not lean on your own understanding, in ALL your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." As I read

that verse I am struck by the radical totality and completeness of the trust I am being called to. Trust in the Lord with...ALL. In ALL your ways acknowledge Him. Most of us shy away from such broad sweeping general statements. Rarely is something ALL..Ways true. There are often exceptions and conditions that apply. We have found this to be so true in our life so that we read on a product 100 Percent guaranteed. We have been burnt several times before so we know that 100 Percent guarantee is only words. What makes that promise or guarantee depends on the company saying it. They have always backed it up in the past, I know they will fulfill their promise. We have all been given certain promises. You will receive ALL of it. But then it didn't turn out to be ALL. There were a couple things that were held back that were originally promised...but you didn't receive them

God calls out a challenge to all believers to trust Him. Not just in 50 percent of the areas of your life. Not trust him in just 60 percent of the time. Not trust him in all the areas except the ones you feel you can handle all on your own. We are challenged to trust him even in the ones where they seem confusing and difficult. Even in the easy and comfortable ones. We are called to trust God in the areas that we think are spiritual and also those areas that don't seem to us to be very spiritual; work, time off, vacation, leisure, friends, family, money, attitudes. God desires to completely invade our thoughts, desires, affections and very will. His radical involvement calls for total and complete trust.

So maybe you are a new believer in Christ and realize you must make a choice, a decision. How serious am I going to take this new faith? This is a question believers of many years must constantly be asking. How much territory am I going to let God invade. How much land am I going to give up and trust Him with? How much am I going to allow my trust, my faith, my belief in God to influence my decisions, choices, actions, words, thoughts?

We who have come to the point of belief will all agree that we are all sinners and that Jesus died for me and saved me from hell. We would all agree that we want to live in such a way that shows how grateful we are for ALL that by walking in the path of wisdom, following his model for us in the Bible. The question we each must answer is...to what extent are

we going to go after God? We know we should all read our Bibles a little more. We know we should all pray a little more. We know we could all probably get more involved at church here. The question is how far ought we take this radical pursuit of God in allowing it to affect my schedule? my priorities? my dreams? my goals? my relationship? even my checkbook.

Proverbs is a book that challenges us in these various areas of our life. Proverbs dares us to be different than the rest of the world. To dare to trust God with ALL and see how he proves himself to bless us and provide beyond belief. Its a dare to trust the Lord with ALL our heart. And heart in the Bible is not referring to a blood pump. Heart is referring to all our will, emotion, mind. Heart in the Bible is used to describe the very core stuff that drives our beliefs and actions.

So why don't we jump in fully? There is nothing more refreshing on a hot summer day, after you've been working hard chopping wood all afternoon. To go down to Moulton Falls and jump in the Lewis River. Now there could be a lot of things stopping you. Mostly the water is flat out cold. When you go down there those who try to dip their toes in and go little by little. Doesn't work. You have to just decide. I'm here. I'm hot. I'm jumping in. And go all the way in. The initial plunge is quite shocking. But then comes the refreshment. It revives your body. Halfway is boring. It doesn't revive. You wonder why you even bothered to go down there. Same thing with faith. Jump all the way in. Take the refreshing plunge into God's revitalizing grace. Proverbs is a call to make you plunge into God practical. It is the way of wisdom that starts out with a step of holy fear into the wide, wide sky blue of his love...trusting...trusting that He will catch you and bring peace and freedom into your life.

Have you taken that plunge. Perhaps today is the day where your faith in Christ begins to get fun. Beyond what you know in your head you decide to start living it out. This verse is a challenge. I challenge you to go all out for God, test him. I know it sounds pompous to think you can test God..but if at anytime God proves himself to be unworthy of trust then you can bail out at anytime, you can walk away. But until then don't go halfway. Give God the opportunity to lead and guide your life. He knows how small your trust is and wants to grow it, to prove Himself strong to you. Its not a one time decision in a church. Its a series

of daily decisions to go for God fully. There can be a myriad of reasons why God has set you up for such a time as now. Maybe he opened your eyes to others you have so messed up their lives you don't want to go there. We certainly can learn from others mistakes. Maybe it was you who was the one doing the screwed up stuff. Maybe you realize you haven't been walking in God's way of wisdom and you need to get on track. I certainly have a file called "Very stupid choices" And I am ashamed of whats in there. The people I've hurt, the things I've said, the things I've thought and done and the consequences because of them. When I step away from following God I sin and sin is stupid. I don't feel that peace and freedom. I always look back and wish that I had chosen God's way and trusted Him. I also look back and see the times in my life where I dared to trust him. Sometimes when it didn't' even make a bit of financial sense, career sense, security sense. Yet, when I dared to trust Gods way in the various intersections of life...I have always, without exception..in the end so glad that I had chosen God's right way. Which turns out always to be the wise way.

So as we glance back on the terrain of Proverbs what areas do you need to trust God with all your heart? What areas are you leaning on your own understanding? What areas do you need to acknowledge God, bring God into the decision process. Begin thinking spiritually about an area you have never considered to be spiritual before? Where do we need to trust and follow God fully? What are areas of growth you can be encouraged by what areas still need some work?

As we studied through Proverbs the area of relationship kept popping up. Is that an area where you have seen some real growth? Are you loving other better then you did before? Are you forgiving those people that have hurt you badly. Are you letting go of that bitterness that has slid its way into your heart and rendered you numb to spiritual things. Do you find yourself more in control of your tongue, that your speech is more seasons with kindness and grace? Do you find yourself telling the truth and telling it in love at the same time? Proverbs speaks of "Faithful wounds of a friend." and a truthful word as a tree of life."

Do you find yourself a much better friend now then you were 12 months ago? Have you been trusting the Lord with ALL your heart..in ALL your ways have you been acknowledging Him and allowing Him to

guides your priorities? Proverbs talks a lot about money. For the one who trust God completely we must realize we don't own our own stuff, but he owns it all. We step out in trust when we recognize the true ownership of our possessions. How we view money will affect our relationship with God and with others. Money will compete for control in our lives as "no one can serve two masters. As we trust God in that faith-walking area of our lives we will begin to enjoy the contentment and freedom that comes when we recognize the true owner of our possessions and that God has merely made us stewards to take care of His things. That's Gods mower that breaks down. That's God's van that refuses to be fixed. Why God wants his mower and van to be broken down is up to him. But when we realize the things in our possession are actually owned by God, it changes our whole attitude toward stuff. and we walk in the way of wisdom.

How about compassion. Are you going in doing good for others? Even the least of this world? Even develop a heart for the hurting and helpless. Doing good to others is a real "God thing" for when we do good to others and help the helpless we act just like God would act. This is one area where I still have a lot of growth needed here. Just a couple weeks after I preached a sermon on showing compassion I blew my exam. I was up in Seattle with a couple of guys. I had stopped by a fast food place and picked up a couple of burgers fries and a coke before going into the stadium to pay big food prices. I was hungry and in a hurry to get in. On the rush to the stadium I past a man sitting on the sidewalk with a cardboard sign. I rushed right past anxious to see the game and made some short derogatory comment I'm glad I've forgotten what it was. But not 50 feet past that guy with me holding my bag of food, one of the guys said, "Yep...I think I heard a sermon about that last week." God might have well as taken a fist and punched me in the gut. I've thought of that often as God uses all sorts of punches to expose our weaknesses and areas where we need to grow.

So Have you felt a punch or two from God? Is God drawing you to learn from Him and trust Him more fully? So if you a believer in Jesus. Maybe some this morning need to take up the challenge to fully trust God in ALL. Jump in totally and experience the refreshment, the excitement and contentment that God offers as your path is made

smooth. Maybe some this morning are hearing that whisper from God. "I'm for real" This is it..go ahead ...do it take that first step of trust and I will prove myself to be trustworthy. Are you ready to take that plunge of faith this morning. Don't wait until you see changes in your life. The Bible's order is Belief first then seeing. Faith comes before seeing and seeing from the word of God.

John 1:12 says "but as many as receive him to them he gave the right to become children of God. Even to those who call on His name." Romans 10:13 Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But what if you say. What if I call out to God and all I get is silence? Well there is only one way to find out. You must take the step of faith and see if God proves trustworthy.

It takes faith to dive out of an airplane. Faith that the parachute will open and safely lower you to the ground. But you have a choice whether you will jump out of a plane or not. Most of us here would choose the safe ground. Your choice on whether or not to skydive is an option depending on how thrill seeking you are. But the choice regarding your eternal destiny is not optional. Eternity hangs in a balance. Either choice demands faith. I believe it takes far greater faith to refuse God's offer of life and salvation. I believe it takes far greater faith to refuse accept that Jesus, God's son came to this world and died for our sins. It takes great faith to believe there is no God, no heaven, no hell You see the downside to a poor, unwise choice here can be deadly, eternally deadly. Are you ready to take the plunge of faith and trust today? Pray with me