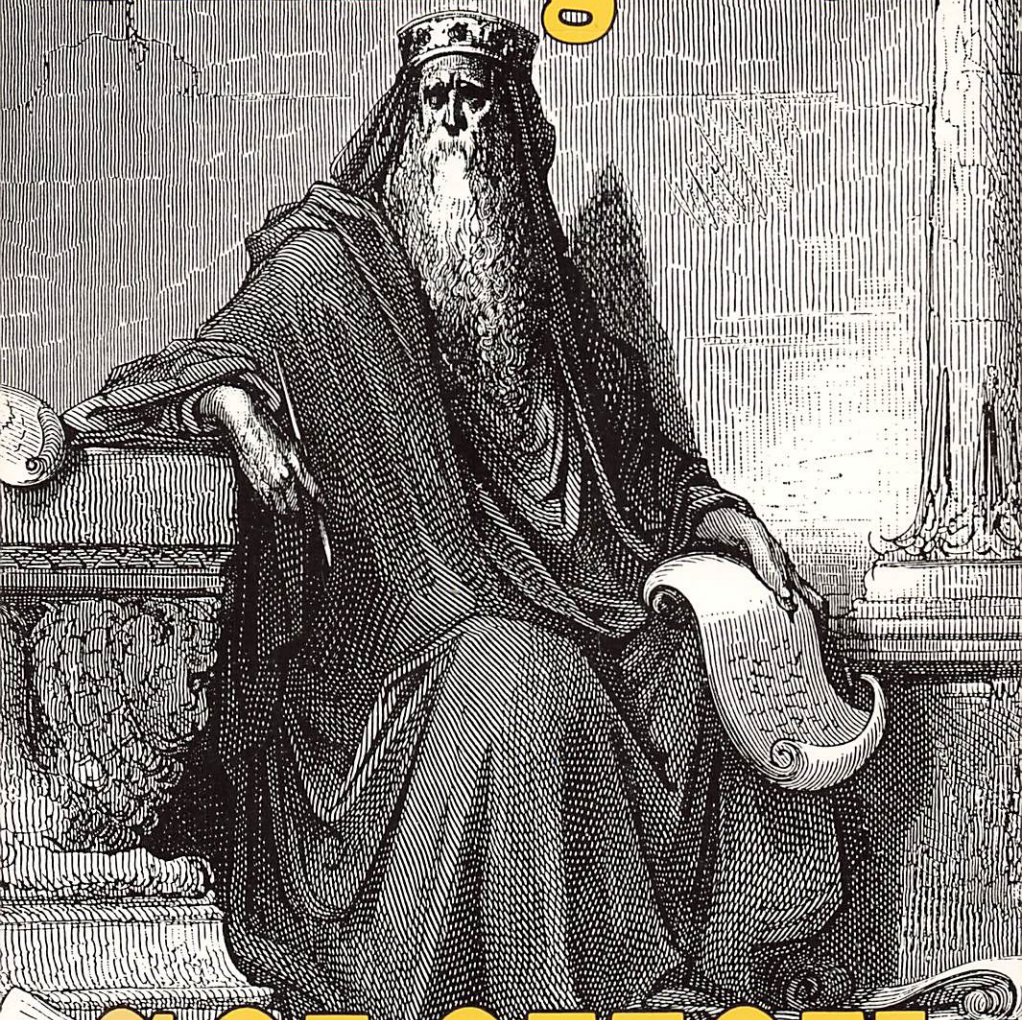


Thinking with



SOLOMON

by Benny B. Bristow

Thinking
With
SOLOMON

100 Devotionals

by

Benny B. Bristow

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated with much love and affection to **Grace Lindsay Edgar** our first granddaughter. Grace, with her beautiful smile, is a rare and precious gift from God, and has brought warmth, joy, and happiness into our lives.

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INTRODUCTION

These one hundred devotionals, based on the thinking and teaching of Solomon, are presented with the hope and prayer that those who use them will be lifted up spiritually and drawn closer to God. The world is continually trying to pull us down by getting us involved with more earthly things. Therefore, there is a need to be reminded often of the real values of life.

These one hundred devotionals cover the majority of spiritual principles needed by Christians to live a life according to God's will. There are so many ways that these devotionals can be used to help individuals or to motivate groups to live on a higher plane for God. Thus, they can be shared with ONE or ONE THOUSAND!

You may wish to use them in your family devotionals, for five minute radio programs, in hospitals, nursing homes, for sermon starters, in personal work, to extend the invitation at Mid-week Bible Study, and for youth or any age devotionals.

This collection of devotionals is an excellent gift for any age. Why not give a copy to a shut-in, someone in the hospital, to a youth graduating from High School or College, to someone bereaved from the loss of a loved one, or to someone in prison? Remember, people from all walks of life and in various circumstances, need a closer walk with God!

"The New King James Version", Thomas Nelson Publishers, is used in all of these devotionals.

With your help, and the guidance of God, this book can become a tool for much spiritual good.

May God's blessing be upon these messages that are based upon the inspired teachings of His Word, is my sincere and earnest prayer.

Benny B. Bristow
Author

FEARING GOD - Proverbs 1:7

Devotional 1

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

Fear has various meanings, but in this passage it means “reverential fear.” Those who fear God respect Him to the point that they do not wish to displease Him. Yes, they also fear His power and would dread facing Him unprepared in eternity, but those who have reverential fear also respect Him as their true and powerful God. This principle can be illustrated by the father-child relationship. A child who truly loves his father will not obey him out of fear of punishment alone, but also out of love and honor.

When Joseph of the Old Testament was a servant in Potiphar’s house, there was an occasion when he showed that he feared God. Potiphar’s wife tempted Joseph to commit adultery with her. Day by day he felt the pain of slavery, and now his master’s wife had made this evil demand. After considering the pros and cons, he came to this conclusion: ***“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9).*** Thus, the thing that kept him from this sin was the respect he had for his master and fear of God.

If we have the proper fear for God, this will lead us to do His will. In the Old Testament, God’s people were told: ***“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 10:12).*** When we seek our own laws in religion, and change the Bible to please ourselves instead of God, this is not true fear for Him.

Why does Solomon say that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge? Because those who fear Him have a deep respect for His Word, and as they study to know it, their knowledge will increase. Show me a man or woman who has a deep respect for a certain author, and I'll show you the same who longs to read and reread all that he has written. Millions do not study the Bible because they do not fear God, but those who fear Him, increase their knowledge of Him and His great work.

When fear is present, there is confidence in His many promises, miracles, and actions toward mankind. There are things that they do not understand, but their faith and fear for Him, lead them to serve. This kind of fear brings the deepest reverence for God. Shakespeare wrote: "Rather let my head stoop to the block, than these knees bow to any save to the God of heaven."

"The majesty of God revere; fear Him, and you have nothing else to fear."

LISTEN TO YOUR PARENTS - Proverbs 1:8,9

Devotional 2

“My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be graceful ornaments on your head, And chains about your neck” (Proverbs 1:8,9).

The wise man sets forth two responsibilities in these verses: (1) The son is to receive teaching from his parents, (2) He implies that the parents will give the proper instruction. When these two responsibilities are taken seriously there will be a happy relationship. As parents set forth the proper laws and instructions, they must realize the potential of their children. There is within them a power that can explode like a mighty volcano destroying themselves and all who are in their paths, or this same power can be harnessed to do good works. With this sobering thought, parents should take their responsibilities seriously. The Jewish parents of Israel were commanded to instruct their children about God and His laws: ***“You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 11:19).*** They must have believed the words: ***“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).***

Assuming then that the parents are giving the proper instruction, the son must hear and obey. This will be a great blessing: ***“graceful ornaments on your head, and chains about your neck.”*** The Old Testament promised prolonged days to those who honor father and mother, and that it would be well with them (***Deuteronomy 5:16***). Paul referred to this commandment as being ***“the first commandment with promise” (Ephesians 6:2).***

Has our modern generation outlived the usefulness of this God-given arrangement? Certainly not! Our generation may think it has, but not so! It is believed that the rapid increase of crime in our society has come from this breakdown in the home. In too many cases, parents are not giving the proper instruction, and their children do not have the proper respect for them. This is not God's way!

Tests have been run among hundreds of inmates who are incarcerated for violent and non-violent crimes, and it was found that most of them were from broken homes. Just think of the prisoners who have suffered because they either did not have proper instruction, or else they did not listen to their parents.

Or, think of the fine successful Christian men and women (whom you know) who refer often to the strict moral training of their parents. A child is well blessed when he honors parents who have brought him up in the *"training and admonition of the LORD"* (Ephesians 6:4).

"I once heard somebody say that you can't tell whether a parent has been a success or a failure until you find out what happens to the grandchildren" (Richard L. Strout).

**REFUSE ENTICEMENT OF SINNERS -
Proverbs 1:10-19**

Devotional 3

“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; . . . My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path” (Proverbs 1:10,11,15).

This is good advice for all ages to follow. There are always those who are in the business of promoting sin. They are not content to be sinners themselves, but try to entice others to join them. In this text, Solomon describes their arguments. They set the snare with its luring bait, but he warns: ***“do not walk in the way with them.”*** Sin has an immediate appeal. It offers the thrill of a lifetime, but be assured that it is the thrill of death. Paul was right when he wrote: ***“For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).***

One time a man took the venom from a poisonous snake and placed it under a microscope. To his amazement, he saw the beautiful colors of the rainbow. However, the beauty of the venom did not make it any less poisonous! Just because sin has its temporary thrill and dashing colors, does not remove its death qualities. ***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:7,8).*** The corruption mentioned here is death!

In view of the awful consequences of sin, Solomon warns: ***“do not consent. . . do not walk in the way with them.”*** Isn't it wonderful to know that we can turn down temptations to sin? Even our Lord was tempted in all points as we are tempted

(Hebrews 4:15), but He was without sin. Refusing to sin may be difficult, but such can be done. The Word of God sets forth principles that will help us resist:

(1) Seek the right kind of environment. Paul wrote: **“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’ ” (1 Corinthians 15:33)**. It may be easy to refuse sin the first time, but to be continually exposed, breaks down resistance. When you find yourself in evil company, get away as quickly as possible. **“Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22)**.

(2) Set your goals on Christian morals, and refuse compromise. Total resistance is the only way to overcome the devil. In Paul’s words: **“. . . do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26,27)**. James advised: **“Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7)**.

(3) Remember, the devil can deceive you, therefore, wear the full Christian armour of faith, righteousness, salvation, truth, gospel, and the sword of the spirit—the Word of God. With this protection, you can resist the **“wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11)**. Always be aware that the devil can appear as an angel of light **(2 Corinthians 11:14)**, or as a roaring lion **(1 Peter 5:8)**.

“Sin may open bright as the morning, but it will end dark as night” (Talmage).

**CALLING WITHOUT AN ANSWER -
Proverbs 1:23,24,27,28**

Devotional 4

“Turn at my reproof; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, . . .When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me” (Proverbs 1:23,24,27,28).

Solomon may be referring in these verses to the sinners described in the earlier verses of this chapter. However, these words also describe the condition of lost humanity when time shall be no more. While mankind lives on this earth, the Lord offers mercy and forgiveness to the obedient believers, but the time will come when this will not be available.

I once heard of a judge who was driving down the street in a snow storm and found a young man in a gutter, intoxicated and almost frozen. He got this young man, and took him to his warm house. After hours of rest and food, he saved his life, and sent him on his way. A few months later the same young man got into a fight and murdered another. When he was brought to court, to his surprise, the merciful judge was on the bench. All through the trial he felt that all would go well. Finally, it came time for the judge to pass sentence, and the young man was shocked when the full punishment was handed down. The young man approached the bench and said, “Sir, aren't you the one who took me into your home and saved my life a few months ago?” “Yes,” said the judge, “But I was your savior then, and now I'm your judge.”

While we live on earth today, we have our Lord Jesus Christ presented in the Bible as our Savior. He has gone to the cross in sacrificial death for our sins, and desires that all be saved. However, the time will come when He will judge the world, and millions will expect Him to be a Savior then. Jesus will have to say, "On earth I was your Savior, now I'm your Judge!" The call for salvation will be made, but He will not answer.

Paul declared to the Ephesian Christians that God had highly exalted Jesus and had given Him a name above every name: ***"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"*** (Philippians 2:10,11). Don't wait until Judgment Day to confess and obey Him.

"Life has but two ends, and one end has been used. Take care of the other end" (Holmes).

**SEEKING KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM -
Proverbs 2:1-6**

Devotional 5

“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:1-6).

In these verses the wise man is emphasizing the importance of wisdom and knowledge. They are especially important in this context because they lead one to fear God. One of the saddest things on earth is for one to live his life, invest everything in material things, and then face death without knowing God. True wisdom and knowledge include God, and all other so-called wisdom and knowledge will vanish with time.

At this point, let us define knowledge and wisdom, and this should help us see further why Solomon insisted on the importance of both. Knowledge suggests, “the learning of facts through study.” Wisdom means, “an understanding to the point of being able to apply facts.” Thus, it can be seen that one may study and obtain facts without having the wisdom to apply them. How does one receive knowledge about God? He has provided this knowledge in His Word. This knowledge that comes from the Bible is factual, and is therefore called “**truth**” (John 8:32).

What about wisdom? Where does one receive the ability to properly apply facts? James wrote: ***“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).*** When Solomon became King of Israel, he asked for wisdom to rule God’s people, and God made him wiser than all men.

Job recognized the wisdom of God and explained why His wisdom was so great: ***“God understands its way, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole heaven” (Job 28:23,24).***

In our text, Solomon suggests searching for wisdom and knowledge as one would search for hidden treasures! Jesus taught while on earth: ***“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).*** Paul admonished Timothy: ***“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).***

Have you found true knowledge by studying the Word? Have you asked God to give you the wisdom to understand?

“Wisdom can be defined as the ability to know what to do next.”

THE LORD IS A SHIELD - Proverbs 2:6,7

Devotional 6

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly” (Proverbs 2:6,7).

As we study through the Bible and learn of God, there are many figures used to describe His attributes. He is pictured as being all-powerful, always present, and possessing all knowledge. In the text before us, God is called a shield, and this suggests the idea of protection. As mankind travels through life, there are many foes to face, and both his physical body and soul are in danger. However, man's greatest protection from these destructive enemies is God.

The metaphor of a shield is truly right to describe God and His power to protect. The soldier could have been completely armed with breastplate, helmet, sandals, and sword, but without the shield, these armor parts could be penetrated. Our God is not a partial protection, because no enemy is strong enough to destroy Him. He is able to meet our every need.

A great example as to how God is a shield is found in the history of Israel. He guided them safely from Egyptian bondage, and met their needs as they journeyed through the wilderness. The enemies came, but to no avail with God's protection. There were times when God withdrew His shield because of their disobedience, and without exception, when He did, they suffered.

God does not choose today to come down in a direct way as He did with Israel, but this does not mean that He can't protect! The providential hand of God is still protecting His children today, and this is why we continually pray for His guidance. As we look at the history of America, it can truthfully be said

that God has been our shield, and has blessed us! However, God will continue to do so only if America continues to look to Him. There are evil forces at work in our nation today that are trying to discredit God and His Word, but these will fail if all true Christians will be faithful to God. Their leader is the devil which is powerful, but not as powerful as God. Even the devil and his angels cannot overcome the shield of God.

Job said to God: ***"If it is a matter of strength, indeed he is strong; and if of justice, who will appoint my day in court!"*** (Job 9:19).

Have you allowed God to be your shield today and for eternity?

"God governs the world, and we have only to do our duty wisely, and leave the issue to Him" (John Jay).

**FORSAKING THE GUIDANCE OF YOUTH -
Proverbs 2:16-19**

Devotional 7

Among the many things that understanding will do, Solomon says that it will: *“deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant for her God. For her house leads down to death, and her paths to the dead; none who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life—”* (Proverbs 2:16-19).

There are two things that will guarantee success in life. (1) To be trained from youth to respect and serve God. (2) Refuse to forsake this guidance of youth in later years. The evil woman described by Solomon in this text had been properly trained in her youth, but she left this and turned to a life of lust and sin.

All of us reach an age in life where we must make our own decisions. During the years of youth, good parents are constantly watching and training us in the ways of righteousness, but finally we must assume this responsibility. They cannot shelter us all of our lives. They may have faithfully brought us up in *“the training and admonition of the Lord,”* but the question we must face is will we continue in their training or forsake it.

There are thousands of people who are happy as Christians because they are following in the footsteps of their parents. In some cases their parents have deceased, but their good influence lives on. However, it is a sad fact that thousands of others are dissipating their lives in sin because they have forsaken the guidance of their youth. There are two evil results from this type of action. (1) They will not find true happiness in this life or in eternity. (2) Many of these will have their own

families and will expose their children to a life of sin. Thus, they will fail to train their children in the way they should go.

J. C. Penney once wrote: "The highest duty of parents is to build Christian homes, in whose influence children can grow spiritually strong, to teach the Bible in season and out of season. I never apologize for pleading for better Christian homes because my entire experience tells me that successful dealings between men in business, government and social relationships are influenced for good or ill by home backgrounds."

Therefore, when you are tempted to forsake the guidance of youth, please weigh the consequences. On the surface, the world with lust and sin may seem appealing, but look beyond to the lasting values of life. Think of your soul and the souls of your children.

"The family circle is the supreme conductor of Christianity" (Henry Drummond).

**A NECKLACE OF MERCY AND TRUTH -
Proverbs 3:3,4**

Devotional 8

“Let no mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man” (Proverbs 3:3,4).

There are those who take great pride in wearing necklaces of diamonds (which are valued at thousands of dollars) about their necks. These may have their place, but the necklace that Solomon describes has far more value. The necklace that he suggests to be bound about the neck is **“mercy and truth.”** This type of necklace is not a physical chain about the neck, but represents two great principles from God that can be written on the “tablet of your heart!” It is so important that it be a part of one’s inner self, while being displayed as a necklace.

Both mercy and truth come from God. Without the mercy of God, mankind would be hopelessly lost. God set His mercy into action by giving His Son in sacrificial death, so that we can have life. Yet, God has a very simple rule—we receive no mercy unless we are willing to show mercy. Jesus taught: **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).**

Shakespeare wrote: “The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath; it is twice blessed; it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.” “Just think of the millions that desire mercy; and show none ourselves” (George Eliot).

While traveling through life, let mercy be shown as it is bound about your neck and engraved in your heart. Then you can sing with the psalmist, David: **“Surely goodness and mercy shall**

follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6).

In addition to mercy, Solomon included in this very important necklace, truth. Truth receives its supreme importance from the fact that it comes from God. Lying is from the devil, and truth is from God. Truth may not always seem at the moment the right thing, but be assured that it is! In the words of Horace Mann: “Keep one thing forever in view - the truth; and if you do this, though it may seem to lead you away from the opinions of men, it will assuredly conduct you to the throne of God.” Jesus taught: ***“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).***

Would you consider wearing this beautiful necklace of mercy and truth by engraving them in your heart?

“If a thousand old beliefs were ruined in our march to truth we must still march on” (Stopford A. Brooks).

TRUSTING IN THE LORD - Proverbs 3:5-8

Devotional 9

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones” (Proverbs 3:5-8).

The story is told of a man who learned to swim when he was a young boy, but for thirty years was unable to do it well. Finally, an instructor discovered his problem. He was fighting the water without trusting it to hold him up. After discovering the fact that the water would help hold him up, he used all his strength for swimming and became successful.

Solomon tells us to trust God with all our hearts. Without this trust, we turn to our own feeble weaknesses for strength, and fail. Man's understanding does not compare to God's knowledge. In this same text, Solomon compares one's life to paths. Some paths lead to harm and destruction, but not so when God is doing the directing. Someone may say: "I don't need anyone or anything to guide me. I can take care of myself." To this false reasoning Solomon says: ***“Do not be wise in your own eyes.”*** There are many things that we can accomplish in this life, but mapping out our own spiritual way is impossible. As Jeremiah wrote: ***“O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).***

Therefore, when it comes to physical life and its many activities here on earth, trust the Lord for guidance. When it comes to facing sickness and death, trust the Lord, and when it comes to your soul's preparation for eternity, don't lean to

your own understanding. Place all your trust in God, because this is what He wants you to do.

It has been said: "He that taketh his own cares upon himself loads himself in vain with an uneasy burden. I will cast all my cares on God; he hath bidden me; they cannot burden Him" (Hall). The apostle Peter wrote: "**casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you**" (1 Peter 5:7).

Remember, one can trust the Lord with his heart, only if he is obedient to His will. The sinner who will not seek Him for salvation, choosing rather to serve the devil, cannot expect God to be pleased with him. Full trust means that we have gone all out for God, and then He will go all out for us. In this same passage that says, "**trust God,**" Solomon writes: "**Fear the LORD and depart from evil.**" Then comes the great blessing from trusting God, "**It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.**"

"All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen" (Emerson).

FULL BARNS - Proverbs 3:9,10

Devotional 10

“Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” (Proverbs 3:9-10).

Do you believe these great words of faith expressed by Solomon? He is saying that if one gives to God in the right way, God will give back. He is not saying that just any kind of giving will do. He specifies: ***“the firstfruits of all your increase.”*** God must be first in our giving. There are those who use their earnings for everything imaginable and then if any is left, they give to God. After using the best for self, they offer God the crumbs. There is NOT a blessing in this kind of giving.

Jesus taught: ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).*** He is saying, put God and His church first! Many never realize the true blessings from giving because they do not give God’s way. When we do, there is no way we can give more than God returns.

“A Christian woman in Connecticut had a beautiful flower garden in which she took great pride, and from which she gave away large quantities of flowers. Two large baskets were fastened by the gate, and these were filled every morning with fresh-cut flowers, from which passers-by were invited to help themselves. The children on their way to school, men on their way to business, tramps as they passed, all alike, blessed the thoughtful kindness of this woman. When asked, ‘Are you not afraid you will rob yourself?’ she replied, ‘The more I cut, the more I have.’ So in life what we give, we have; what we withhold, escapes from us” (Otterbein Youth Quarterly).

We have this promise: ***“Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).***

How does God want us to honor Him today with our substance? First, we must give as we have been prospered: ***“On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper” (1 Corinthians 16:2).*** Then one must give himself: ***“And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5).*** Finally, the true giver must purpose in his heart and give in a cheerful manner. Paul wrote that giving was not to be done ***“grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).***

With this kind of giving, God will fill the giver's barns with plenty!

“When a man is rich, God gets a partner or the man loses his soul.”

**THE CORRECTION OF THE LORD -
Proverbs 3:11-12**

Devotional 11

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest his correction; for whom the LORD loves he corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11,12).

From man's earliest existence upon this earth, God has exercised correction. Adam and Eve were told what God expected, and He did not want them to suffer by eating from the forbidden tree. The serpent, the devil, convinced Eve that she would be improved by eating. Both disobeyed God, and He had to discipline them by driving them from the garden to eventually face physical death. Their disobedience would someday require the sacrificial death of God's Son!

By Noah's day, the human race needed correction. Thus, God destroyed those who would not seek Him, with a devastating flood. However, the type of correction Solomon had in mind, came with God's relationship to the children of Israel. God had a deep love for this nation, but they continually rebelled to the point of needing correction.

There are those today who feel that God is good, and will not discipline, but they don't know God. For it is His love that leads Him to discipline! A faithful earthly father who corrects his son, does so because he loves him and wants him to do right. He knows that if he goes undisciplined, he will be harmed in both this life and in eternity. Thus, correction, though painful at the moment, avoids greater problems in the future.

Correction by the Lord, was introduced very early in the history of the Lord's church. Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a possession and agreed to lie about their giving. Peter told Ananias: ***“Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy***

Spirit" (Acts 5:3)? Both Ananias and his wife fell dead after telling this lie. This was hard, but think of the effect it made on the early church to keep others from rebelling against God.

Another form of discipline that God recognized in the church was withdrawing fellowship from brethren who walked disorderly. To the Corinthian church we read: **"But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (1 Corinthians 5:11). "Therefore 'put away from yourselves that wicked person' " (v. 13).** To the Thessalonian Christians: **"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).**

God has authorized this correction for the sake of the sinful brother, desiring that he repent, and to keep the body of Christ pure.

"I fear God, and next to God I chiefly fear him who fears Him not."

**GOD'S KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM -
Proverbs 3:19,20**

Devotional 12

“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens; by His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew” (Proverbs 3:19,20).

As Solomon viewed the vast world of nature around him, he did not have the knowledge accumulated by the scientific world during the past centuries. He did not have modern labs with test tubes and highly sophisticated equipment. However, there were two things that Solomon had which helped him recognize the powerful creative hand of God: (1) He had the wisdom which was given him by the God of Israel. (2) He had faith to observe God's creation with its design and beauty. With these two things, he could only reach the conclusion that it was God's wisdom that had founded the earth and established the heavens.

The more one learns of creation, the more he is convinced that God made everything. Someone may ask, “How can we know that there is a God?” Voices of nature all over the world declare it in a language too plain to be misunderstood. The birds on any given spring morning chirp His existence as they busily build their nests and search out their food. The tender blade of corn that makes its way upward through the soil, reaching hungrily for life and the trees which are annually clothed in new beauty of leaves and blooms all speak of God. The mighty oceans with their rolling whitecapped tides speak of His power as they crash themselves onto the shores and against solid walls of rocks. The howling winds and storms, the lightning that electrifies the skies, and the thunders that quiver the earth with their roars, all declare the greatness of God. In

fact, after you have heard all the sounds of nature and gazed into the wonders of the starry heavens, you will learn that all in one great harmonious voice will declare that there is a God. Man alone has said, ***“there is no God”*** (*Psalm 14:1*).

As man builds various things upon this earth, the finished products reflect his art and skill. The same is true of God. When one reflects upon nature, he becomes aware of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

“The stars shine over the land,/ The stars shine over the sea;/
The stars look up to God above,/ The stars look down on me./
The stars will live for a million years,/ For a million years and
a day;/ But God and I shall live and love/ When the stars have
passed away” (Sunderland).

Do you know the God of the Bible, the God of creation? Have you discovered the wisdom of a God who gave His Son so that lost humanity might live? Yes, His knowledge and wisdom are great, but at least try to comprehend some of it. Take time to study Him in His Word and to observe His handiwork of creation.

“Nature is too thin a screen; the glory of the omnipresent God bursts through everywhere” (*Emerson*).

GIVE HONOR WHEN DUE - Proverbs 3:27,28

Devotional 13

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,’ when you have it with you” (Proverbs 3:27,28).

It seems that Solomon is speaking in this passage of helping the poor, but he also lays down the great principle of giving honor to anyone when it is due. In the very early history of man, Cain asked God, ***“Am I my brothers keeper?”*** The answer is yes, because Christianity is a life of service. Our Lord spent His hours upon the earth serving others. He healed the sick, raised some who were dead, fed multitudes who were hungry, and more importantly, He pointed the lost to salvation. Thus, if we are following Jesus, we will want to live a life of service.

The text also suggests an urgency in helping. Solomon says: ***“Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it.’ ”*** Why the urgency? (1) They may be in desperate need. (2) Tomorrow may be too late. Have you ever planned to visit someone who was very ill, but put it off and later learned that they were gone? Some opportunities won't wait. Suppose the good Samaritan had decided to wait about helping the man he found beaten and robbed? Suppose he had said, "I'm in a big hurry and will stop on my return trip." Or, "Maybe someone else will stop and help." The chances are good that the man would have died. The good Samaritan saw an opportunity to do good, and he did it at once. Paul wrote: ***“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).***

Someone has made this suggestion: "Set your candle before a looking glass and you will get two lights. Plant your rosebush near your neighbor's fence so that a little of the beauty will grow on his side. If you have any loveliness, share it. If you have any talents, make them count most in wilderness lives. We are preserved from ostentation by a spirit of true service. A glad, free life that is full of love for others will make up for what the frosts of time have blighted in your neighbor's weary way" (The Examiner).

There is also another type of good we should not withhold. We should not withhold words of compliments to our fellowmen. It takes only seconds to pay a compliment, but it can mean so much. Don't wait until it's too late.

"If you have roses, bless your soul,/ Just pin one in my button hole/ while I'm alive and well today."

**AVOID THE PATH OF THE WICKED -
Proverbs 4:14-19**

Devotional 14

“Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; and their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble” (Proverbs 4:14-19).

One cannot read these words of Solomon without realizing the danger of following sin. He paints a picture in these verses of two paths, a path of darkness and a path of light. The path of darkness is filled with those who are wicked. Those on this path spend their every waking moment in thinking of evil. In fact, they have trouble sleeping unless they have committed evil. They are not content just to do evil, but they desire the evil they commit to harm others. It seems that their very nature is violent.

Sin is a disease which grows and spreads in our lives until it is out of control. As one writer put it: “Sin is like a stream of water, small in its beginning, then enlarging continually in its onward flow toward the ocean; at first easily managed and controlled, but after a while becoming large, deep, strong and unmanageable; so sin in its continuance and growth becomes a mighty torrent, overwhelming, uncontrollable, like a Niagara sweeping everything in its course over the precipice” (Zartman).

No wonder Solomon warned against entering this dark path of the wicked! Notice his repeated warnings: **“Do not enter,”**

“do not walk in the way,” “avoid it,” “do not travel on it,” “turn away from it,” and “pass on.” Just think of those who are destroyed today because they chose the path of darkness. When one enters, it seems the best thing to do, but it is a path of destruction and death. “Sin is first pleasing, then it grows easy, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed; then the man is impenitent, then he is obstinate, then he is resolved never to repent, and then is ruined” (Leighton).

The second path that Solomon paints is a path of light. He declares that the just follow this path as they travel toward the perfect day. Remember, this is God’s path and it leads to eternal life (***John 14:6***). Please refuse the path of darkness and choose the pathway of light.

“There is no fool equal to the sinner, who every moment ventures his soul” (Tillstson).

Devotional 15

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established” (Proverbs 4:23,24,26).

In this text, Solomon is giving mankind a formula in which he can keep himself right with God. Please notice that he begins with the heart, ***“Keep your heart with all diligence.”*** Heart, as it is used here, does not refer to the blood pump in one’s left side. It rather refers to the mind, intellect, and will of man, and this is the fountainhead of all actions. This is where all good and evil originate. When one keeps his heart, his life will be kept. The same writer expressed this thought in these words: ***“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).***

One greater than Solomon, the Christ, taught: ***“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man” (Matthew 15:19,20).*** Then in contrast he said: ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).*** What is the condition of your inner heart? Are you allowing sin to give you heart trouble?

After beginning with the heart, Solomon goes further to mention three parts of the human body that are often used to sin: the mouth, the eyes, and the feet. When the heart is evil, the mouth and tongue become sinful. When one thinks of evil, he usually expresses it with words. Allow me to listen to one’s speech, and I can tell you what is in his heart. ***“A man’s tongue is an index to his mind.”***

Then Solomon gives admonition concerning the proper use of the eyes. Just think of the evil that enters our hearts through the eyes. One of the avenues of temptation that caught Eve in the Garden of Eden was the "lust of the eyes" - "***So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes,***" (Genesis 3:6). As Christians, we must guard our eyes from those lustful things of the devil. We should choose literature to read, and television programs to view that will not contaminate our hearts and the hearts of our children.

Finally, Solomon speaks to pondering the path of our feet. We must not go places that influence our hearts to evil. When we guard our tongues, eyes, and feet, we can then keep our hearts with all diligence.

"A good heart is worth gold" (Shakespeare).

**SMOOTH WORDS THAT DECEIVE -
Proverbs 5:3-5**

Devotional 16

“For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell” (Proverbs 5:3-5).

The woman described in this passage was a depraved harlot - a woman who spent her time in the ways of sin. She sets a trap for her prey with smooth, deceitful words. Although Solomon speaks of a woman, the principles apply to both men and women.

Words are powerful things, because they can move mountains for good or for evil. Words can bless or curse, help or destroy, heal or make deep wounds. The immoral woman of this text must have promised happiness, joy, and life, but her words were deceitful. Solomon says: **“Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell.”**

Millions have chosen the path of sin and dissipation, because of deceitful words. The world says, “Come partake of my ways and you’ll be happy. Participate in strong drink and you will be sociably accepted. There’s no harm in drinking a small amount.” These are deceitful words, because the world fails to mention the millions who are alcoholics, and the suffering that they are going through along with their families! The world fails to mention the fact that: **“Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).**

The world allures with enticing words for all to follow lust. Those who keep themselves pure are mocked and referred to as being out of step with modern times. They say, “Everyone

is doing these things, and why deprive yourself of having fun.” Again these words (smooth as oil) are deceitful! The world fails to mention the millions who are suffering from this kind of lifestyle. No mention is made of homes that are broken, AIDS, venereal diseases, illegitimacy, the wounded conscience, and loss of self-respect.

Deceitful words are further used to promote false teachings and religions whose source is from man instead of God. Since these doctrines of men will not save, they deceive those who follow them. Jesus said: **“And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).**

Solomon further suggests that these deceitful words from an immoral woman **“drip honey.”** They sound sweet and good, but they bring death and hell to those deceived.

How can we avoid deceitful words? We can let the principles in God’s Word guide us, and we’ll never go wrong!

“It is with a word as with an arrow - once let loose and it does not return” (Abdel - Kaden).

**REJOICE WITH THE WIFE OF YOUR YOUTH -
Proverbs 5:15,18**

Devotional 17

“Drink waters from your own cistern, and running waters from your own well. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth” (Proverbs 5:15,18).

One of the most beautiful things that God has given in the physical sense is the husband and wife relationship. In this text, Solomon compares this to a stream of running water which suggests refreshment and purity. This is a relationship that comes from God and contains His blessings so long as a couple abides by His will. However, there is a great danger of losing this beautiful relationship, and this caused Solomon to sound these warnings. ***“Drink waters from your own cistern”*** means that a husband is not to be unfaithful to his wife. Society today is suggesting more and more that adultery is permissible, but this destroys the beauty in marriage. In fact, this is one of the surest ways to destroy a marriage and the home.

In the Old Testament, God was very strict with those guilty of this sin. The law stated: ***“The man who commits adultery with another’s man wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10).*** As Jesus prepared for the coming of the Christian age, He placed even heavier restrictions on this sinful act. He said: ***“You have heard that it was said to them of old, you shalt not commit adultery: But I say to you, that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27,28).*** Out of all the grounds that might be used to dissolve a marriage, Christ chose ONLY adultery. He said: ***“Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual***

immorality, and marries another, commits adultery: and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9). Thus Jesus is saying that “sexual immorality” is the only lawful grounds for divorce and remarriage.

The husband and wife who remain true to each other, not only bring happiness to themselves, but to the children born to that union. Have you ever tried to image the human suffering and heartbreak that has come from broken homes? Or, what about the hurt and rejection a husband or wife feels when they learn of the unfaithfulness of the other? All of this hurt could be avoided if this advice: ***“Rejoice with the wife of your youth”*** could be followed.

“He is the happiest, be he king or peasant, who finds peace in his home” (Goethe).

**LEARN FROM THE LITTLE ANT -
Proverbs 6:6-11**

Devotional 18

“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a robber, and your need like an armed man” (Proverbs 6:6-11).

In these passages, Solomon is describing the awful condition of a sluggard, one who is habitually idle and lazy. To get him out of this lazy condition, he calls upon him to consider the ways of the ant. To understand the ways of the ant, note Adam Clark’s description: “At the proper seasons they collect their food - not in the summer to lay up winter; for they sleep during the winter and eat not; but when the food necessary for them is most plentiful, then they collect it for their consumption in the proper season; no insect is more laborious, not even the bee itself; and none is more fondly attached to or more careful of its young, than the ant.” He goes on in his description and tells of their actions when their young are in the state in which they appear like a small grain of rice, “They bring them out of their nests near their holes, for the benefit of the sun; and on the approach of rain, carefully remove them, and deposit them back into their nests then covering the hole for protection.”

The thing that should be most amazing about the ant is the fact that they do this from self-discipline. They have no guide, overseer, or ruler, but each individual ant does his work well.

Every generation has found its share of those living in poverty. Some of this poverty is beyond man's control, but so much of it could be prevented if all the lazy, idle sluggards, (as Solomon called them) would work and prepare like the ant.

The New Testament teaches that a true Christian will work to provide for himself and family. Paul wrote that instead of stealing: ***"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28).*** Again: ***"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).***

Being industrious and self-disciplined like the ant, not only keeps away poverty, but brings to the worker a sense of satisfaction and happiness.

"We have too many people who work without living" (Charles R. Brown).

**CHARACTERISTICS OF A WICKED MAN -
Proverbs 6:12,14,15**

Devotional 19

“A worthless person, a wicked man, walks with a perverse mouth; perversity is in his heart, he devises evil continually, he sows discord. Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly; suddenly he shall be broken without remedy” (Proverbs 6:12,14,15).

This scripture from the proverbs of Solomon describes the characteristics of a wicked man. Isn't it strange that many centuries have passed since this was written, and yet, the wicked today are the same? Let us notice some of the ways of a wicked man:

First, he has a perverse mouth. Since his heart and ways are evil, he continually speaks evil things. You can listen to the conversation of people today and determine whether or not they are evil. These love to use God's name in vain, along with every foul word that they can speak. They do not enjoy a joke unless it is saturated with filth. They think no more of slaying another with words than breathing a breath of air. In fact, this is the kind of tongue James had in mind when he wrote: ***“But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8).***

Solomon further describes the wicked man by saying: ***“in his heart, he devises evil continually.”*** This wicked person thinks only of evil. When someone speaks good things, this sinful one translates them into evil. Be assured, when one thinks evil in his heart, his ways will be evil. It seems that this evil person is not content to commit sins which are already known, but he spends his time dreaming and planning new ways to do evil.

His final mischief described in this text is: **“he sows discord.”** He continually seeks ways to stir up trouble. It may be through lies, gossip, or by turning one against his friends, but he NEVER promotes peace.

Won't you agree that this type of person is an enemy to society? What does Solomon say will happen to him? **“His calamity shall come suddenly; suddenly he shall be broken without remedy.”** More truthful words could not be spoken, and sooner or later the wicked will be punished. Paul wrote: **“Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord**” (Romans 12:19). It may seem that the evil one is prospering, but he will be brought down. Be assured that his sins will find him out.

Therefore, avoid the ways of the evil ones. Following Christ is the happy way in this life and the life to come!

“If you cannot find happiness along the way, you cannot find it at the end of the road.”

**SEVEN THINGS THAT GOD HATES -
Proverbs 6:16-19**

Devotional 20

"These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

When one studies closely these seven things that God hates, it is evident that God hates SIN. You may have noticed that Solomon chose various members of the human body which can be used to commit sin. However, before we classify our eyes, tongue, hands, heart, and feet as being evil, let it be remembered that these members of the body are also capable of doing good. God created the human body, therefore, He does not hate these members, but the sins committed by them!

He hates a proud look. Pride in its evil sense is truly a sinful thing. Solomon also wrote: *"A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin."* *"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord."* *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Proverbs 21:4; 16:5,18). To avoid the sin of pride, Jesus said: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3). "Pride is the master sin of the devil" (E.H. Chapin).

Three of these seven sins can be attributed to the misuse of the tongue, a lying tongue that loves false witness, and a tongue that sows discord among the brethren. How important it is for a Christian to put a bridle on his tongue. To fail to do so, is to make one's religion vain. *"If anyone among you thinks he*

is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26).

Another thing that God hates is "***hands that shed innocent blood.***" In our civilized age, you would think that murder would not be a problem, but thousands are killed yearly! Hands that could be used to help humanity are used to destroy life. God has always hated murder. Both the Old Testament and the New declare: "***You shall not murder.***" From the time that the first murder was committed by Cain, God has condemned this sin.

Solomon mentions one other in his list of things that God hates: "***A heart that devises wicked plans.***" God wants mankind to think good thoughts as he lives upon this earth. It is a fact that if we will guard our hearts, these other sins will be avoided.

"I pray thee, O God, that I may be beautiful within."

**ADULTERY DESTROYS THE SOUL -
Proverbs 6:23-35**

Devotional 21

“For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life” (Proverbs 6:23-26).

In this passage, Solomon is warning against the sin of adultery. Our modern society has tried to outgrow this sin. Millions are trying to make adultery the right thing to do, and calling all who refuse to participate old-fashioned. However, try as they may, this sin still has destruction in its path. There are three major reasons why this is so. (1) These who know anything about what is morally right and wrong, (based on the Bible) know that adultery is wrong. (2) Adultery is based on lust instead of love! This principle is described by Hermon Wilson: “Adultery is also wrong because it is loveless. It is based, not on love, but on lust. Love seeks the good of the one loved; it is kind, gentle, loyal, and unselfish. But lust is self-centered, base, unsettled, seeking always its own advantage. Love protects and ennobles—lust exploits, takes what it wants, and then rejects the object of its passion. The basic evil in lust (and therefore in adultery) is that it treats persons as things, to be used or manipulated and then cast aside. It seeks no lasting attachment; it is interested only in the flesh, and it rejects all responsibility for its behavior. Lust is like theft: the thief takes what he wants without regard to the rights or claims of others.” —The Living Word

(3) Adultery is wrong because it causes guilt feelings along with a loss of self-respect. The sexual relationship between man and woman is approved of God in marriage. ***“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4)***. You will notice, that outside of marriage God will judge. Failure to obey God’s law in this respect brings guilt. Even those who disregard God and His law may still feel guilt and shame. Especially is this true when the great principle of love and marriage are not respected, because there seems to be a God-given dream in the hearts of millions to have a happy married life and home. Either consciously or sub-consciously, the average person realizes that adultery is an enemy to this concept. Therefore, feelings of guilt, disrespect, and cheapness rise to the surface, and such bring about unhappiness.

“If you would have the marital union last, let virtue be the bond that ties it fast” (Rowe).

HATING EVIL - Proverbs 8:13

Devotional 22

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate” (Proverbs 8:13).

There is a theme that runs throughout the Bible, it is the struggle between good and evil. God is always represented on the side of good, and the devil for evil. When Jesus came into the world, He represented this good, and taught that He was light come to dispel darkness: ***“I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).*** However, there was a great resistance from darkness, and Jesus described this conflict: ***“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).*** He continued: ***“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (v.20).***

Since evil opposes God, it should be evident why the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. When we have due respect for God, we desire to refrain from that which opposes Him. The evil way today is the way of sin that appeals to our fleshly nature, and if we are not careful we will be deceived. Evil carries with it temporary thrills, but it also brings disappointment and death. To follow good, may seem to be a restricted life at the moment, but overall such will bring happiness and life. Since God wants us to have life, this is one of the reasons why God hates the evil way!

Evil is also hated because of the fruit it bears. In this text, Solomon enumerates some of the fruits of the evil way. The first is pride and arrogance. It is an ugly picture to see persons filled with pride and arrogance. Such persons are so sold on self that

they cannot see the good in others. It has been said: "He who is proud eats himself up. Pride is like an empty bag, and who can stand such a thing upright? It is hollow and heartless; and, like a drum, makes the more noises from its very emptiness."

Then Solomon speaks of the "perverse mouth" among the things to hate that are of the evil way. The words which come forth from one's mouth is an indication of what is in the heart.

How do you feel about the evil way? Be assured, the closer we get to God, the more we will hate evil. Paul wrote: "***Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good***" (*Romans 12:9*).

"To be free from evil thoughts is God's best gift" (*Eschybus*).

SECRET SINS - Proverbs 9:17-18

Devotional 23

“Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell” (Proverbs 9:17-18).

It seems that Solomon is describing secret sins. Some have the feeling that to do something forbidden is more enjoyable than to do those things that are acceptable. But even those things that are done in secret are known and those who practice them will find, in the words of Solomon, that: ***“her guests are in the depths of hell.”***

Yes, secret sins, like all other sins, bring punishment. In fact, there are some ways in which secret sins harm even more. First of all, it is a burden to keep sins secret, and in most cases, this is impossible even with our fellowman. Secrets have a way of becoming known. Then, of course, there is no way to keep a sin from God. There is no height or depth where man can go to hide from God. David knew this when he wrote: ***“Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from you” (Psalm 139:7-12).***

In the second place, secret sins harm our conscience, because they are not brought forth for forgiveness. God has two major laws for those in sin. (1) The alien sinner. He cannot be born again and forgiven without repentance. To repent means to change one's mind about sin which leads him to change his

life. Keeping a secret sin (it seems) would keep one from true repentance. (2) The erring Christian. He cannot come back and be forgiven by prayer without confessing his faults and repenting. Therefore, secret sins are very damaging.

Solomon is teaching also, that just because stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant, doesn't mean that those guilty will escape. They are immediately caught by death and hell. In the words of Moses: ***"Be sure your sins will find you out"*** (*Numbers 32:23*). It can be said that there are three places in which our sins will be found out; in time, in conscience, and in eternity.

"At the foot of every page in the annals of nations may be written, 'God reigns.' "

Devotional 24

*“He who gathers in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame”
(Proverbs 10:5).*

The advice in this proverb will make one successful in the physical realm, because it is a lesson on being prepared. The prosperous farmer spends his time in the proper season getting ready for the cold winter months. To fail to do this brings problems. This great principle is true in all areas of life, but becomes even more important when applied to the spiritual. The summer, or time of gathering, represents the time that we have on earth to prepare for death. Those who obey their Lord and serve Him faithfully show great wisdom. Death to them will be a victory! However, those who sleep, or fail to gather in the time of harvest, will suffer severe consequences.

The Bible is filled with passages warning mankind to prepare for God. In the New Testament, Christians were continually taught that Jesus would come someday, and that they must prepare. Jesus especially emphasized this when He told of ten virgins who took lamps to meet the bridegroom. Five were wise and five were foolish. The wise were able to enter into the marriage feast because they brought enough oil, but the five foolish were left out because their oil ran out. They made an attempt to prepare when the bridegroom came, but it was too late (*Matthew 25:1-13*). Jesus summed up the lesson from this parable by saying: *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (verse 13).*

Jesus must have had this principle in mind when He taught His disciples to lay up treasures in heaven instead of on earth. He was not suggesting that one can earn eternal life, but rather

these treasures represented choosing the spiritual life which is filled with genuine obedience. When this is done, one lives his life in covenant relationship with God and His Son. His service as a Christian is recorded because his deeds are spiritual. All other works are temporary, fleshly, and subject to destruction, but the spiritual treasures cannot be destroyed by physical enemies (*Matthew 6:19,20*).

Do you ever take a few moments and consider whether or not you are properly preparing? How many of you are bringing shame to your souls because you are spiritually sleeping in the summer? Remember, the time for gathering will come to an end. Today is the time to prepare.

“Prepare to meet your God” (Amos 4:12).

Devotional 25

“He who walks with integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will become known” (Proverbs 10:9).

The Bible speaks often to those who walk with integrity or uprightly, and this means to walk according to the directions of God. They refuse to bend down to the sinful ways of the world, but rather walk in a way that pleases God. One of the truly fine characters of the Old Testament which God approved was Job. In fact, God believed in the integrity of this man to the point that He allowed the devil to try him. After the devil had tried him in every way possible by taking away his wealth, children, respect of wife and friends, and even his health, in all of this, he remained true to God. How did God describe Job? ***“And that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1).***

To walk with integrity or uprightly refers to the kind of life one lives. Solomon says that those who have integrity walk surely. Could it be that this is true because he knows where he is going? He knows the way because God is leading him. The children of Israel encountered many problems as they wandered forty years through the wilderness. They faced enemies whom they could not defeat, diseases that they could not cure, and were bitten by serpents that brought death. Why did these things happen to them? Because of the times when they refused to follow God, and were not walking with integrity! When they repented and walked uprightly, God led their steps so that they could walk surely.

God still feels the same way about walking with integrity. He does not want His children to bend down to the evil ways of sin. John would say that to walk with integrity means to walk

in the light: ***“But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).***

Solomon completes this text by saying: ***“but he who perverts his ways will become known.”*** The ones who refuse to walk with integrity, but pervert his ways will be caught.

The Old Testament tells of a wicked king named Ahab. His reign was spent in wickedness and idolatrous worship to Baal. Toward the end of his reign, he invited the good King of Judah to join him in battle. Even though Ahab knew in his heart that God would not bless him, he decided to go while disguising himself. The battle raged all day without him being slain. Finally though, at the close of the day, an arrow was shot that God guided to Ahab. Yes, Ahab thought he could do evil without being caught, but he was wrong. Neither can we!

“No man has the right to do as he pleases, except he pleases to do right” (C. Simmons).

A WELL OF LIFE - Proverbs 10:11

Devotional 26

“The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked” (Proverbs 10:11).

In this short text, a great truth is declared. The mouth of a righteous man is compared to a well of life. Why would Solomon choose a well to illustrate the righteous? Let us notice some characteristics of a well:

(1) A good well suggests purity. Millions, down through the centuries, have enjoyed the pureness of water taken from wells. The speech of a righteous man also has purity. He refuses to speak words that are vulgar, degrading or sacrilegious. He delights in speaking words that have meaning, kindness, and comfort. The righteous one realizes that once words are spoken, they can never be recalled, therefore he weighs their meaning.

(2) A good well refreshes. Imagine a hunter lost for hours in the hot sun without water. He is half exhausted, and critically thirsty, and without warning he comes to a well filled with pure, cool water. In a matter of moments, he is totally refreshed as a new man. The tongue of a righteous man is like this. The world is filled with people who are traveling the scorching roads of sin. Some have heard evil words until they are sick, but the tongue of a righteous man can bring words of spiritual refreshment. He can lift the weary ones above the fleshly weaknesses of the world as he speaks of things that are good and heavenly.

Jesus (more than everyone else) was able to offer refreshing water to those who would drink. One time He visited Jacob's well in Samaria, and a woman from Samaria came for water. She was astonished when Jesus asked her for a drink of water. Jesus said to her: ***“If you knew the gift of God, and who it***

is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10). The words of Jesus are still a refreshing well to those who are thirsty and willing to drink!

(3) A good well is active. Most of its good qualities are present because it is active. The righteous man continues to speak pure, refreshing words because he is active for God. He walks and talks with God continually. He not only studies and prays, but applies godly principles to his daily life. Millions allow their mouths to become instruments of wickedness because they are not active for God. Pure Christianity is a climbing process. The fish that is swimming up stream must continue to swim or float backward. When a Christian stops activity, he floats backward to wickedness.

Is your mouth a well of life, or a mouth of violence?

"The mouth is taken as the principle channel by which the issues of life flow out for good or evil" (V. Arnot).

**HATRED COMPARED TO LOVE -
Proverbs 10:12**

Devotional 27

*"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins"
(Proverbs 10:12).*

In this text we find the greatest contrast - hatred versus love, and they are as different as dark and light, and the fruit they bear is opposite. *"Hatred stirs up strife."* The Old Testament reveals in detail, the lives of Jacob and Esau. Jacob was able to receive a special blessing from his father by pretending that he was Esau. The results of all this is described in these words: *"So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning of my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Genesis 27:41).* Hatred led Esau to desire murder!

Be assured that hatred still stirs up strife. Hatred grows as long as it is permitted to remain in the heart. In fact, it does more damage to the one hating than to the one being hated. Fosdick wrote: "Hating people is like burning down your own home to get rid of a rat." When we are hating, we are robbing ourselves of many good things in life. Dale Carnegie wrote of hate in the following way: "Hate burns up more energy than anything else, more than hard work, illness or justifiable worry. So when hatred is entering our hearts, let's just put it out, make room for pleasant thoughts instead, save our precious God-given energy for something worthy of it."

Solomon tells us what should take the place of hate - *"love covers all sins."* Love is the magic ingredient that we need in our lives. For it not only helps the one loved, but it makes us the kind of person God wants us to be. Love helps us to be understanding, kind, gentle, forgiving, and helpful. "A bit of

fragrance always clings to the hand that gives you roses" (Chinese proverb). Love is a winner and hatred a loser! Love can succeed when everything else has failed. Hate propagates other sins—even murder, but love is surrounded by a royal court of virtues. Hate stirs up strifes, but love spreads kindness. "One kind word can warm three winter months" (Japanese proverb).

Love is the golden thread that runs itself through Christianity. This is true because the source of Christianity is love. Thus Paul admonished the Ephesian Christians, "***And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you***" (*Ephesians 4:32*).

Would you please try removing all hate from your heart, and fill it with love?

"Love is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself."

THE SILVER TONGUE - Proverbs 10:20,21

Devotional 28

“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom” (Proverbs 10:20,21).

When studying closely the book of Proverbs, it becomes evident that Solomon had much to say about the use of the tongue. In this text he makes two important statements about the tongue of the righteous. (1) It is compared to choice silver. (2) It is capable of feeding many. In these two descriptions, he places great value on the tongue of the righteous, however, in contrast, the wicked have little worth and are void of wisdom.

Why did he choose choice silver to describe the tongue of a righteous man? Choice silver has been refined to its purest state and is of great value. The tongue of the righteous is guarded against impurities such as lying, slander, gossip, and using God’s name in vain. Yes, temptations come to him, but he strives to overcome them. He is aware that the unbridled tongue can destroy. James taught that just as a big ship is turned by a small rudder, the little tongue can boast great things, and is further compared to a fire burning out of control, and *“it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:4-8).*

The tongue can make or break a man. It can be our greatest blessing or our greatest curse. “Some use the tongue to express thought, to conceal thought, or instead of thought.” The righteous will endeavor to express good thoughts, and this will make his tongue as choice silver.

Solomon must have chosen the figure of choice silver to describe the tongue of the righteous because choice silver is of great value. Many priceless items have been fashioned from silver. The tongue of a righteous man is also of great value. It

is used to speak truth, encourage the depressed, lift up the bereaved, and to point lost sinners to God. His tongue is used as a peacemaker. When tempers are high and the storms of hate are raging, with choice words he is able to calm the storms.

What is the one thing that makes the tongue of a righteous man as choice silver? It is the purity of his heart. There is a sense in which the heart controls the tongue. The use of the tongue reflects what is in the heart. If there is hate, the tongue will express hate, but if there is love, this will be expressed. Job was a man of integrity with a pure heart. Consider his resolve: ***“My lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit” (Job 27:4).***

Can you classify your tongue as choice silver?

Be careful of your thoughts. They may break into words at any time!

Devotional 29

“When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has an everlasting foundation” (Proverbs 10:25).

Solomon is comparing the life of a wicked one to a whirlwind. Most of us have seen the whirlwind move across the ground picking up leaves, grass, and dust in its path. However, as thrilling as this may be, it is seen for only a few moments and it is gone. The whirlwind is very unstable. It may move to the right, the left, stand still, and then disappear. This certainly describes the wicked.

Since all of his life is centered in fleshly things, it soon passes away. The apostle Peter had this in mind when he wrote, ***“Because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24,25).*** Unless we link our lives to the spiritual, our lives are soon gone. If the wicked finds any happiness, it must be in this life, because after death there awaits eternal punishment. Considering the brevity of this life like a whirlwind, his life is soon gone.

The whirlwind describes the wicked also by the fact that it is unstable. What could be more unstable than sin? This evil one lives by lies, fraud, unfaithfulness, selfishness, and infidelity. He seeks those things that please himself at any cost. As the whirlwind, he changes directions any moment. This kind of life has no lasting value.

In contrast, Solomon says: ***“But the righteous has an everlasting foundation.”*** It is true that a righteous man has a fleshly body that is rapidly passing away, but he is an everlasting foundation because his priority is on the inward

man. Paul wrote, ***“Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16)***. He has made things right with God through obedience to the gospel, and is striving daily to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Thus, the same power that brought Jesus forth from the grave, will someday bring the righteous one forth to live eternally with God. In this respect, the righteous one dies so that he can be resurrected to die no more.

Adam Clark describes death to a good man in these words: “Death, to a good man is but passing through a dark entry, out of one little dusky room of his father’s house, into another that is fair and large, lightsome and glorious, and divinely entertaining.”

Take a look at your life! Is it like a whirlwind or an everlasting foundation?

“The bad man’s death is horror; but the just does but ascend to glory from the dust” (Habbington).

**PROLONGING ONE'S LIFE -
Proverbs 10:27,28**

Devotional 30

“The fear of the LORD prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened. The hope of the righteous will be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked will perish” (Proverbs 10:27,28).

It is obvious from these verses that it pays great dividends to serve God, but there is great disappointment to the wicked who reject Him. The truth behind this proverb can be seen in these modern times. It is true that the righteous can die early, but so many times, death comes early because of sin. Sin not only renders disobedience to God, but it can bring harm and death to the physical body.

The question might be asked, “Why do millions let this happen?” Could it be because it is a slow, gradual process and not too alarming? The body may be filled with alcohol, nicotine, excessive drugs, and other harmful things, but seems to be all right. However, damage is being done within, and the time will come for sin to collect its toll.

“Henry Drummond said that the white ants of Africa are the most secretive creatures in the world; even when they are attacking whole forests they come up under cover, building dirt tunnels up and down tree trunks to shelter them while they work. One may rise from his chair at night, or go to bed; get up in the morning and see it standing there apparently unchanged. But let him take his seat on it, and lo! he and the chair are in a heap on the floor. What is the matter? Why, the white ants have come in the night and eaten all the inside out of the wooden legs, rounds, and frame. Not a nick appears on the outside, but the chair is a mere shell by daylight. So it is with the threads of sin upon personal and national life” (Sunday

School Chronicle). Yes, sin can eat away secretly at our lives, shortening our days, and in some cases bring death!

However, with the righteous it is different! True Christianity has a good effect on both body and mind. The Christian will recognize that it is a sin to abuse the body. He will avoid anything that is harmful because, (in his case) the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. ***“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).*** Add to this the fact that the hope of a Christian brings gladness to his heart, and he has a better chance for prolonged days.

Is your body harmed by sin or helped with right living?

“I would rather be right than be president” (Henry Clay).

ACCURATE SCALES - Proverbs 11:1

Devotional 31

"A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight" (Proverbs 11:1).

Solomon is teaching the importance of being honest. The false balance means to weigh a dishonest weight. There are those who live their lives in dishonesty, and some even claim to be Christians. However, this cannot be done and still be pleasing to God. Dishonesty is a form of lying, and a false balance distorts the truth. Some have the idea that dishonesty is permissible in the name of business, but this is not true! God hates this sin whether it is done by an individual or by a large corporation of people. Paul wrote, ***"Providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."*** ***"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for things in the sight of all men" (2 Corinthians 8:21; Romans 12:17).***

The wise man also says that the Lord delights in a just weight. Please notice that the amount being weighed is NOT mentioned. God loves honesty in things that are small as well as large. It is just as wrong to be dishonest over a penny as a dollar! We may consider the value of the money, but God looks at the principle. The kind of honesty that delights the Lord is honesty from the heart. Some are honest when forced to be, but if they can find an opportunity to be dishonest without being caught, they take it. This is not a just weight!

Our honesty can have a good influence in leading someone to Christ. One time a Christian man got on a street car. He gave the driver a dollar and received back some change, and then took a seat while counting his money. After reaching his destination, he came to the driver and said: "Sir, you gave me back too much change." "I know," replied the driver, "You see,

I visited last Sunday where you attend worship and noticed that you claimed to be a Christian. I've been thinking seriously about becoming a Christian, but wanted to see if such had changed your life and made you honest."

We can't follow Christ and live dishonestly because such covers our lights for the Lord. Carlyle once wrote: "Make yourself an honest man, and then you may be sure there is one rascal less in the world."

A just weight is not only a delight to the Lord, but it pays in this life. Franklin had it right when he said: "Honesty is the best policy." It may not seem to be at the moment, but over a period of time, it will pay.

An honest man is the noblest work of God" (Pope).

PRIDE BRINGS SHAME - Proverbs 11:2

Devotional 32

“When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

One of the things that has brought destruction to millions down through the centuries is the sin of pride. This is a sin that not only looks bad to God, but also to our fellowman. When one is puffed up, too sold on self, he is in for a fall. Later in the book of Proverbs, Solomon wrote: ***“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though they join forces, none will go unpunished” (Proverbs 16:18,5).***

One of the things that makes pride so destructive is the fact that it is based on a lie. The things that we become puffed up over will let us down. William Arnot wrote these words about pride. “Pride? what is the man proud of? Money? It will not procure for him one night’s sleep: it will not buy back a lost friend: it will not bribe off approaching death. Land? A very little bit of it will serve him soon. Birth? What has he inherited, but sin and corruption? Learning? If he is equal to Newton, he has gathered one little pebble on the ocean’s shore, and even that one he must soon lay down again.”

Yes, pride may seem the best thing at the moment, but in the words of Solomon, it will bring shame. To avoid the sin of pride, one should seek wisdom by being lowly. Jesus taught, ***“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).*** He also taught that to be great, one must be humble: ***“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4).*** There has never been, nor will there ever be, one greater than Christ the Son of God, and yet He was humble enough

to bow down and wash the feet of His disciples. Humility is not a sign of weakness (as some might believe) but rather a sign of strength and self-control.

Christians of the first century were called upon to possess humility. Peter wrote, ***“Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5)***. James taught, ***“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10)***.

Someone has said: “The Christian is like the ripening corn; the riper he grows the more lowly he bends his head” (Guthrie). Do you have the heavenly wisdom that comes from being lowly?

“The richest pearl in the Christian’s crown of graces is humility” (Good).

RICHES THAT FAIL - Proverbs 11:4

Devotional 33

“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 11:4).

It is true that money will buy many things in this life. In fact, money used wisely and according to God's will is a great blessing. However, money has its limitations and Solomon mentions one of these. It fails in the day of wrath. The wrath mentioned here is the wrath of God! It may come as a shock to millions, but God can render to man either blessings and life, or His divine wrath. Be assured that all the wealth in the world cannot stop His wrath.

Early in the history of man, there were two cities that were very wicked. In fact, Sodom and Gomorrah were so wicked that God heard their cry and said that their sin was very grievous (***Genesis 18:20***). This wickedness stirred God's wrath to the point that He destroyed these cities with fire and brimstone. Could these cities have been spared? Yes! Abraham bargained for their salvation, but he did not do so with money. All their wealth and flat fertile plains would not stay the wrath of God. What would it take? Only ten righteous souls would have spared the cities, but these could not be found (***Genesis 18:32***).

Have you ever tried to turn away God's wrath with money? If so, you have failed! Have you ever known those who lived a life of sin and felt that all would be made right with God by a large contribution? If so, they were deceived. ***“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath.”***

For riches used unwisely will keep one from being righteous. Wealth can bring with it many additional temptations. Paul taught, ***“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the***

love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:9,10,17).

Would you please note that Paul is not condemning “money,” but the “love of money.” He didn’t say that money is a root of all kinds of evil, but rather the LOVE OF MONEY. It is the love of money that keeps one from being righteous.

Jesus taught His disciples to put emphasis on heavenly wealth instead of earthly (*Matthew 6:19-21*). Why? Because physical treasures will not help in eternity. When God punishes the wicked with death, earthly treasures will not profit.

“Money is not required to buy one necessity of the soul” (Thoreau).

DEATH OF THE WICKED - Proverbs 11:7,8

Devotional 34

“When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, and the hope of the unjust perishes. The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead” (Proverbs 11:7,8).

As one studies through the book of Proverbs, it becomes obvious that Solomon makes many contrasts between the righteous and the wicked. He teaches over and over that it pays to be righteous. In this text, he shows the difference between the hope of the righteous and the wicked. In summation, he says that the hope of the wicked is limited to this life, and this same principle is taught throughout the Bible. When a sinner dies without Christ, he is without hope and lost forever. Paul announced, ***“When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).*** Thus, it is evident that all hope dies with the wicked at death.

However, this is not true with the righteous. In Solomon's words: ***“The righteous is delivered from trouble.”*** To the faithful Christian, death is a victory, not a defeat. His hope does not end, but becomes fulfilled. As John was permitted to preview heaven and the end of time, he pronounced a blessing on those who die in the Lord. ***“‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’ ” (Revelation 14:13).*** The faithful Christian believes that God is preparing great things for him after death. As one writer put

it: "Eternity is the divine treasure house, and hope is the window, by means of which mortals are permitted to see, as through a glass darkly the things which God is preparing" (Mountford).

The writer of the book of Hebrews refers to hope as an anchor, ***"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil"*** (Hebrews 6:19). Without this anchor of hope, we would drift about through life with no real security now or in the life to come. Please remember, man's only hope can be found in Christ Jesus. God willed that it be this way. In the words of a song: "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness." However, this hope in Christ is available only to those who obey Him.

"Man's greatest need is a living Christ for a dying world."

**THE MOUTH OF A HYPOCRITE -
Proverbs 11:9**

Devotional 35

“The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered” (Proverbs 11:9).

“A rather pompous - looking deacon was endeavoring to impress upon a class of boys the importance of living the Christian life. ‘Why do people call me a Christian?’ The dignity asked, standing erect and beaming down upon them. A moment’s pause; then one youngster said: ‘Maybe it’s because they don’t know you’ ” (Ladies Home Journal).

Hypocrisy is one of the most destructive things in this life. It is a lie put into action designed to deceive. Among the many sins that disturbed Jesus during His ministry was the sin of hypocrisy. The hypocrite can display his sin in various ways, but in this text Solomon mentions the tongue, **“The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor.”**

The idea of having a good neighbor is a beautiful thought and brings happiness to millions. Secrets are shared and burdens borne between faithful friends. However, the picture is different when a neighbor becomes a hypocrite. He pretends to be a friend only to obtain information to spread to others. Talebearing is bad within itself and sinful, but it becomes even more repulsive when it is done by one who claims to be a friend.

How despicable it must have been for Jesus to listen to the Scribes and Pharisees pray their long repetitious prayers when He knew they were seeking only to impress men. He saw them as Hypocrites! To the average person, they appeared very religious and sincere, but Jesus could see their hearts and compared such to dead men’s bones.

The hypocrite's speech and actions are contrary. In the words of Jesus: ***"They say, and do not do"*** (*Matthew 23:3*). As one writer put it: "A bad man is worse when he pretends to be a saint" (Bacon).

Therefore, when we take on the role of a hypocrite, we play into the hands of the devil. It can be said that he is the master hypocrite. Milton wrote: "Satan was the first that practiced falsehood under the saintly show." The devil loves hypocrisy because the one practicing it is deceived. In their pretension of righteousness, they feel that all is well, and yet, the devil has them in his clutches.

The antidote against hypocrisy is to be honest and truthful with our friends and neighbors. Live close to the way of Jesus, and your life will reflect true light without pretense.

"An untrue man is the moral murderer, his mouth the lethal weapon, and his neighbor the victim" (Arnot).

**THE BLESSING OF THE UPRIGHT -
Proverbs 11:10,11**

Devotional 36

“When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked” (Proverbs 11:10,11).

Every city, community, and neighborhood is made up of good and evil people. Those who are good are truly a blessing, but the wicked bring a curse. We should thank God daily for the families in a city that are good. Be assured that in most cases all religious, civic, and moral activities are present because of them.

What has influenced these people to be good? Even though many factors could be mentioned, the underlining influence is the Bible. The infidel works to persuade people not to believe in God or the Bible, but they would not enjoy living in a society where the principles of God’s Word are ignored.

One time an infidel was traveling in Africa and in the bush country came upon a converted cannibal who was reading from the Bible. He said to the cannibal: “You don’t really believe that Bible, do you?” The man looked at the infidel for a moment and said: “Sir, if I didn’t believe this book, you would have been eaten by now!”

When thinking of the influence of Jesus and the Word of God, one can imagine it like a large net spread over the entire world, taking within its meshes entire countries, cities, and villages; all of which have been influenced to do good. **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).**

Influence for good is what Jesus had in mind for His disciples when He said: ***“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13,14).*** Jesus viewed the world as being in sin and darkness needing the preserving power of salt, and the illumination of His light. He knew that those living in sin could not improve the world. In fact, they would contribute to its darkness. Therefore, He calls upon them to bless the world with light and this is still His desire today. “A good man does good merely by living” (Bulver).

What about your life? Does your righteousness contribute to the community where you live? It has been said, “The spirit of a person’s life is ever shedding some power, just as a flower is steadily bestowing fragrance upon the air” (T. Starr King).

“A word or a nod from the good, has more weight than the eloquent speeches of others” (Plutarch).

A GRACIOUS WOMAN - Proverbs 11:16

Devotional 37

“A gracious woman retains honor, but ruthless men retain riches” (Proverbs 11:16).

As Solomon continues to give his list of proverbs, he says that **“A gracious woman retains honor.”** History reveals that women have played an important part in their influence on society. Although God has given men headship in marriages and families, women have had the power to influence, either for good or for evil. Therefore, whether or not she has kept her honor has been very important, and is still important today.

God’s Word rings out in praise for women who have been true to God’s design. The Old and New Testaments tell how God chose discreetly the women to be the wives and mothers of His special men. Such women as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah, Ruth, Mary, Elizabeth, Dorcas, Lydia, and Anna were outstanding choices. God has always intended that women be gracious and retain honor.

As we look back over centuries, various writers have praised women with honor. Notice some of the praises that have been made:

“A beautiful and chaste woman is the perfect workmanship of God, the true glory of angels, the rare miracle of earth, and the sole wonder of the world” (Hermes). “Next to God we are indebted to women, first for life itself, and then for making it worth living” (Bevee). “There is a woman at the beginning of all great things” (Lamartine). “No one knows like a woman how to say things which are at once gentle and deep” (Victor Hugo). “There can be no higher ambition for a Christian woman than to be a faithful wife and a happy influential mother. It is the place which God has given woman, and she who fills it well, is as honorable and honored as the most illustrious man can

be" (Stoddard). "Woman is like the reed which bends to every breeze, but breaks not in the tempest" (Whately).

Such praises and many more have been given to women, but only to those who have retained their honor. The same Bible that speaks highly of godly women, reveals the depravity of Jezebel and those like her. A virtuous woman can help raise man and society, or a fallen woman can help bring both down.

In this modern age of low morals, women are called upon (young and older) to present their lives as gracious women full of honor!

"Woman - last at the cross, and earliest at the grave"
(E. S. Barrett).

**JEWELRY IN A HOG'S SNOUT -
Proverbs 11:22**

Devotional 38

"As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion" (Proverbs 11:22).

In this same chapter (verse 16) Solomon writes of a gracious, honorable woman, but in this text speaks of a woman without discretion. To show its leaders how unnatural it is for a woman to be without discretion, he uses an extreme illustration. How unnatural it would be to place a jewel of gold in a hog's snout! The two do not go together. In Solomon's eyes, it is just as absurd for a woman to be without discretion.

Discretion is very becoming to anyone. It means: "prudence - one who is wise; careful of the consequences of measures or actions; judicious; cautious; circumspect" (Webster). These are traits that add to a woman's beauty. A woman who has discretion is beautiful within, and this is the beauty that pleases God. It would be disgusting to see a jewel of gold in a hog's snout, but it is just as disgusting to see a fair woman without discretion.

When you study the life of Jezebel in the Old Testament, you get the picture of an evil woman. She was rotten to the core of her heart and she corrupted all who were around her. She may have been a beautiful woman physically, but any beauty she possessed was destroyed by her evil ways. She could then be considered a fair woman without discretion. In fact, the only other woman in the Bible who can be compared to Jezebel is her daughter Athaliah. When her king son was killed, she slew all her grandchildren, (except one who was hidden) and took the throne of Judah where she ruled with a wicked hand.

However, all should remember that a woman does not have to go to these extremes to be without discretion. Paul wrote,

“In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works” (1 Timothy 2:9,10). The way a woman dresses, acts, and lives her life can determine whether or not she possesses discretion. “A woman’s worth is to be estimated by the real goodness of her heart, the greatness of her soul, and the purity and sweetness of her character; and a woman with a kindly disposition and well-balance temper, is both lovely and attractive, be her face ever so plain and her figure ever so homely; she makes the best of wives and the truest of mothers” (Royal Pathway).

“Earth has nothing more tender than a young woman’s heart when it is the abode of piety” (Luther).

TRUSTING IN RICHES - Proverbs 11:28

Devotional 39

“He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage” (Proverbs 11:28).

Riches can be a blessing or a curse depending on how they are used. There are many warnings in the Bible against the deceitfulness of riches. It would stagger our imagination to know how many souls will be lost eternally because they trusted in riches. When Jesus gave the parable of the sower, He described one heart as the thorny soil. In His spiritual application, He said, ***“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).*** “The deceitfulness of riches” is still thorns in our lives today. Just think of the hatred and the many other sins of greed which come from man’s coveting money!

“Lincoln was one day walking along a street in Springfield holding the hands of his two boys. They were crying lustily. ‘What’s the matter with the boys, Abe?’ ‘The matter with them is the matter with the world: one has a nut, and the other one wants it’ ” (Bryant).

Jesus recognized the dangers of trusting in riches when he gave the parable of a successful farmer. ***“Then he spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This night***

your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

This is one of the times in the ministry of Christ that he described a fool, and be assured that being deceived by riches will still produce fools!

Solomon goes further in this text and says: ***"But the righteous will flourish like foliage."*** The righteous will flourish because they have treasures in heaven. Jesus taught that in heaven: ***"neither moth nor rust destroys and ...thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:20).*** However, this cannot be said of earthly treasures.

Where is your trust and confidence? Put your trust in God, and like the foliage of a tree, you will flourish.

"What you do with your money determines what your money will do to you."

Devotional 40

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30).

Those who learn the good news of the gospel and obey it, will want to share it with others. The sharing of Christ and His salvation is not just for the purpose of making people better, (although this happens) but it is to save souls. What was the motivating force that caused Jesus to leave heaven and come to earth? Was it to be a great teacher? Was it to perform miracles? No, God had given others the power to do these! Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Thus, the righteous will desire to do the same.

Did you notice in the text that Solomon states that the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life? As they bear fruit, they produce life when they share the saving grace of Christ, and they are extending life from the Lord. Why do many who claim to be Christians fail to bear this fruit? Why do they not save lost souls by sharing the saving grace of Christ? Because many do not accept the fact that those who have not come to Christ in obedience are lost. If we see someone about to drown, we do all that we can to save them. Why? Because we believe they will drown—they will be lost! When we realize this to the same degree with lost sinners, we will begin to offer spiritual life from the Lord.

Trees are valued in many cases by the fruit they bear to sustain physical life. However, the tree of life mentioned by Solomon, sustains spiritual life. Physical food will sustain for only a few hours, but the tree of life (offered by the righteous) will last forever.

Since this is true, Solomon makes the declaration that **“He who wins souls is wise.”** The most valuable gift ever offered

was the death of Our Lord on the cross. The greatest gift that we can give our fellowman is to share this gift of Christ. Remember, when we save a soul from death, they may share the same salvation with others.

Have you ever dropped a pebble in a lake of still water? If so, you may have noticed that the original ripple caused another, and one by one they spread to others across the lake! Soul saving is the same way. Surely it is wise to save souls.

“The body, that is but dust; the soul, it is a bird of eternity”
(N. Culberwell).

**SATISFACTION FROM THE SOUL -
Proverbs 12:11**

Devotional 41

“He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity (vain things) is devoid of understanding” (Proverbs 12:11).

The wise man lays down a very wise principle in this passage. He is speaking of involvement and accomplishments! We may complain often about having to work, but in the midst of our complaints, there is satisfaction that we are providing for our families. There are those who are unable to work and need help from others, but when undeserved handouts are given, this has a deteriorating effect upon individual lives, and the whole nation.

Old Testament history records how God’s nation, Israel, lived forty years in the wilderness. Since they were in the wilderness and continually wandering, God took care of their physical needs. He rained down their food from heaven in the form of manna, and when they cried for meat, He sent them quail. You would think that they were the happiest people on earth, but this was not so. In fact, those forty years were spent in murmuring and complaining, and God had to punish them continually. Perhaps many things caused this, but surely much dissatisfaction came because they did not work to earn their own bread.

The New Testament places strong emphasis on the importance of working with our hands to provide for self and family. Paul wrote the Ephesians that one should ***“..labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28)***. He instructed the Thessalonians to: ***“..to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you”***

(1 Thessalonians 4:11). "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" and "that they work in quietness and eat their own bread" (2 Thessalonians 3:10,12). Perhaps Paul's strongest statement on this subject was made to Timothy, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

Therefore, count it a blessing to be able to work. The giveaway programs may seem appealing, but if one can earn his own bread with his hands, satisfaction will be received.

Even before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God wanted man to be busy with his hands. **"Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Genesis 2:15).** As one writer expressed it: "No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling the field, as in writing a poem" (Booker T. Washington).

"The fruit derived from labor is the sweetest of all pleasures" (Vauvenargues).

STUCK ON SELF - Proverbs 12:15

Devotional 42

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise" (Proverbs 12:15).

The wise man here is against the sin of pride. Spurgeon begins one of his sermons with these words: "Pride is so natural to fallen man that it springs up in his heart like weeds in a watered garden. Pride is a sin with a thousand lives. It is a sin with a thousand shapes."

Did you notice that Solomon referred to the one blinded by pride as a fool? Even though his way is foolish, it is right in his own eyes, and because of pride, he refuses counsel from others. Why should he harken to counsel when he knows so much himself? This is the road in which pride leads.

Paul warned the Christians at Rome, "***Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.***" They were also warned that one is "***not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think***" (Romans 12:16,3). It is right to think highly of self, but the warning is not to think "***more highly than he ought.***" When this happens, the sin of pride is present, and being sold on the greatness of self, leads one to ignore counsel from others.

When we compare ourselves and our thinking to God, we become so small. God's Word reminds us: "***For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out***" (1 Timothy 6:7). Job was a man who had great wealth, fame, and wisdom until God allowed the devil to try him. This was done by removing all the things that man had used down through the centuries to feel highly exalted and puffed up. However, all of this did not destroy Job because he had avoided the sin of pride. His response to his losses was, "***Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall***

I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

This is the kind of attitude that God accepts, but those who are always right in their own eyes (full of pride) He will refuse. ***"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).***

Do you remember the Old Testament account of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon? He reached the point where he exalted himself above God. One day as he walked in the palace he asked, ***"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty" (Daniel 4:30).*** With this attitude, God drove him from the palace to roam as a beast and to eat grass as oxen. God still hates the sin of pride today!

"We rise in glory as we sink in pride" (Young).

Devotional 43

"He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. A righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame" (Proverbs 13:3,5).

As Solomon speaks of keeping one's mouth, he is referring to one who is able to control his tongue. The mouth can become a way of expressing all kinds of evil, or with the mouth kept, one can stop lying, cursing, and gossiping. Notice that each individual is assigned with the responsibility of keeping his own mouth. I can't keep yours, and you can't keep mine. We can encourage each other to use our tongues properly, but it finally comes down to an individual responsibility. The Psalmist had this in mind when he wrote: ***"Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile" (Psalm 34:13).***

How does one keep his mouth? By closing it so that no lying, slander, gossip, profanity, vulgarity, or angry words get out. Our fleshly nature wants to engage in these things, but be assured, that instead of helping, these will destroy!

When one keeps his mouth, Solomon says that he keeps his life. Just think of the situations we get ourselves into in life because we fail to keep our mouths. We may have to face the fact that we have damaged someone's reputation, discouraged someone who is already struggling, or lost our Christian influence. Just think of the tender lives (our children) who are molded in the way of sin because of unkept mouths. However, when we are able to close our mouths against all of these evils, we can help others to be strong. In regard to committing evil, our Lord Jesus closed His mouth. Peter wrote of Him: ***"Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth; who,***

when he was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:22,23).

Someone may say, "Yes, but that was Christ, and we are not expected to do the same." Look at the verse before, ***"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps" (v. 21).*** Jesus kept His mouth from evil, and He expects us to follow His steps.

Solomon further states: ***"A righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame."*** A righteous man hates lying because God hates it! The wicked man becomes loathsome and comes to shame. When he opens his mouth to sin, he brings shame to his life. Do you respect a liar? How do you feel about those who lie to you? Do you enjoy their presence? Truly they are repulsive. Therefore, take the advice of Solomon and keep your mouth from evil.

"Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle that fits them all" (O. W. Holmes).

POOR, BUT RICH - Proverbs 13:7

Devotional 44

“There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches” (Proverbs 13:7).

Often we determine being rich or poor by the amount of money one possesses. This is certainly one definition for riches, but it is not the best one. The richest people in the world may have only enough money to survive. They are rich in the more important things of life.

They are rich because they know God and His Son as Savior. The true Christian has been born into God's family. Jesus taught, *“I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5)*. Paul wrote, *“And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:17)*. To be “heirs of God” means that one will inherit the riches of God. There is none richer than God, for He has in His hands heaven, earth, and all creation. In fact, the finite mind can never comprehend the riches of God. Without doubt, the Christian is rich!

Since a Christian has surrendered his life to God, he has righteousness. The Word of God considers righteousness of far greater value than earthly treasures. Solomon wrote, *“The LORD will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but he casts away the desire of the wicked.” “In the house of the righteous there is much treasure.”* Then he compares the gains of the wicked to the righteous: *“Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 10:3; 15:6; 10:2)*.

The faithful Christian is rich even though he has few earthly riches, when he has a Christian family and friends. These are things that money cannot buy. Money will buy those who pretend to love, who pretend to be friends, but the real thing is the true treasure. Again, Solomon speaks of the value of true friendship in these words: ***“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10).***

Therefore, we can see that one may be poor in earthly goods, and still be rich from God. Thinking on these principles inspired me to write the following poem:

“I do not ask, dear Lord, that life may be
Always a pleasant road beneath my feet
Nor paths to walk where thorns prick not my feet
I do not ask dear Lord, for flowers along the way
Where only shines the sun in soft array
But this I ask, and pray that it may be
That when I walk in storm or calm,
That you, dear Lord, will walk with me” (bbb).

“He is not poor that has little, but he that desires much” (Daniel).

**IF DESPISE THE WORD, DESTROYED -
Proverbs 13:13**

Devotional 45

"He who despises the word will be destroyed, but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded" (Proverbs 13:13).

To despise the Word of God is not limited to hating it, but the context seems to suggest one who does not study and obey it. There are millions today who do not hate the Word of God, neither do they love it. How are some of the ways we may despise the Word?

(1) We despise it when we refuse to study it. We say by our actions that we don't need it, and that we can work out our lives without its guidance. Timothy was commanded to: ***"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).*** Since study causes one to be approved of God, failing to do so will bring His disapproval. Jesus said, ***"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).***

(2) We despise the Word when we study, but refuse to obey it. God never intended His book to be simply good reading material. He desires that it moves and influences lives, for it is a way of life. ***"For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:23).*** Therefore, we must do the things contained in the Word. James wrote, ***"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22,25).***

(3) We despise the Word if man-made doctrines are substituted. Some seem to think that they can improve upon the Word by their additions and subtractions, but they are wrong. There are so many warnings against changing God's Word. ***"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).***

The greatest warning against despising the Word by adding man-made doctrines comes from Jesus: ***"And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).***

"Nobody ever outgrows scriptures; the book widens and deepens with our years" (Spurgeon).

**THE WAY OF THE UNFAITHFUL IS HARD -
Proverbs 13:15**

Devotional 46

“Good understanding gains favor, but the way of the unfaithful is hard” (Proverbs 13:15).

The devil has deceived millions to believe (over the centuries) that sin is the easy way, and when one sins, he has freedom and can do as he pleases. What the devil fails to relate is the fact that freedom in sin brings slavery. The young man in the parable of the prodigal son, left home and went to a far country seeking freedom. He obtained his inheritance, and in a far country wasted it in wild living. He turned his back on home with all its restrictions—he went all out for freedom! Did he find it—did he find happiness? Let the Bible answer: *“But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine” (Luke 15:14,15).*

He lost the very thing he went out to seek. At this point he was ready to return home as one of his father’s servants. Before leaving home he said, *“Give me the portion of goods that falls to me,”* but after his experience with sin he said, *“Make me like one of your hired servants.”*

Can you begin to imagine the amount of pain and suffering that come to our lives today because of sin? Physical bodies are destroyed, mental attitudes become sick, homes are destroyed or become unhappy, and guilt pains are carried because of sin. This is not to say that all suffering comes from our sins, because those who are closest to God, still have diseases and pain. However, be assured that there is so much pain that is self-inflicted because of sin. Therefore, it is true that the way of the unfaithful is hard even in this life.

At this point, may we be reminded of another truth. The way of the unfaithful does not begin and end with this life. God's Word reveals that His most severe punishment comes after death—eternally! ***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:7,8).***

There are those who try to discredit the idea of eternal punishment, but to do so is to discredit the Bible. If you believe the Lord Jesus offers salvation to the saved, you must believe that He promises eternal destruction to those who are not saved! For Jesus taught both principles! Truly, the way of the unfaithful is hard!

“When the world dissolves, all places will be hell that are not heaven” (Marlowe).

**ENVIRONMENT IS IMPORTANT -
Proverbs 13:20**

Devotional 47

“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20).

Solomon is saying in this proverb that environment is important; a good environment can help, and a poor one can harm. This is a truth that most of us know from experience, for we become like our environment.

“A story is told of a man who had a canary which sang sweetly. When summer came, the man thought it was a pity to keep the canary indoors, so he hung its cage out in a tree in his yard.

This tree was frequented by sparrows in great numbers. Before long the canary’s song lost much of its sweetness, and by the end of summer it couldn’t sing like a canary any more at all. All it could do was twitter like an English sparrow. It had spent the summer in bad company, and it had become like them, and so had lost its finest gift” (Hallock).

Why did Peter deny his Lord three times? Many reasons have been given; however, the one that seems to set the stage for all others is the fact that he joined the company of the enemies. ***“But Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire” (Mark 14:54).*** By getting away from Jesus and into the company of the enemy, it became a temptation to deny Him.

Our children will grow up to be like their home environment. We may tell them not to imitate the things that are evil, but more than likely, they will. If the environment is good, the changes are great that they will seek the good. Also their

environment away from home is important, but we may not be able to always control this. However, if they have had the right influence at home, they can overcome much evil from outside.

The true answer to good environment is Christianity lived in its purity. The Christian family not only sets the proper environment at home, but the church lends a helping hand. This is done from the pulpit, Bible classes, and Christian fellowship. Thus, the proper environment must begin with parents. If we will keep our lives (as much as possible) from evil influence, then we can better help our children.

Therefore, we can see that one's environment is a forceful thing. It can make or break our lives, it can help us stay close to Christ, or it can drive us away. Will you seek a richer environment?

"The life of a faithful Christian man is a guide to paradise"
(Kempis).

Devotional 48

“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24).

Here Solomon is speaking of discipline in the sense of physical punishment. This is not the only form of discipline, but it is (in many cases) an effective one. There are two major ways this type of discipline for children has been abused. (1) There are parents who totally spare the rod. They talk and scream at their children, but never apply the rod. In the words of this text, Solomon says that ***“He who spares his rod hates his son.”*** Why is this true? Because this son will grow up unable to cope with life. He will not know the true meaning of self-discipline, because he was never trained. Solomon further advises: ***“Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction. Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Proverbs 19:18; 22:15; 29:15,17).*** Therefore, those who refuse to discipline their children, those who fail to physically punish them, abuse the God-given principle of discipline.

(2) Another form to discipline abuse is to render physical punishment in an excessive manner, and for the wrong purpose. We certainly can have no respect for those who practice child abuse. Not only is this harmful to the child's health and training, but it is contrary to God's will. Physical punishment should always be done out of love and concern for the child.

One of my college professors told this experience. He and his family were visiting his mother. His little boy kept going around in the yard turning over the watering containers for the chickens. After the first time, this father talked to his little boy and explained that he should not do this again. "If you do, daddy will have to punish you." A short time later, the little fellow disobeyed and turned all of them over. The father took him by the hand and said, "Let's go behind the barn, I'm going to spank you." As they started out, the boy said, "Daddy, I won't every turn them over again." The father said, "I hope you won't, but I still must spank you." They went a few steps further and again he said: "Daddy, I'm sorry I disobeyed you." The dad replied, "I'm glad you feel that way, but I must still give you that spanking." As a last plea, the little boy stopped his dad, looked up into his face and said, "Dad, I sure do love you."

Almost unable to hold back the tears, he said, "Son, I love you, too and that is why I must punish you." He gave him a good spanking, but he said it was the hardest thing he had ever done. This little fellow experienced discipline with love. This is the only kind that God accepts today.

"Someone says, 'Boys will be boys;' he forgets to add, 'Boys will be men.'

MOCKING AT SIN - Proverbs 14:9

Devotional 49

“Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is favor” (Proverbs 14:9).

Sin is the most deceptive thing in the world because it comes from the devil who is a liar and very crafty. Most people do not take sin seriously. They look at it and see only the allurements, but should the veil of deception be removed, they would see pain, misery, and death. We like to categorize sins into “little,” “big,” and “grievous.” Some sins we even feel are not so bad. Don’t be deceived, for all sins (even those we consider small) are deadly. Someone has rightfully said, “Change a single line of a portrait, and you will destroy the likeness. So a single sin will destroy our likeness to God.” The wages of sin never change with the passing of years—it is always death (*Romans 6:23*). It has always been true, and is still so today, that if we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption (*Galatians 6:8*).

When one makes sport of sin and does not recognize its ability to destroy, he will soon be overcome. Sin, like the octopus, has many tentacles, and one by one each of these winds itself until the victim is totally bound. As one writer describes it: “The cruel tentacle of one transgression is quickly followed by others, if the first is permitted to get a grip upon its victim” (Hugo). Thus, we can see that the further one goes into sin, the more he will be tempted to remain. “Sin is never at a stay; if we do not retreat from it, we shall advance in it; and the further on we go the more we have to come back” (Borrow).

Just think of the millions who believe that a life of sin brings supreme happiness! They believe that to invest in sin is their greatest bargain. They are wrong, in fact, they are dead wrong!

A twelve-year old boy was talking to a crippled, old man who was sitting on the park bench. The boy asked, "How come you are crippled?" The man replied, "A twelve-year old boy did this to me!" Immediately the boy became all eyes and ears - this was his age! "Yes," said the man, "When I was twelve years old, I began to use tobacco; now my lungs do not work properly. A few years later, I began to drink beer and then whisky; that damaged my brain. Along with the drinking and smoking, I began to gamble. Now I have nothing to my name; I lost everything; I am a poor, broken-down old man. Yes, sir; a twelve-year old boy did this to me" (Church Newsletter).

The next time you are tempted to view sin as a pleasant enjoyable experience, take a closer look and see a deadly, poisonous serpent ready to strike.

"He that hath slight thought of sin never had great thoughts of God" (Owen).

THE WAY OF DEATH - Proverbs 14:12

Devotional 50

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

This is considered to be one of the most serious warnings in the Bible. In fact, ***“a way that seems right”*** represents a leading doctrine of the devil. Have you not heard it said often that it doesn't matter what you believe in religion, just so you are honest and sincere? Be assured, it does matter to God! Just because a religion seems right, does not make it right. Solomon said, ***“But its end is the way of death!”***

As Jesus pictured the Judgment Day, He described those who will plead with Him based on the works they have done. However, their works will not be according to the will of the Father, and they will be lost. Jesus said: ***“Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!’ ” (Matthew 7:22,23).*** Why were these rejected? Just before speaking of these evil doers, Jesus said, ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).*** These had prophesied, had driven out demons, and had even performed miracles (at least this is what they could claim). However, they had not done these according to the will of the Father. Their way had seemed right to them, but it will bring death at the Judgment.

Some may consider the Lord unjust for being this strict, but we don't feel this way when it comes to His laws of nature. Suppose a glass of milk is set before a man to drink that contains deadly poison. However, the man is told that this milk

is 100% pure. He sincerely believes this and drinks it all, but in a few seconds he dies! Why? Because he violated a law of nature. All of his honesty and sincerity did not keep the poison from killing him, because poison is no respecter of persons. The same God who made the laws of nature, made the spiritual laws. His way is based on love, but God insists that we obey Him. It is not enough for one's religion to seem right, it must be right.

Have you obeyed the commandments that the Lord has asked you to obey to become a Christian? Are you worshipping Him according to His teaching? In short, are you following His way? The way of man may seem right, but in the end it leads to death.

“Doing the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about His plans” (McDonald).

**ENVY, ROTTENNESS OF THE BONES -
Proverbs 14:30**

Devotional 51

A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones" (Proverbs 14:30).

The wise man in this short passage describes two conditions of the heart. One is at peace and happy while the other is full of envy and corruption. When there is envy, all peace is driven from the heart. The expression, "**Rottenness to the bones**" is a strong illustration. Our bodies depend on good sound bones for health. Envy then, destroys the man! It certainly brings more harm to the one who has envy, than to the one being envied.

A beautiful character of the Old Testament was Joseph. Among the many arrows that were shot at him was one called envy. His father loved him and recognized his greatness, and favored him by giving him a coat of many colors. Although it was not intended, this brought the fiery arrow of envy from Joseph's brothers. The longer they observed his goodness, the more envy rotted their bones. Finally they reached the point to desire murder. Reuben, however, pled for his life and they placed Joseph in a pit, but this did not stop their envy. For later on, they sold him into slavery and devised a plot to deceive their father. Surely Jacob, his father, spoke the truth in later years when he said of Joseph: "**The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him, and hated him**" (Genesis 49:23).

Even the definition of envy suggests rottenness to the bones. It means: "To feel displeasure at the excellence or prosperity of another; to grudge; to have malice; or illwill" (Webster). Envy destroys all peace of mind.

Do you have envy in your heart? If you answer yes, do you feel that you can be happy if it remains there? Be assured, no

person can have happiness with envy. Solomon later speaks of the sin of envy and jealousy: ***“Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, but who is able to stand before jealousy?” (Proverbs 27:4).*** The answer implied is “None can stand!” James makes this statement: ***“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there” (James 3:16).*** It is obvious then, that one cannot be a Christian and harbor envy.

It is true that in our weaker moments, envy may appear, but we can drive it out. This may not be easy, but once we realize fully that there can be no peace of heart where envy dwells, we will find a way to remove it.

“Envy has no other quality but that of detracting from virtue” (Livu).

HOPE IN DEATH - Proverbs 14:32

Devotional 52

“The wicked is banished in his wickedness, but the righteous has a refuge in his death” (Proverbs 14:32).

Death is a subject we like to avoid, but it is in our midst daily just as surely as life. In our more serious moments, we might think about dying someday, but even then we like to believe that it is far into the future. Why is the thought of death so painful? Why do we fear it so much? First of all, we fear death because there is created in us the desire to live. It is therefore natural to fight for life. However, this is not the fear implied in this text. The fear that is really serious is that which comes when a wicked person faces death. This wicked one has trusted his own strength, and now death will bring him down.

It is different with the righteous - even in death they have a refuge. When Paul thought of dying, he spoke of ***“Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23).*** ***“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).*** Paul had great hope for those who die in the Lord. ***“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).*** When Paul thought of death for the Christian, he thought of winning a victory. To the Corinthians he wrote: ***“So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54,57).***

Death to the saved is life—everlasting life! The following quotation is from a man with hope: “I remember a year ago

when a man in this city said, 'You have got to go to your death!' I walked out to where I live, five miles out of this city, and I looked across at that mountain that I love, and I looked at the river in which I rejoice, and I looked at the stately trees that are always God's own poetry to my soul. Then in the evening I looked up into the great sky where God was lighting His lamps, and I said: 'I may not see you many more times, but, Mountain, I shall be alive when you are gone; and, River, I shall be alive when you cease running toward the sea; and, Stars, I shall be alive when you have fallen from your sockets in the great down-pulling of the material universe!'"

Yes, the righteous have a refuge in death.

"This world is the land of the dying; the next is the land of the living" (Tryon Edwards).

**RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTS A NATION -
Proverbs 14:34**

Devotional 53

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

More truthful words could not be written. This truth is not only recorded here, but is illustrated throughout the Bible. There is a reason why righteousness exalts a nation. It is exalted because such a nation pleases God. It is both a biblical and historical fact that God has blessed nations that were righteous. The history of America almost staggers one's imagination when considering how God has blessed her. Our forefathers founded this nation on principles of righteousness as they called upon God's blessings. God has truly blessed us and continues to do so. Millions in America still believe that God is providentially guiding this nation.

Benjamin Franklin expressed it correctly at the Constitutional Convention when he said: “I have lived, sir, a long time and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall without His notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without His aid?”

Yes, God has blessed America, but we must never forget the last part of this text. After declaring that righteousness exalts a nation, he adds, *“But sin is a reproach to any people.”* Be assured that if we continue to leave His righteousness and plunge ourselves into sin, He will withdraw His blessings. Some may feel, “O, God would never turn against America!” He turned against the holy city of Jerusalem, and against the nation of Judah because of sin. Consider the words of Isaiah against Judah and Jerusalem:

“How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them. Therefore the Lord says, The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will rid myself of my adversaries, and take vengeance on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy. I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isaiah 1:21-26). Do some of these problems sound modern? Has God changed?

If America wants God to continue His blessings, we must turn to righteousness!

“God is a circle whose center is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere” (Empedocles).

Devotional 54

“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

This is a truth that most people will not take seriously. They may admit that it is true, but live as though it is false. Somewhere down in our hearts we may feel that we can hide from God.

The story is told of a father (with a five year old boy) who was known for stealing. Each evening about dusk, he would leave his son alone, and would go out to steal. One evening, without the father's knowledge, the little boy followed him. The man went to a neighbor's corn crib and the little boy watched him through a knot hole. Before filling his sack with corn, he looked to the right, left, in front, and behind him, then hurriedly began to fill his sack. Can you imagine the emotions of this father when his son said through the knot hole: "Dad, you forgot to look up!"

Why had he looked in all directions except up? Because he didn't fully believe that the Lord's eyes were on him. You see, we are sometimes successful in hiding from our fellowman, and we get to thinking that we can hide from God. However, this is impossible, for the eyes of the LORD are everywhere!

Jesus must have had this in mind when He said: ***“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).*** These described by the Lord thought they could hide their evil deeds with darkness. Jesus further comments on this subject when He said: ***“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20).***

These are deceived in thinking they can hide from God—even in the blackest of darkness.

David learned, during the course of his experience with sin, that there is no place above, below or in between in which one may hide from God. ***“Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ Even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from you, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to you” (Psalm 139:7-12).***

Be assured, though, that the same eyes of God that see the evil, also see the good.

“He who sins against men may fear discovery, but he who sins against God is sure of it” (Jones).

**PRAYER THAT DELIGHTS THE LORD -
Proverbs 15:8**

Devotional 55

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight” (Proverbs 15:8).

There are many prayers offered to God, but not all please Him. Some are prayed without faith, but James says of such: ***“For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:7).*** Some pray to be seen of men. Jesus said: ***“Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Matthew 6:5).*** Some live purposefully a life of sin, and then pray when in trouble. The Bible teaches: ***“Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, he hears him” (John 9:31).***

There is perhaps nothing that has been abused more than prayer. Many seem to have the idea that God does not have any restrictions on prayer, but He does. To those who are God's children, who are seeking to do His will; living their lives by faith and walking uprightly, prayer is so important. This is what pleases God. To show you how much importance Jesus placed on prayer, out of the one hundred and eleven verses in the sermon on the mount, He devoted eighteen directly to prayer. Therefore, the heart of this great sermon is prayer.

Prayer that pleases God is one of God's greatest blessings upon mankind. This is emphasized when we consider the real reasons for prayer. An elderly woman, who was known to spend much time in prayer, was asked one day by a skeptic, “Why do you pray?” The woman replied, “There are three simple reasons. First, I am so weak. Second, I need God's help, and finally, God does help me when I pray.” Greater reasons could not be given.

Do your prayers please God? Does He consider you upright in your life? The closer we are to God, and the greater our faith is in Him, the more prayer will mean to us. Then our prayers will be in behalf of others as well as ourselves.

An unknown author penned this prayer: "Lord, help me to live from day to day/ In such a self-forgetful way/ That even when I kneel to pray/ My prayers will be for others./ Help me in all the work I do/ To ever be sincere and true./ And know that all I do for you/ Must needs be done for others./ And when my work on earth is done./ And my new work in heaven's begun./ May I forget the crown I've won/ While thinking still of others./ Others, Lord, yes others./ Let this my motto be./ Help me to live for others/ That I may live like Thee."

Yes, the prayer of the upright pleases God.

"Prayer is the wing wherewith the soul flies to heaven"
(Ambrose).

Devotional 56

“A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (Proverbs 15:13; 17:22).

It is a proven fact that the way we feel in our hearts (our inner selves) affects our health. Thus, our countenance tells what is in the heart. Solomon is saying that laughter is a good medicine, and that happiness improves one's health. Assuming that we accept this concept, the question might be raised, “How does one obtain this happiness and laughter?” It must begin with the heart! You could wear your face muscles out forcing smiles and laughter, but all would fail without the heart.

Since the heart is so important to true happiness, what is it? The heart, as Solomon uses it, is the mind, emotions, and will. Thus, the inner person. When we are happy in the heart, it can't be hidden on the outside. How does one make the inner person happy? Let's consider a few suggestions:

(1) Get your priorities right about your life. What is your purpose in life? What is important to you? This will keep all the trivial matters from destroying your happiness.

(2) Lift your sight above yourself and this life. This is so important since so many things of this life bring pain and disappointment. If we focus only on self and physical things, when they let us down, we have nothing left for happiness. The Christians of the first century could rejoice even when beaten, imprisoned, and persecuted. Why? Because they looked beyond self and earthly circumstances for happiness.

The Psalmist David learned this: ***“I WILL lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm***

121:1,2). Therefore, because he lifted his eyes to the hills (to the Lord) he could say at death: ***“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me” (Psalm 23:4).***

(3) To make the inner person happy, one should avoid selfishness. It is right to respect self, but too much concern for self, without any concern for others, brings unhappiness. It is not easy to follow the commandment to love our neighbor as ourself, but it gives us a great feeling.

(4) Plan to be happy. When you feel sad, work to turn things around. Seek happiness, but never seek the wrong kind. Never do those things that are wrong, because any happiness found this way will be short-lived.

“It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness” (Spurgeon).

LOVE IS BETTER THAN WEALTH
Proverbs 15:16,17

Devotional 57

“Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred” (Proverbs 15:16,17).

Millions have not learned the real meaning of love. They seem to think that wealth (with the glitter of gold) will satisfy even without love, but they are mistaken. Love is an ingredient that supersedes all others because God is love. Those who struggle for happiness without love will come up empty. Love is so important that it must have priority in our religion, marriage, home, and friends. When Jesus was asked about the first and greatest commandment, He answered, ***“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37,39).***

There are those today who are questioning God’s arrangement for the husband to be the head of the wife: ***“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and he is the Savior of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).*** However, this is a perfect arrangement when *verse 25* is considered: ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.”*** Those who usually complain about the husband being the head are those who are not loved. When there is the proper love, she will not hesitate to obey God’s admonition: ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).*** When husbands love their wives as their own bodies, ***(Ephesians 5:28)***, they will not abuse their headship.

There are those today who are crying for equal rights concerning husbands and wives, and they would try to make us believe that the majority of women are unhappy in their relationship with their husbands. However, they overlook the fact that there are thousands of wives with husbands who love them. They have their God-given rights as women, and are very important to their husbands and children. Although their husbands watch over them, protect them, and provide for them, they feel happy because of the presence of love.

Be assured that any type of arrangement will not bring happiness when love is absent. The apostle Paul declares that even the major principles of religion will fail without love. ***“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1,2).***

“The heart of him who truly loves is a paradise on earth; he has God in himself, for God is love” (Lamennais).

THE PATH OF LIFE - Proverbs 15:24

Devotional 58

“The way of life winds upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell below” (Proverbs 15:24).

Here, Solomon is saying that one either chooses the path of life upward or he goes downward to hell. It becomes obvious that only two ways are presented—either up or down, life or hell! Throughout the centuries, many have tried to invent a third way. They desire to walk with one foot on the path of sin, and the other on righteousness. They do not wish to go all out for the devil, neither do they wish to go all out for the Lord. The Lord does not recognize this type of walk. The path either leads upward or downward, either to life or death. In the words of Jesus: ***“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. . . He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad” (Matthew 7:13,14; 12:30).***

When Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden, she had to decide which direction to look. On the one hand was God upward, and on the other, the devil downward. God commanded her not to eat the forbidden fruit, the devil told her it was profitable to eat. God told her it would bring death, the devil told her it would bring a better life. This first couple looked in the wrong direction!

Among the many things accomplished when we choose the path of life upward, is that we avoid going downward. It is certainly great to anticipate the joys of heaven, but it is also great to anticipate missing the punishment of hell. Since the path upward brings life, it follows that the path downward

brings death. Why does the path upward bring life? Because this path brings one to Jesus who is life! Jesus said to Thomas: ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).***

“Sir John Lubbock, lecturing once on ‘The Fall of the Leaf,’ ” brought into the lecture room the branch of a tree. The dead leaves were still hanging on it, though it was spring and the branch was cut off in the autumn. They had not fallen off because there was no new, living sap coursing through the branch to push them off. It is the current of new life from Jesus Christ that alone can push off bad habits from our lives, and enable us to bear leaves and flowers and fruit” (Peloubet).

Which path are you following? Upward or downward.

“One life; a little gleam of time between two eternities; no second chance for us forever more” (Carlyle).

**THE SILVER-HAIRED HEAD
A CROWN OF GLORY - Proverbs 16:31**

Devotional 59

“The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31).

Millions grow old faster because they worry about growing old. Why do so many worry about growing old? Because they never stop to consider their many blessings from their extended life. They see only the bad, without seeing the good! Yes, it is true that old age brings its weaknesses and infirmities, but it also brings its share of blessings. It is so important that we recognize these blessings, because we can never turn time back to youth. George Burns may sing: “I wish I was eighteen again,” but as he sings, he gets older! We may seek the fountain of youth, but it does not exist in this life. Therefore, we must learn to grow old gracefully as we count our many blessings. Please consider some of the blessings that can be found with the silver-haired head:

(1) Those of old age have been given many years to live. Just think of the hundreds of people whom they have seen die young. Some were cut off in youth, while others in the prime of manhood and womanhood. They have been permitted to see the changing of seasons with all of nature’s splendor and glory many, many times. At least the majority, have been able to watch their precious children grow up to have their own homes and children. So many have known the thrill of being with their grandchildren. Even though some can talk for hours about their past, there are still so many joys that they have forgotten.

(2) They have had time and opportunity to serve the God who made and sustains them. Solomon describes the silver-haired head as a crown of glory, *“if it is found in the way of righteousness.”* Here is the secret! What you are, and your

relationship to God today will determine what kind of old person you will be. Have you ever heard someone ask: "I wonder what kind of old man or woman I will be?" That's easy! Just look at your life while young. It is a mistake to believe that godliness is only for the elderly. Thus, if you want to be kind, gentle, compatible, and spiritual when old, then grow that way from youth.

(3) Those who are old have had time to prepare for eternal glory. Even though old age brings feebleness and death, to the godly, it also brings eternal life. The aged who die godly will never get old again. ***"Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day"*** (2 Corinthians 4:16).

What is your attitude toward growing old? How do you feel about the silver-haired head? Do you consider it a curse or a crown of glory? Follow the way of righteousness, and it will be a crown of glory!

"In old age life's shadows are meeting eternity's day" (Adam Clark).

Devotional 60

“Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly” (Proverbs 17:12).

This is the wise man's way of illustrating how dangerous and destructive is the fool. Most of us would fear meeting an angry bear robbed of her cubs because such meeting could mean death. However, we usually are not all that concerned about the folly of a fool. The Bible has much to say about the fool and his ways, and in this devotional message, may we look at some Bible fools.

One is a fool who gives all his energy and time to earthly things without any thought for God and eternity. Jesus described such a fool (***Luke 12:15-20***). Here He tells of a rich farmer who made a fruitful crop, and planned his future without God. After anticipating new and bigger barns for his grain, he said to himself: ***“Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This night your soul will be required to you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ (vs. 19,20).***

This example is being lived over and over today by millions. All their investments are in material things with no thought of after death. This is indeed the folly of a fool.

The Bible further defines a fool as one who does not believe there is a God. The Psalmist spoke of this in these words: ***“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” (Psalm 14:1).*** In making this declaration, he claims to be wise and advanced beyond the thinking of the masses, but he is called a fool. Why? Because he is blind to all the evidence of God found in creation. He foolishly claims that all the design, pattern, and intelligence seen in nature, happened by chance. He foolishly reduces

himself down to nothing more than a highly sophisticated animal having no soul or link with eternity. When he is someday brought before God for judgment, he will recognize his folly.

Jesus classified those who disobey Him as fools. To make this truth more forceful, He compared such to a foolish builder who built his house on the sand. Such building is folly because it will not withstand the storms of eternity. How foolish it would be for one to spend his years on earth in disobedience, only to lose his soul forever!

Have you noticed that all of these Bible fools, and many others, are destructive? They destroy faith, purpose, hope, and the dignity of the human race. Yes, the angry bear robbed of her cubs would be better than the folly of a fool.

"A fool may have his coat embroidered with gold, but it is a fool's coat still" (Rivarol).

A TRUE FRIEND - Proverbs 17:17

Devotional 61

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

One of the most beautiful words in the English language is “Friendship,” and one of the true definitions for friendship is given in this verse: ***“A friend loves at all times.”*** The greatest friend that mankind has ever known is Jesus. The words to the old song are correct: **“WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS.”** He was our friend when we were sinners. Paul recognized this fact in these words: ***“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).*** Jesus not only claimed to be our friend, but He demonstrated it: ***“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).***

What does it take to be a friend of Jesus? He has shown His friendship, but is this sufficient? No, we must accept Him as a friend. In the next verse, He tells who are His friends: ***“You are my friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).*** Thus, we can see that friendship has two hands, each hand reaching out to the other.

After seeing the perfect example of friendship in Jesus, we can seek friendship with others. This too is a rare jewel among the many treasures of life. Be assured that Solomon’s rule, ***“A friend loves at all times,”*** applies to friendships today! Those who claim to be your friends when the sun is shining, but forsake you when the dark clouds gather, are not true friends.

Friendship is so important that it must also be found between husbands and wives if there is true happiness. The Greek language has several words for love—each having a special meaning. The word *eros* means sexual attraction. The word *philia* means friendship, and the word for unselfish service is

agape. When considering the example of husbands and wives, all three of these need to be present for happy, romantic love. There is the sexual attraction, the close friendship, and the need of serving each other. Therefore, you can see that friendship is a very important part of our lives.

How does one make friends? There are many principles involved in this, but Solomon lays down a basic one when he writes: ***“A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24)***. He is saying, “Be a friend, and you will find a friend.”

“Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man” (Sam Walter Foss).

**CONTROLLING ONE'S TEMPER -
Proverbs 17:28**

Devotional 62

“Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive” (Proverbs 17:28).

There is a time to speak and a time to keep silent, however, the hardest of these to do is to keep silent. The old saying: “We too often broadcast when we should be tuned in” is certainly true. James says: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19)*. Why do we fail often to keep silent? There may be many reasons, but failing to control one's temper tops the list. There is no way of knowing the damage done by a temper burning out of control.

Solomon writes: *“A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; for if you deliver him, you will have to do it again” (Proverbs 19:19)*. Yes, there is a price that must be paid by those who refuse to control their tempers. Some have lost their marriages, brutally harmed their children, destroyed friendships, and in some cases, committed murder. It has been said: “More than half the difficulties of the world would be allayed or removed by the exhibition of good temper” (Arthur Helps). “Temper, if ungoverned, governs the whole man” (Shaftesbury).

Thus, we can see that the controlling of the temper will help all, however, doing so is even more important for Christians. There is no way we can be like Jesus, and follow the many principles of Christianity without self-discipline in regard to our temper. The Christian may occasionally slip and lose his temper during a weak moment, but this will be the exception and not the rule. To be a Christian means that one has been converted. This change must also change one's temper.

As one writer put it: "Too many have no idea of the subjection of their temper to the influence of religion, and yet, what is changed if the temper is not? If a man is a passionate, malicious, resentful, sullen, moody, or morose after his conversion as before it, what is he converted from or to? (John Angell James).

An uncontrollable temper causes people to do things that are unreasonable and destructible. There was a man, when I was a teenager, who had a new 1934 model car. One day it stalled, and he got out the crank and tried to start it. After making several efforts with failure, he lost his temper, took that crank and beat out the head lights, and beat large dents into the car. Who really lost on that occasion? Yes, "a hot-tempered man must pay the penalty."

"If religion does nothing for your temper it has done nothing for your soul" (Clayton).

Devotional 63

“The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body” (Proverbs 18:8).

It seems that Solomon is speaking here of the deep wounds that are made by those who gossip. We are often told, “Don’t pay that any attention, you know that person is a gossip!” However, this does not stop the words from doing damage. Often scars are left from malicious words of gossip that never completely heal. You have heard it said: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me!” This is one of the biggest lies ever told. Words do harm us, and the wounds last longer, many times, than those made with physical blows.

Our Lord Jesus had bitter enemies during His ministry. The scribes and Pharisees followed Him daily seeking to harm Him. We do not read where they made attacks physically, but rather their blows were made by the improper use of the tongue. They accused Him of teaching things that were wrong; they changed figurative language into literal, and they even questioned His motives. When He performed a miracle, they gave the devil credit. Jesus was so strong that He met this opposition, but who would deny that they used their tongues forcefully against Him. Even though Jesus could resist them, He was human enough to feel the pain!

Why do the words of a gossip go so deeply?

(1) Because they speak lies. There is a sense in which the truth may hurt because we are proven guilty, but a different kind of pain comes from lies. Others are being told that we are guilty when we are not! This goes deep—this hurts. A gossip session is nothing more than swapping lies.

(2) Because gossip is a form of rejection. We like to have friends and be accepted, but those who are slandering our

names with gossip are enemies, and their mission is to destroy. As one writer put it: "The thoughtless tattling tongue often murders the peace, and blights the good name of others, as surely and wickedly as if inflamed by malice" (C. Simmons).

(3) Because the words of gossip are secondhand. You can spot gossip by looking for these phrases: "Have you heard?" "They tell me;" "Keep this to yourself, but—;" "I don't believe a word of it," and "I heard so-and-so say." Thus, we are being discussed from secondhand information. Remember, "they say" is the biggest liar in the world!

Without doubt, the words of a gossip go down to a man's inmost parts.

"Gossip is like a balloon—it grows bigger with every puff"
(Hodge).

Devotional 64

“Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility” (Proverbs 18:12).

In this passage, Solomon is giving his readers a choice. Choose pride and fall, or choose humility and receive honor. From a human standpoint, the proud heart is appealing. We are often tempted to lift ourselves up to a high position, however, pride is a false premise. It does not represent fact, but rather **PRETENSE**, and this accounts for the downfall.

Notice that this sin of pride is in man's heart. The word heart (as used here) means the intellect, the will, the **INNER** being. Thus, this sin goes deeply into one's **INNER** being. The heart can be a beautiful thing or it can destroy. The prophet Jeremiah wrote of the heart: ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9,10).***

To correct this heart problem, Solomon says: ***“And before honor is humility.”*** Why does God see honor in humility? God knows that beneath humility is courage. The world sees humility and thinks of softness, but it never sees the courage. Macartney illustrates it this way: “In some pathway through a deep glow of the forest you have come upon a jutting rock, covered with green moss, and through it there trickles a tiny cascade. Nothing on earth is softer than that moss, but when you tear away the moss you come upon the cold, naked rock.” Yes, underneath true humility is a strong rock of courage.

Jesus placed a great emphasis on humility when He taught that the greatest in His kingdom are those who have the humility of a little child. After setting a little child in His midst

He said: ***“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4).***

The apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church: ***“And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:2).*** To the Philippians: ***“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3).***

Also the apostle Peter gave this instruction: ***“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).***

Finally, James writes: ***“Therefore he says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’ (James 4:6).*** Those who choose humility, choose honor!

“Humility is—to make a right estimate of one’s self” (Spurgeon).

**LIFE AND DEATH IN THE TONGUE -
Proverbs 18:21**

Devotional 65

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

Do you believe that the average person today recognizes the power that is in the tongue for either good or bad? Evidently not, or all would guard it more closely. Solomon is saying in this verse that the tongue is so powerful that it can control life and death! It would be interesting to know how many people in history have lost their lives because of their tongue, and how many have been saved by it. Words spoken by the tongue can destroy or build up; can bring death or life. Jesus must have had this thought when He said: ***“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36,37).***

If we do not recognize the power of the tongue, we will never make an effort to control it. A controlled tongue is not only kept from evil, but is directed toward good. We have a choice as to how we use our tongues. James writes that to control our tongues is to control our whole bodies: ***“For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2).*** He illustrates this point by showing that just as the small rudder controls a large ship and the small bit controls a horse, so the little tongue controls our bodies.

Do you feel that you control your tongue, or does your tongue control you? Is your tongue your enemy or friend? Let us train ourselves daily to keep our tongues under control. When words are of doubt, hold them back. As one writer expressed it: “Give

not thy tongue too great liberty, lest it take thee prisoner. A word unspoken is, like the sword in the scabbard, thine. If vented, thy sword is in another's hand. If thou desire to be held wise, be so wise as to hold thy tongue" (Quarles).

There are times, however, when the tongue should not be stopped. For the tongue holds, not only death, but also life. Solomon may have had in mind a person on the witness stand, or the defender of one's life in court. On a daily basis, lives are saved or lost in court by words. The beautiful side of this is that the spoken truth has saved many lives. One does not need to go to court, however, to give words that bring life. Our words (rightly spoken) can bring hope and joy to many in this life. When we share the words of truth from God's Word, the words we speak point to eternal life.

"If thou desire to be wise, be so wise as to hold thy tongue"
(Lavater).

**A GOOD WIFE - A FAVOR FROM GOD -
Proverbs 18:22; 19:13,14**

Devotional 66

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22).

"A foolish son is the ruin of his father, and the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping. Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD" (Proverbs 19:13,14).

It is obvious to see from these verses that Solomon believed that a good wife was a great possession, but a contentious wife was a burden. This is not only true from the teaching of the Bible, but millions over the years have learned such by experience. When God made woman for man and presented her, He intended that she bring a blessing. Some of the most beautiful pictures of the Bible are found in faithful wives, but some of the ugliest pictures are found in those women who plunged themselves into sin. Therefore, to be a good wife is a God-given challenge, (for those women who seek marriage) and is one of the ways that she can carry out God's purpose.

There are two other reasons why a woman should be a good wife:

(1) She becomes a good wife to make her husband happy. Many men are successful in the business world, but feel like complete failures because their wives are contentious. In this text, Solomon describes a contentious wife as a continual dripping. A continual dripping of water over a period of time is disturbing. Thus, the contentious wife can bring much mental agony to her husband, but the wife who seeks to make her husband happy will bring him joy, and all of his other successes will be sweeter.

(2) A woman should be a good wife because such brings happiness to her own life. It is a fact that when her husband is happy, he will conduct himself in such a way that his wife will also be happy. When a husband, wife, or both fail to be a good companion, both will be unhappy.

Someone might say, "I'd be a good wife, but my husband doesn't deserve such." Sadly, this is often true, however, please remember, one poor wife plus one poor husband does not make a happy marriage. In fact, the wife who becomes contentious because her husband does not measure up, makes him more evil. Did you know that many undesirable husbands in character have been turned around by good wives?

Again, Solomon says that the purpose for man finding a good wife is to find that which is good, and he receives favor from the Lord. Man certainly has his weaknesses, but a good wife can help him overcome these.

Good wives, wherever you are, never lose sight of the fact that you are bringing favor from God.

"Of earthly goods, the best is a good wife; a bad, the bitterest curse of human life" (Simonides).

A FALSE WITNESS - Proverbs 19:5,9

Devotional 67

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape” (Proverbs 19:5).

We live in a society today where lying is taken lightly. The reason for this sin is that millions do not believe that lying is so wrong. Be assured though, that God hates a lying tongue. When He gave the basic Ten Commandments to guide His people, Israel, God warned against the sin of bearing false witness. Lying is of the devil (***John 8:44***), and is the number one enemy to truth. When one engages in a lie, he is as far from God as he can go. In fact, it is impossible for God to tell a lie (***Hebrews 6:18***).

Shortly after Christ established His church in Jerusalem, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives because they lied to God. They sold some land and kept back a portion while claiming to give all. Why did they lie? Peter told them that ***“Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself” (Acts 5:3).***

Lying may appear in various forms such as deceit, half-truths, falsehoods, and hypocrisy, but to be a false witness can destroy another person's reputation as well as his physical life. It is wondered how many have been put to death or received lifetime prison terms because of false witnesses! A false witness declares that he saw something that never happened. His lie may stand alone or may be entwined with truth, but in either case, lying destroys. A lie usually does not exist alone, but calls for another and another! ***“One lie must be thatched with another, or it will soon rain through” (Owen).*** Even our Lord felt the hurtful blows of false witnesses. Lies have as their destiny death, and they continue to destroy long after they are

told. "A lie, though it be killed and dead, can sting sometimes—like a dead wasp" (Mrs. Jameson).

In the eyes of man, lies come in all colors and sizes, but in God's eyes, they all are loaded with death, and He hates all of them (**Proverbs 6:17**). Among the population of the eternal fires of hell will be all liars. When a list of those who would burn in eternal fire was given, liars were included. ***"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and ALL LIARS shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).***

How do we deal with those who lie against us? Don't retaliate with another lie, but live in such a way that nobody will believe them!

"A great lie is like a great fish on dry land; it may fret and fling, and make a frightful bother, but it cannot hurt you. You have only to keep still and it will die of itself" (Crabbe).

TOO LAZY TO EAT - Proverbs 19:24

Devotional 68

“A slothful man buries his hand in the bowl, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again” (Proverbs 19:24).

You may have noticed that throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon has condemned the slothful or lazy person. In this text he uses an extreme illustration as he speaks of one too lazy to lift food to his mouth. Most lazy people may not go to this extreme, but it is safe to say that the majority are too lazy to earn their food.

The New Testament also condemns the slothful by enjoining the responsibility to work. Paul wrote: ***“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). “That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you” (1 Thessalonians 4:11).***

Why is it so wrong to be lazy? Notice a few reasons:

(1) Success in this life depends on activity. ***“He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes one rich.” “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a robber, and your need like an armed man” (Proverbs 10:4; 6:10,11).*** There are those who have wealth handed to them without effort, but this is not the general rule. The majority must work with their hands.

(2) Happiness depends on working and providing for our needs. Yes, most of us get tired of working at times, and dream of lazy days of doing nothing, but too much of this would become boring! We must feel needed in this life, and working for self and family, helps. If we can work, but are too lazy to

do so, we lose self-respect and this destroys happiness. ***“He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread” (Proverbs 12:11).***

(3) The Bible also teaches that we should work to be able to share with those who are in need. Some are poor through no fault of their own. It may be due to illness or difficulties beyond their control. In such examples, Paul writes: ***“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28).***

(4) Idleness promotes sin. When we are involved in work, we have less time to engage in sinful things. In the church at Thessalonica where some would not work, Paul heard of other problems: ***“For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies” (2 Thessalonians 3:11).***

“Labor rids us of three great evils—irksomeness, vice, and poverty. A man’s best friends are his ten fingers” (Robert Collyer).

**DECEIVED BY STRONG DRINK -
Proverbs 20:1**

Devotional 69

“Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).

There are so many ways in which mankind can be deceived, but surely intoxicating drink would win first prize. The evil and harm from intoxicating drink are far more painful than any benefits derived; so much that such can hardly be compared. Still, millions foolishly choose destruction, and this is deception! Intoxicating drink promises happiness, burdens lifted, problems solved, and strength, but gives only misery. To help you see the real facts, may we lift the fog of deception and learn why Solomon says that wine is a mocker. If you choose intoxicating drink, you can expect the following:

(1) Harm to your body. It has been a proven medical fact for a long time that drinking alcohol is harmful. Even though the harm is gradual, drink after drink brings erosion to one's health. Millions are in their graves today because they abused their bodies with alcohol.

(2) Harm to others. It is cruel to observe people destroying themselves by drinking, but the picture becomes even sadder to consider the millions who have been harmed although innocent! We are told that about one-half of the automobile accidents which are serious in nature involve drinking. So many innocent people have lost their lives (because of the drinking of others), that some have referred to strong drink as a license to kill. No wonder Solomon wrote that *“whoever is led astray is not wise.”*

(3) Destruction to families. It is wondered how many homes have been destroyed, and how many children's hearts have

ached because of intoxicants? Drinking is truly a leading enemy to the home. When this evil continues to make its attack on a home, the point of “no return” will be reached. Drinking often exposes a family to fighting, lying, neglect, unfaithfulness, child and mate abuse, and finally divorce. Those who allow this to happen must be deceived.

(4) Destruction to your soul. Drunkenness is a sin even though it is considered a disease. The Bible speaks of the drunkard being in a lost condition unless he chooses to repent. Among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, Paul writes, are “drunkards” (***Galatians 5:21***). Anything that is strong enough to destroy both soul and body should certainly be avoided. Therefore, in the face of such destruction, one is very wise NOT to partake. Don’t ever be deceived by this powerful enemy.

“Strong drink is not only the devil’s way into a man, but man’s way to the devil” (Adam Clark).

A PURE HEART - Proverbs 20:9

Devotional 70

“Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin’ ”? (Proverbs 20:9).

If we take this question literally and apply it to the entire human race, there is only one who ever lived on the earth who can say my heart is clean; I am pure from sin. This, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ (***Hebrews 4:15***). For when man is left to deal with sin of his own strength, he fails. ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)***. However, there is a way that man can declare himself clean and without sin. This is accomplished by the blood of Jesus.

When God first made man and woman, their hearts were pure and they were without sin, and no one forced them to give up their purity. Yes, the devil tempted Eve to do so, but she still could have refused. Eve did not force Adam to eat, she simply gave it to him and he ate.

From the moment that sin brought guilt and shame to the human heart, mankind needed cleansing. Since God is pure, only those who are pure in heart will see him (***Matthew 5:8***). How does one become pure in heart to the point that he can say, ***“I am pure from my sin?”*** Try, as one may, a human being cannot keep his heart pure and sinless by his own goodness! God knew this and gave His only begotten Son to die so that man can be pure for everlasting life (***John 3:16***). The sacrifice was expensive, but out of love, Jesus made it. He died for sin and the sinners. ***“But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)***.

Therefore, woman introduced sin by believing a lie, and we are forgiven by believing and obeying the Christ. “All the sin that has darkened human life and saddened human history

began in believing a falsehood; all the power of Christianity to make men holy is associated with believing truth" (Broadus).

The truth that makes one free (*John 8:32*) through Christ is the truth obeyed in love (*Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:22*). Those who come to Christ will believe in Him to the point of obeying His commandments. Since Christ has made the supreme sacrifice, some have looked upon this as a license to sin. However, this is wrong! Those who come to Christ will work daily to overcome sin although they will often falter.

Jesus, along with the New Testament writers, has made it clear how to be cleansed from sin. The sinner is told to believe, repent, confess Christ, and to be baptized for the remission of sins (*Acts 2:38*). When this is done from the heart, one is in Christ where he must remain faithfully. When he works to keep his heart pure, with Christ's forgiveness, his sins are forgiven.

"The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation"
(Luther).

Devotional 71

“Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth will be filled with gravel” (Proverbs 20:17).

Most of us have been taught, or at least have heard the expression over the years, that “honesty pays!” This is certainly a biblical principle and has been proven in the test of life. Then why do so many feel that deceit and dishonesty are the best? Because they taste the immediate sweetness without considering the ultimate outcome. In the words of Solomon, they do not consider the mouth full of gravel that follows. What is the gravel found in one’s mouth who eats food gained by deceit?

(1) Deceit deteriorates our self-esteem. There are those who seem to cheat, steal, and lie without feeling any remorse, but be assured the effects from such evils are present. Yes, some can hide the ill effects better than others, but the damage is still done. When we can’t fully respect ourselves because of a dishonest life, we have destroyed some of our self-respect. “For the most part fraud in the end secures for its companions repentance and shame” (C. Simmons).

(2) Deceit has a way of being found out by others. There are those who feel that they can cheat and never be caught, but most of the time they are wrong. In the Old Testament, we have an example of deceit. When Joshua led Israel’s army against Jericho, they were forbidden to take any personal spoils. Achan decided to take a Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold. He hid them under his tent hoping no one would know. The time came, however, for the truth to be revealed, and he and family were singled out. No doubt, with shame he had to admit that he had stolen the items, and he

and family lost their lives because of his sin. That which started out sweet, became like gravel in his mouth. "Dishonesty is a forsaking of permanent for temporary advantages" (Bovee).

(3) Deceit can never be hidden from God. One might occasionally be successful in hiding from man, but NEVER from God. The early Christians learned this lesson shortly after the church was established. Barnabas had some land, sold it and brought the money to the apostles to help those who were less fortunate. A couple named Ananias and Sapphira also sold land, but kept back part of the price. They evidently agreed to tell the apostles that they were giving the full price. One by one they told their lie and met death! You see, God knew and He knows today. Yes, deceit produces a mouth full of gravel.

"He who purposely cheats his friends would cheat his God" (Lavater).

Devotional 72

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2).

Solomon is not saying that we should not respect ourselves, but rather that we should not reach the point where we let self deceive us. When we control self by the rules of God, we can be sure that our hearts are right. Notice that God is the only one who can determine what is right and wrong, because He weighs the heart. God looks beyond the surface—He looks into the real reasons of our actions as He determines what is in the heart.

Have you ever been guilty of deciding what is right or wrong by what seems right to you? If so, you have been deceived. The inner person, the heart, is the real source of what is going on inside, and God knows how to weigh it. The heart of man may deceive man, but never God. For, He alone knows how to weigh it!

What is meant by God weighs the heart? God searches the heart. To one of the churches of Asia, the Lord said, ***“I am he who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works” (Revelation 2:23).*** We may lie to ourselves—try to deceive ourselves and others, but He knows what is in the heart.

He judges the heart. We are often guilty of observing outward appearances and making judgments, but such judgments are proven wrong. However, this never happens to God because His judgment is based on the heart.

God also understands the needs of the heart. Since the heart determines the real person, ***“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7),*** God rightfully understands the heart. In our lives we may put on a show to deceive others, we

may even play the role of a hypocrite, but all of this has no influence on God. For His judgments come from understanding our hearts. Thus when we feel that no person cares or understands us, turn to God—He does! When our lives are burdened with griefs and problems, turn to God—He understands! Peter wrote, ***“Casting all your care upon him, for he care for you” (1 Peter 5:7).***

“God governs the world, and we have only to do our duty wisely, and leave the issue to him” (John Jay).

Therefore, you are challenged to put more trust in the God who weighs the heart.

“An undivided heart which worships God alone, and trusts Him as it should, is raised above anxiety for earthly wants” (Geikie).

A CONTENTIOUS WOMAN - Proverbs 21:9

Devotional 73

"It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman" (Proverbs 21:9).

Although Solomon specifically refers to a contentious woman who is causing so much unhappiness, he lays down a principle that will apply to many situations. The principle: "It is not WHERE you live that matters the most, but rather HOW you live when seeking happiness." He uses two extremes to get across his point. Living in a house is far more comfortable than living on the corner of a housetop. However, he declares the corner of a housetop better than the comfortable house with a contentious woman. The comfortable house can certainly contribute to one's happiness, if peace is present.

Have you known people who had all the material things needed to make them happy, and yet they were miserable? Or, have you known people with barely the necessities of life, and yet were among the happiest people alive? What makes the difference? It is how we live that counts.

The contentious woman stands for anger, strife, fighting, and in some cases, hating. These kind of actions represent a lack of love. This proverb does not seem to be referring to an occasional lover's quarrel, but rather to an attitude which is part of her life. The man must watch each word he says around her or else he will be throwing fuel on the already burning flame. This kind of situation destroys happiness! Keep in mind, also, that the husband can be contentious with his wife; making her life unhappy.

Why are some husbands or wives contentious? There may be many reasons. Some have accepted such as a way of life, and are not fully aware of the damage being done. Others may

have been reared in an atmosphere of contention. Perhaps their mother, father, or both had this problem. There are others who are this way because they lack a good spiritual background, and maybe they have never been taught to find happiness through peace. However, the greatest cause of such contention is a lack of love. When true love is present, the wife or husband will not purposefully do anything to make the other unhappy.

Helen Keller must have had this idea in mind when she wrote: "Love is like a beautiful flower which I may not touch, but whose fragrance makes the garden a place of delight just the same."

What is the solution for happiness in the light of this proverb? The goal for any man would be to live in a house with a wife where love has crowded out all contentiousness.

"If there is anything better than to be loved, it is loving"
(Anon).

**A GOOD NAME IS BETTER THAN
GREAT RICHES - Proverbs 22:1**

Devotional 74

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1).

As we live our daily lives, the world would have us believe that there is nothing more valuable than great riches. Countless millions of lives and souls have been sacrificed to the glitter and allurements of gold. When Paul wrote that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, (**1 Timothy 6:10**), he was speaking words of truth and wisdom. The long pathway of the human race is covered with lying, cheating, and killing to obtain riches. Money certainly is a necessity and of great value, but Solomon teaches that a good name is more desirable than great riches. For one's name is not limited to that which identifies us, but rather to the person we are and the principles for which we stand. Please consider what Solomon meant by a good name.

(1) A good name suggests honesty. Every faithful Christian should have honesty attached to his name. Paul instructed the Roman Christians: ***“Have regard for good things in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17)***. This includes honesty! How can we claim to live for Christ while wearing the name of dishonesty! Dishonesty brings hard feelings and hatred. As Paul gave Timothy instructions, he exhorted him to pray ***“for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:2)***.

(2) A good name involves having the reputation of a Christian. Have you ever mentioned a person's name to another, and they said, “Oh yes, I know him (her) he's a fine Christian.” This kind

of name comes by living Christ in our daily lives. It's not enough to have your name on a church roll, or to be able to say that you attend worship weekly, in addition to this, our lives must reflect the light of Christ. A good name has a Christian reputation.

(3) A good name radiates truthfulness. Telling a lie is common, but never right, and every lie told, eats away at our name. Have you ever mentioned someone's name, and had this response: "I know him, he's the biggest liar in town. Don't ever believe a word he says." This is what we wish to avoid with our name. However, it's wonderful to hear of another, "That man's word is his bond—you can count on it!"

(4) Finally, a good name that is better than great riches is a name that is faithful to one's family. The way may be rough or smooth, but a good name is faithful all the way.

"A name is a kind of face whereby one is known" (Fuller).

Devotional 75

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

This has been a rule down through the years that many Christian parents have tried to follow. Some parents have seen their children hold on faithfully to their training, while others did their best to train them in the right way, but they went astray. What is the answer? Is Solomon simply stating a general rule, or is it a specific rule where there are no exceptions? Perhaps looking at some of the key words will help.

Observe that he uses the word “train” up a child. The Hebrew suggests that this training start at his beginning. Adam Clark puts it in these words: “Initiate the child at the opening of his path.” Far too many parents do not “strike while the iron is hot!” They wait until the tree is already inclined before beginning their training. This is not the kind of training Solomon had in mind.

Some feel that very little training can be done until the child is old enough to talk. This is so wrong. The training process must begin early. An expectant mother should have already begun his training as she prepared herself to be a mother from an early age. Her attitude and disposition will play a big role in the life of her child. The same principle certainly applies to the father.

What is the difference between teaching and training. Without doubt, they are related, but a child needs more than instruction. He needs to see the proper instruction demonstrated by his parents. “Children have more need of models than of critics” (Joubert). Training involves teaching certain facts, but goes on to help the child experience them. Most children are anxious to try things even though their skills are

undeveloped. We must be patient with them. Sure, you fathers can drive a nail better than your son, and it will take more time for you to let him try. You mothers could cook much faster without the little anxious hands of your daughter helping. Remember though, they are hungry to be trained, and we should do so throughout their lives.

Notice further that Solomon specifies the kind of training: ***“In the way he should go.”*** The apostle Paul in his epistle gives more details. ***“Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).*** They need to be trained in the skills of physical life, but if our training stops here, we have failed. They must also be trained for the Lord. This is more than taking them to Bible Classes and worship, as important as this is! Spiritual training is a daily task, and when they are old, they shall not depart from this type of training.

“The most essential element in any home is God” (Dr. Frank Crane).

**DON'T REMOVE THE LANDMARK, NO. 1 -
Proverbs 22:28**

Devotional 76

“Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28).

The figure used in this proverb was very important during Solomon's time, and is likewise important today. The landmark was that which identified boundary lines. Since they did not have permanent records (as we do today) the removing of a landmark was stealing another person's land. Thus, the command, ***“Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set.”***

As we study the New Testament, it is obvious that many ancient spiritual landmarks are present. These landmarks have been identified by the Lord, and it is a serious matter to remove them. Would you consider briefly some of these:

The ancient landmark specifies that Jesus build only one church—His church. This may contradict modern thinking and the practice of having many churches, however, it is still a fact! Jesus made the following promise to His apostles: ***“I wil build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18)***. As stated in ***Acts 2***, Christ kept His promise and His church was established. Later, the gospel was spread throughout the Roman Empire, and Christians assembled in many cities. These assemblies or congregations of Christians were called churches, but were still a part of the one church which Jesus purchased with His blood (***Acts 20:28***). This is God's ancient landmark, and man has no authority to remove it.

Another important landmark is the fact that Christ is the one head of His church. ***“And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the***

dead. . .” (Colossians 1:18). Also, the Father: “Put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body. . .” (Ephesians 1:21,22). From this passage, it can be seen that the church and the body of Christ are synonymous. .therefore, one body—one church!

Another landmark that was set in ancient times by our Lord is the fact of one faith. It is very common today for man to speak of many faiths, but only one faith was set for the original landmark: **“One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5)**. Many have asked the question, “Of what faith are you?” The question should be, “Are you of the faith?” Paul warned that some would depart from the faith: **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1)**. In further instructions, he said, **“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8)**.

In the next devotional, this subject of the ancient landmark is continued.

“Man is not made to question, but adore” (Young).

**DON'T REMOVE THE LANDMARK, NO. 2 -
Proverbs 22:28**

Devotional 77

"Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28).

In the last devotional, we looked at three important landmarks from the Lord: (1) The one church. (2) Christ the one head. (3) The one faith. Another important landmark is the one type of government in His church. The original landmark had a simplified type of government. Each congregation had men called elders to watch over them. ***"So when they had appointed elders in every church" (Acts 14:23).*** We do not read of one elder overseeing a congregation, but always a plurality of elders. These same men called elders were also called bishops or overseers. To the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul warned: ***"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:28).*** Paul gave two lists of qualifications for these men before they could serve as elders or bishops (***1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9***).

It is likewise a fact that the elders or bishops of one congregation could not rule over any other congregation. Each eldership looked to Christ as the head. Think of how far man has drifted today from this simple pattern with earthly headquarters, archbishops over bishops, deacons filling the office of elders, and preachers pastoring flocks. We need to restore the ancient landmark!

In addition to a local congregation having elders or bishops to watch over it, each church also had deacons to serve. The word deacon means "servant." Although the seven men chosen in (***Acts 6:1-6***) were not called deacons, they give us an example

of serving. Paul's Philippian letter was addressed: "***To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons***" (***Philippians 1:1***). The deacons must also meet certain qualifications as stated in (***1 Timothy 3:8-13***). It is so important to keep this landmark in its original place.

Another landmark that should not be removed is the fact that God's Word was the only guide. The writings of the apostles were inspired of God (***2 Timothy 3:16,17***) which means "God breathed." From this passage it can be seen that they did not need anything else! Peter also declared that "***His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness***" (***2 Peter 1:3***). God's Word is all-sufficient.

These landmarks we have studied represent only a partial list, but the same principles apply to all landmarks set by our Lord. We are warned against removing them: "***But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed***" (***Galatians 1:8***).

"It will cost something to be religious: it will cost more not to be so" (J. Mason).

Devotional 78

“Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven” (Proverbs 23:5).

This is a beautiful way of saying that riches of a physical nature are not permanent. This certainly does not represent the way most people think. The average person feels that riches will solve all problems; that they will make one's life secure. Jesus told of a rich farmer who had this attitude. He thought his abundance and new bigger barns would be all his soul needed. Therefore he made plans without God. However, that very night his soul was required of him, and he had to face the question, ***“Then whose will those things be which you have provided?” (Luke 12:20).*** His riches made themselves wings and flew away like an eagle.

If we accept Solomon's description of riches that fly away, what will we do? We will recognize that there are riches of more value than those of the earth. We will give heavenly treasures more value while seeking God's kingdom first (***Matthew 6:33***). This is what Jesus had in mind when He called upon His audience to, ***“lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:20).*** What are some of the things of more value than money?

(1) Having good health. In (***Acts 3***), Peter and John approached the gate to the temple called beautiful where they found a lame man desiring alms. Peter did not have money to offer, but he had something better. He had the power from the Lord to restore his health. Therefore, he said: ***“Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name***

of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” (vs. 6,7). When Peter lifted him up, what was his reaction? “So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God” (v. 8). This man received more than silver and gold. Since a Christian’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), health should be more valuable than money.

(2) God’s Word. In *(Psalm 19)*, the Psalmist speaks of the ***“law of the Lord,” “the statutes of the Lord,” and “the fear of the Lord.”*** Then he gives them their proper value: ***“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (v. 10).*** Unlike riches, God’s Word will not fly away! Jesus taught: ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away” (Mark 13:31).***

Would you take a second look at the power of wealth to flee, and choose as the rule of your life those things that are lasting?
“No man is so poor as he who has nothing but money.”

Devotional 79

“Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23).

Truth is among the most valuable commodities in the world. There are two major ways that truth can be considered. (1) Truth can be considered in view of presenting facts in all ways of life. Those who will follow God will avoid lies and pursue truth at all cost. In (*Proverbs 3:3*), the wise man calls upon his readers to hold on to truth: ***“Let not mercy and truth forsake you.”*** He further writes: ***“For my mouth will speak truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips” (Proverbs 8:7).*** Speaking truth is the only way one can be righteous: ***“He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit.” “The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (Proverbs 12:17,19).*** Jesus called upon all of His disciples to speak truthfully. In the sermon on the mount, He said: ***“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and Your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37).*** He is saying, when you say “Yes,” mean “Yes,” when you say “No,” mean “No”! Speak the truth.

(2) Truth can be considered in the light of God’s spiritual way of life. Truth, in this sense, begins with Christ. Jesus said to Thomas: ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).*** Since Jesus Himself is truth, His words are also truth. In His beautiful prayer as recorded in (*John 17:17*), Jesus prayed: ***“Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.”*** When you hold the Bible in your hand, you are holding God’s truth. Man has tried to improve upon it by adding to and subtracting from it, but all such efforts represent failure. It is only when His word is

accepted that man finds freedom: ***“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).*** Therefore, Solomon calls upon his readers to buy the truth and sell it not.

This text also implies that truth must be purchased. One must give up many things to purchase truth, but it is so valuable that one should obtain it. There are many temptations to lure us to human reasoning, man-made doctrines, and false teachers, but these must be rejected at all cost to obtain the truth.

Solomon also associates wisdom, discipline, and understanding with truth. Can anything else compare? Since truth is the only thing that God will accept, and Christ’s words are truth, shouldn’t we buy the truth and sell it not? At Judgment Day, all human wisdom will fail, but truth will stand forever.

“Truth is the foundation of all knowledge and the cement of all societies” (Dryden).

DON'T ENVY THE EVIL - Proverbs 24:1,2

Devotional 80

“Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking” (Proverbs 24:1,2).

Down through the centuries the devil has been successful in making millions feel that wickedness is the best way of life. He has pictured the wicked life as being filled with freedom, pleasure, and happiness. Consequently, some who have been seeking the Christian life, have envied the ways of the wicked. Solomon declares, ***“Do not be envious of evil men.”*** Why? He answers, ***“For their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking.”*** Thus, their way may seem to be the good way, but it is not—it is a way of trouble and violence. Although it may (at the time) appear the best way, don't believe it. “If the wicked flourish, and thou suffer, be not discouraged; they are fatted for destruction, thou art dieted for health” (Fuller). Be assured, the wicked are not as happy and contented as they may seem! “Was ever any wicked man free from stings of a guilty conscience—from a secret dread of the divine displeasure, and of the vengeance of another world?” (Tillotson).

In a parable, Jesus told of a young man who requested from his father his share of the estate and traveled to a far country. He soon squandered his money in sinful living. Before leaving home, he must have envied those living this kind of life. Can you imagine his dreams of pleasure and happiness? However, things did not turn out the way he planned. He ran out of money, friends, and food while being forced to hire out to a citizen of that country to feed pigs. He was so hungry that he could have eaten with the pigs, but the Bible says: ***“And no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16).*** This young man

realized (the hard way) that wickedness is not the happy way, and was willing to return home as a hired hand to his father. Fortunately, he returned to the arms of a forgiving father, but the way of the wicked usually does not turn out this well. Therefore, please do not envy wicked men!

Solomon further describes the wicked by saying that violence is in their hearts, and all they talk about is troublemaking. Does this sound like a constructive, happy life? All hope is eternity; all desire to help fellowman is missing from their lives. Sooner or later, these evil and troublemaking thoughts will catch up with them. In fact, they must face them in this life and throughout all eternity. Paul lays down this rule: ***“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption” (Galatians 6:8)***. This is a rule that cannot be avoided. How do you feel about the wicked, do you envy them?

“Wickedness may prosper for a while, but in the long run he that sets all knaves at work will pay them” (L’Estrange).

**WISDOM AS SWEET AS HONEY -
Proverbs 24:13,14**

Devotional 81

“My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste” (Proverbs 24:13).

It is true that honey in all ages of time has been one of nature's best foods. It is one of the few foods that mother nature prepares ready to eat without further preparation, and the taste of honey appeals to the majority. Thus, it is easy to see why Solomon would choose the sweet taste of honey to illustrate true wisdom.

He begins this proverb by commanding his readers to eat honey. All of its goodness and sweetness will not be known, nor of value unless eaten. The same can be said of wisdom. For wisdom to be of value, one must partake of it and seek it. One could live and die without tasting the sweetness of honey, and one could live and die without knowing the sweetness of wisdom.

The Bible divides wisdom into two categories, the wisdom of God, and the wisdom of men. We should remember that only God's wisdom will last, while man's wisdom will fail. Therefore, Solomon is speaking of the true wisdom from God.

“The wise man does three things: he abandons the world before it abandons him; prepares his sepulchre before entering it; and does all with the design of pleasing God before entering into His presence” (Addison). James wrote: **“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5)**. Thus, God is the true source of wisdom.

Solomon should know about wisdom that comes from God, because he received more than any other mere man. When he

became king of Israel, God gave him the opportunity to make a request, and he requested wisdom to rule God's people. ***"And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore." "For he was wiser than all men" (1 Kings 4:29,31).***

An example is given of his wisdom in ***(1 Kings 3)***. Two women came to him, one with a live child and the other with a dead one. During the night one woman's baby died and she had exchanged it while the other mother slept. Therefore, they came to Solomon to solve the mystery—whose baby is alive? His advice: ***"Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other."*** The real mother spoke: ***" 'O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him.' But the other said, 'Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him' "*** (vs. 25,26). Solomon then knew the true mother and gave her the living child. True wisdom brings hope now and forever!

"God gives men wisdom as He gives them gold; His treasure house is not the mint, but the mind."

**THE NEGLECTED VINEYARD -
Proverbs 24:30-34**

Devotional 82

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction; a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so your poverty will come like a prowler, and your want like an armed man" (Proverbs 24:30-34).

The principle laid down in this parable is still true today. Failing to work brings neglect, ruin, and failure in every area of life. Solomon is speaking, in this context, about a physical setting, but the same lessons certainly apply in the spiritual. It seems that neglect, in all areas of life, is a real problem. You see, his laziness caused him to neglect his field and vineyard, and this eventually brought poverty.

Let us take a closer look at why he failed. Was it because he didn't have a vineyard? Was it because he had no fence around his property? No, he had a field and vineyard with a stone wall for protection. He failed because he was lazy and neglected his responsibility.

Many today do not provide for their families because they will not put forth the effort to work. It is true that one may not always get the work he chooses, but if he really wants to carry out his responsibilities and is not lazy, he will choose whatever work is available. Even if the pay is small, he knows that such will keep the home fires burning until something better comes along.

This problem of laziness and neglect becomes even more serious when applied to the soul. It is wondered how many people in their graves today neglected their souls? They knew their God-given responsibility, but neglected to serve. The neglected garden didn't happen overnight. Solomon tells us that it came by: "**A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest.**" However, over a period of time these little things grew into total neglect.

Franklin must have had this thought in mind when he wrote: "A little neglect may breed great mischief; for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost, and for want of a horse the rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by an enemy, all for want of a little care about a horse-shoe nail."

Does God see your soul as a neglected vineyard?

"The best ground, untilled and neglected, soon runs out into rank weeds" (Hall).

Devotional 83

“Debate your case with your neighbor himself, and do not disclose the secret to another” (Proverbs 25:9).

While living our lives upon this earth, there are problems that arise in the field of human relations. Some of these problems are solved easily when we go to the other person and talk it out face to face. This is especially true when both have the right attitude and humility is present. However, this is not the way the majority attempt to solve their problems. Instead of debating their cause to their neighbor, they talk about it to others, and in the process, confidences are betrayed. The longer the problem goes without resolve, the more difficult it is to reconcile.

Jesus gives the proper way to handle this matter: ***“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Matthew 18:15; cf. Matthew 5:23,24).*** Many times the face to face approach brings out facts that remove all misunderstanding. If, however, one or both parties are found to be wrong, each should ask the other for forgiveness. When the problem has been gossiped by others, it makes the restoration of friendship very difficult.

Please remember: “Friendships are fragile things, and require as much care in handling as any other fragile and precious thing” (Bourne). It may require the swallowing of one’s pride, the asking for forgiveness, or the admitting of wrongs. As Christians, we should be willing to do this, and with the desire to save a friendship, we will go the second mile.

In the parable of the prodigal son, when the young man came to himself (after spending all in sinful living), he chose to return home in the humility of a servant. He decided to meet his father

face to face. When he did, the father welcomed him home, not as a servant, but as his son who was lost (***Luke 15:20***).

Jacob and Esau (in the Old Testament) had real problems just before Jacob left home. Esau had planned to kill him after his father died. Several years passed, and the two brothers were in the same country. Jacob was told that Esau had come to meet him with four hundred men. ***“So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed” (Genesis 32:7)***. However, all fear and dread must have vanished in Jacob’s heart when: ***“Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (Genesis 33:4)***. By coming together face to face, they solved their difficulties, and great love was restored!

“A true friend is the gift of God, and he only who made hearts can unite them” (South).

Devotional 84

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

Among the many proverbs of Solomon, this one is listed with the most beautiful. It is easy for us to imagine a picture bearing apples of gold framed with silver. Solomon must have chosen this picture because a word fitly spoken is so beautiful. Words are powerful things either for good or evil. He approaches the use of a word from a helpful standpoint, but the same can be said of a word used to destroy. “Bad words are as influential as the plague and the pestilence. They have wrought more evil than battle, murder, and sudden death. They creep through the ear into the heart, call up all its bad passions, and tempt it to break God’s commandments. A few bad words got into the ear of the mother of mankind, and they led her on to eat the forbidden fruit and thus to bring death into the world” (G. Mogride).

However, as powerful as a word is to destroy, it has the same power to do good. Notice that it must be fitly spoken. It’s not always **WHAT** we say, but **WHEN** and **HOW** we say it. This involves some important principles:

(1) There should be kindness. Paul writes: ***“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31,32).***

(2) A word fitly spoken should also be the truth spoken in love. ***“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).***

(3) A word is fitly spoken when used to comfort the bereaved, to cheer the depressed, and to help anyone in distress.

(4) Words fitly spoken, are so beautiful that God chose the speaking of them to relay His saving message of Jesus to the lost world. Great multitudes have been moved to obey and receive salvation by proper words. The apostle Peter led three thousand to become Christians in (*Acts 2*), by speaking the proper words about Jesus, and we can still present these same apples of gold today.

As one lets his mind stroll through the Bible for an example of words fitly spoken, he must surely consider the words of Ruth to Naomi: ***“Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God”*** (*Ruth 1:16*). These are apples of gold worth framing in silver. Therefore, be sure that your words are fitly spoken!

“Don’t use a gallon of words to express a spoonful of thought.”

**DON'T MAKE YOUR NEIGHBOR SICK -
Proverbs 25:16,17**

Devotional 85

“Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit. Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you” (Proverbs 25:16,17).

As you can see from this proverb, Solomon believed in dealing with problems that apply to all. Honey is very tasty, but also rich and filling. If one eats just enough, he is satisfied and comfortable, but if he eats too much, it will make him sick of honey. This illustration is given to teach a lesson on human relations. Solomon is saying, “If you want your neighbor to love you, don't wear out your welcome.” This is certainly good advice for today.

This is a situation where the golden rule definitely applies. Jesus taught: ***“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).*** We do not wish for our neighbors to be at our house all the time, and we should consider how they may feel the same toward us.

Neighbors are very valuable when all goes well. Although the idea of a neighbor can apply to anyone, we usually think of those living near our homes. Solomon is not suggesting (in this text) that neighbors should not visit and associate, but rather that they should limit their time together. In fact, he uses honey, evidently one of his favorite foods, to describe a neighbor. Just as honey is great and enjoyable unless abused, so the same is true with neighbors!

What are some of the advantages of having neighbors who do not hate us? They can be there to help us in times of need. When Jesus defined a neighbor, He described a man who took

time to help one who had been beaten and robbed. He bound up his wounds, took him to an inn for help, and even promised to help him in the future (*Luke 10:30-37*).

A neighbor is also someone who brings comfort by just knowing they are there, even if you don't need them.

Likewise, neighbors can be our best friends; someone with whom to share our successes and failures. Since they are friends, they will bear with us, and even tolerate many of our weaknesses. However, if we go too far and set our foot in their house too often, Solomon sounds a very serious warning, they will become weary and hate us!

“Let friendship creep gently to a height; if it rushes to it, it may soon run itself out of breath” (Fuller).

**DEALING WITH ONE'S ENEMIES -
Proverbs 25:21,22**

Devotional 86

"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you" (Proverbs 25:21,22).

Dealing with one's enemies is a problem throughout the ages. The world says, "Get even with them, look for ways to harm them. If they look to you for food and water, starve them to death." God's way is different! Here, Solomon says that we should give to our enemies when they need help.

Jesus shook the world with His teaching in regard to enemies. He said: ***"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).*** Our Lord is not saying that we must love their wicked ways or even the evil they have waged against us. He is, however, saying that we should love the person and pray for him.

Macartney gives the following incident: "During one of the persecutions of the Armenians by the Turks, an Armenian girl and her brother were pursued by a blood-thirsty Turkish soldier. He trapped them at the end of a lane and killed the brother before the sister's eyes. The sister managed to escape by leaping over the wall and fleeing into the country. Later she became a nurse. One day a wounded soldier was brought into her hospital. She recognized him at once, as the soldier who had killed her brother and had tried to kill her. His condition was such that the least neglect or carelessness on the part of the nurse would have cost him his life. But she gave him the most painstaking and constant care. One day when he was on

the road to recovery he recognized her as the girl whose brother he had slain. He said to her, "Why have you done this for me who killed your brother?"

She answered, "Because I have a religion which teaches me to forgive my enemies."

If one cannot, as a Christian, physically harm his enemies, how does he deal with them? Solomon teaches, by being good to them. The food and water you give them will heap coals of fire upon their heads. It will make them ashamed of their evil ways.

This same principle was written by Paul, and he prefaced it by saying, "***Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord***" (***Romans 12:19***). Then his final admonition sums up this whole principle: "***Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good***" (v. 21). When we do good to our enemies, God will take over, and all will be well.

"The narrow soul knows not the god-like glory of forgiving" (Rowe).

**A CONTENTIOUS MAN KINDLES STRIFE -
Proverbs 26:21**

Devotional 87

“As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife” (Proverbs 26:21).

Have you ever heard it said about someone, “Everywhere he goes, he stirs up troubles?” This is a description of a contentious man, and such actions are opposite to Christianity. When viewing the world, there are two types of strife: (1) The active burning kind. Day by day tempers rage, cutting words are spoken, and in many cases there is bodily harm. (2) Potential strife. This is strife that is present in the heart, but has not yet surfaced. When the wrong circumstances arise, it will come forth to do damage. In both kinds of strife, the active and potential, the contentious man makes it burn.

Solomon illustrates this by comparing a contentious man to charcoal placed on burning coals, and wood placed on the fire. When wood is placed on the fire, sparks fly upward, blazes appear, and there is extreme heat. The contentious person produces the same with strife. Wherever he goes, he leaves a trail of hurt feelings and bitter frightings. He is not happy unless he has caused strife.

This type of attitude is far from that of Christ. It is true that some strife, anger, and resentment come when the truth is presented. On several occasions, Jesus stirred up men by His pure life and strong language of truth. However, we do not find Him purposely stirring up strife! In fact, Jesus had as His aim peace. He taught His disciples: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9)*. When peace could be promoted without compromising truth, Jesus approved.

Also, the true Christian will go as far as possible to avoid strife, and to get along with others. ***“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:38-41).***

Therefore, the contentious man (described by Solomon) does not please God, and does not have the Christian attitude. He also tempts others to turn from the Christian attitude toward strife.

The opposite of a contentious man can be found in Abraham. While his nephew Lot was living with him, they each had their own herds and herdsmen. However, strife arose between these herdsmen, and Abraham gave Lot a choice of land to remove the strife. Notice his attitude: ***“Please let there be no strife between you and me. . .for we are brethren” (Genesis 13:8).*** Would you work to put out the fire of strife instead of kindling it?

“The fire of strife you kindle in another, may burn you more than him.”

AVOID BOASTING - Proverbs 27:1,2

Devotional 88

“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” (Proverbs 27:1,2).

Whether or not we accept it, life is very fragile. To hear us talk, you would think we have centuries to live upon the earth, but this is not true. For any moment can be our last breath upon this earth. Why do we boast of tomorrow? Is it because the Bible does not teach the brevity of life and we are deceived? Certainly not! In fact, from the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, God’s Word began speaking of the reality of death. Life is compared to the grasses of the fields, the fading flowers, the passing of a shadow, a vapor, and many other figures. Therefore, we become deceived when we feel that we have tomorrow, and boast of our plans.

Many do not accept the shortness of life because of their desire to live long. We often place more value on the **QUANTITY** of life instead of its **QUALITY**. As one writer summed it up: “There appears to exist a greater desire to live long than to live well! Measure by man’s desires, he cannot live long enough; measure by his good deeds, he has not lived long enough; measure by his evil deeds, and he has lived too long” (Zimmermann).

Instead of boasting about tomorrow, what should we do? We should live today so that tomorrow (come what may) will be well. The best way to live today in view of tomorrow is to live for God. He truly holds the future in His hands. Since God is eternal, even premature death will not harm us. In the book of Revelation when John was permitted to see the seals opened one by one, the fifth seal revealed “*under the altar the souls*

of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Revelation 6:9). They had been killed for their faith. To those on earth, it appeared that they were robbed of their future because they could see only fleshly things. However, John saw them honored by receiving white robes as they rested under the altar (**Revelation 6:11**). When we include God in our future, nothing else really matters!

Instead of boasting of tomorrow, Solomon says: **"Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth."** When we praise ourselves, such is usually exaggerated and is repulsive to others. However, when we are praised by others, it has an influence for good.

Therefore, live each day within God's will; do your best; leave the praise to others, and a blessing will come to your life.

"The empty vessel makes the greatest sound"
(Shakespeare).

KEEPING IN ONE'S PLACE - Proverbs 27:8

Devotional 89

“Like a bird that wanders from its nest is a man who wanders from his place” (Proverbs 27:8).

Solomon lays down a principle in this passage that applies to many areas of our lives. The bird that wanders from its nest has left its God-given place in nature. Whether it leaves behind eggs or baby birds, its neglect will stop life.

How true this is with mankind! All of us have our place in life and should tenaciously hold on to it. Notice some of the things in which we should hold to faithfully.

(1) We must have a place with God if we expect eternal life. He sent His Son to be our Savior, but we must receive Him. Thus, it becomes one's place to follow Him faithfully. In the words of Jesus: ***“If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).*** God set forth conditions that must be met before Christ will be our Savior. These conditions prepare our hearts to get into Christ and He in us. His commandments are not meritorious in nature, but rather reflect the condition of our hearts. Do you believe that Jesus would dwell in an unbelieving heart? Or in a heart that refuses to repent and confess His name? Do you think He would accept a disobedient heart that refuses the command to be baptized? Certainly not! The one who refuses to obey the Lord has chosen darkness, and there is no way that Jesus as light can be compatible with darkness and disobedience.

Therefore, our God-given place is to do the will of the Father in becoming a Christian and in living the Christian life. When we leave this and turn to the ways of the world, like the bird that abandoned its nest, we have left God.

(2) Another God-given place is to have a family. All across this nation, husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers are leaving (as it were) their nests and breaking up homes. The great institution, the home, is receiving serious blows on every hand, and thousands of children are facing harmful consequences. Many of the promises made at the marriage altar are only lies. It is a common expression made before marriage: "If things don't work out, we can always get a divorce." Yes, millions have become like the bird that wanders from its nest!

The question might be asked, "What happens when man leaves his God-given place in life?" He turns to all kinds of sin and immoral practices. Each year brings him another step downward until life holds nothing more than an empty shell without future hope. If you have left your God-given place, will you return?

"The most essential element in any home is God" (Dr. Frank Crane).

HELL IS NEVER FULL - Proverbs 27:20

Devotional 90

“Hell and Destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Proverbs 27:20).

To illustrate that man is never satisfied, Solomon refers to the fact that ***“Hell and Destruction are never full.”*** Eternal punishment (as presented in the Bible) is very real. It is not mentioned a time or two in passing, but appears many times throughout the Bible. Jesus had much to say during His ministry about the fires of hell. This may shock you at first, since He spent so much time in behalf of saving the lost. However, there is a sense in which salvation is associated with being lost. Jesus taught: ***“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).*** Thus, His mission was not only to save, but to keep mankind from being lost. His realization of what hell is like, must have stirred His love even more to die on the cross so that souls can escape.

Many today do not respond to the Lord’s salvation because they do not realize the awfulness of being lost. Whether you consider the Bible description of hell literal or figurative, it describes a place that anyone should wish to avoid. The word “hell” is from the Greek word Gehenna, and is described as an eternal dwelling place for the lost. At the judgment day, Jesus will say to the wicked: ***“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).*** Just as life is eternal for the righteous, so punishment is eternal for the wicked.

Hell is further described as a place of darkness. Jesus said, ***“And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).*** The apostle Peter speaks of the angels who sinned, and says that God: ***“Cast them down to hell and delivered***

them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

The punishment of the lost is also described as a place of fire. Jesus again spoke of some going, ***“to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43).*** In the book of Revelation, hell is described as ***“fire and brimstone,”*** and ***“the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10,15).*** Thus, figuratively or literally, what could render more pain than this? Now we can better understand why Jesus spoke of this awful place and said, ***“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).***

When Solomon said, ***“Hell and Destruction are never full,”*** he was declaring that many will be there with room for others. Jesus described the broad way leading to destruction, and then added, ***“And there are many who go in by it” (Matthew 7:13).*** Have you allowed Jesus to save you from the fires of hell by obeying and following Him faithfully?

“If there be a paradise for virtues, there must be a hell for crimes” (Caussin).

**TURNING OUR EARS FROM THE LAW -
Proverbs 28:9**

Devotional 91

“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

How many of you feel that you spend enough time studying the Bible? The average person would answer, “I do not!” Too many times, we have let all the other things of life crowd out the most important book in life. “The Bible among other books is as a diamond among precious stones” (John Stoughton). In the words of another writer: “Information is bursting in upon people daily in such quantity and from so many different directions that we cannot possibly assimilate it all. By the time he has completed high school (after about 10,800 hours of instruction), the average American has watched more than 15,000 hours of television. According to some estimates, he is exposed to 1,600 advertising impressions weekly. He lives in a country where the daily newspaper circulation exceeds the number of families, where the circulation of periodicals is twice as large as the population, and where book publishers introduce nearly 30,000 new titles and editions in a single year” (Lucien E. Coleman, Jr.). Does this explain why many never study God’s book?

The problem (especially in this nation) is not a shortage of Bibles. Approximately one billion copies of the Bible are said to be in existence today. This is enough to reach around the earth seven times, if laid end to end at the equator. The problem is the fact that they are not studied!

There is no way we can please God without letting Him speak to us through His Word. Paul writes to Timothy: **“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does**

not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). In (Acts 17:11), Luke praises the Bereans above those of Thessalonica because they: ***"Searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."***

In this text, Solomon is teaching that those who refuse to hear God's Word, cannot pray. ***"Even his prayer shall be an abomination."*** Failing to love God's Word and to study it will turn God against us.

It is also a fact that our children are often discouraged from Bible reading. Paul Harvey reported: "Bible reading is illegal in Illinois schools. Bibles are distributed free in Illinois prisons. Illinois school children: If they won't let you read the Bible NOW—wait." Please remember, "This book can keep you from sin, or sin can keep you from this book."

Have you studied your Bible today?

"The Bible is a window in this prison of hope, through which we look into eternity" (Dwight).

**DANGERS IN CONCEALING SINS -
Proverbs 28:13**

Devotional 92

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

It is a biblical fact that all who reach the age to be accountable to God, commit sins. The apostle Paul wrote of both Jews and Gentiles: ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)***. This principle applies, not only to those who are not God’s children, but also to those who have been born again (***John 3:3***). John wrote to Christians, ***“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8)***. What happens when Christians slip and sin, and what should they do? In the next verse, John continues, ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** This seems to be exactly what Solomon is saying in this text: ***“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”***

This leads us to ask, why confess our sins? Let us consider some reasons:

(1) To receive mercy. Many hide their sins thinking this is the best way, but it isn’t! There is no hope for mercy when sins are covered.

(2) It is harmful to one’s mental health to bottle up sins. Such can be to us a constant fear of being found out. Have you ever confessed a sin and then felt better? If so, you experienced your mind being freed from a burden.

(3) One must confess sins so that he can renounce them. It is not enough to confess sins, but those who belong to God will

try harder in the future to avoid these sins. Paul wrote: ***“What shall we say then? Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1-2).*** Christians must not consider the grace of God and His forgiveness a license to sin. The old idea that I’ll go out and sin tonight and get forgiveness tomorrow is of the devil; not of God.

(4) Confessing sins keeps us from living lies and playing the role of a hypocrite. Keeping secret sins hidden inside, often requires lies to be told as one pretends that all is right with his life. Sin wounds our conscience, and how can we carry around sins which eat away at us daily?

Being able to find forgiveness through obedience to Christ through His blood is the most wonderful thing for our lives. Without His death, there could be NO forgiveness. Paul wrote of Jesus, ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).***

“There is no sin we can be tempted to commit, but we shall find a greater satisfaction in resisting than in committing” (Howell).

RIGHTEOUS LEADERS - Proverbs 29:2

Devotional 93

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan” (Proverbs 29:2).

It has always been God’s plan to have rulers upon this earth—those who are under Him in authority. This is especially emphasized as we study the Mosaic dispensation. God chose Moses to lead His people from Egyptian bondage. When He set up the tabernacle and the priestly form of worship, He chose Aaron (brother to Moses) as High Priest over all other priests. When Moses could no longer serve, Joshua, another great leader, followed him. After his death, God allowed the people to look directly to Him for leadership, but they wandered in sin, and it became necessary (time and time again) for God to call forth men to serve as judges.

Finally, after many judges, the nation of Israel desired a king. For the following one hundred twenty years, three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon served Israel, and this was known as the United Kingdom of Israel. After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was divided and many kings served both kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom mostly had evil rulers which finally led God to send them into captivity—never to return. However, the Kingdom of Judah had both good and evil kings. When they had a good king, God’s people prospered and rejoiced; when they chose an evil ruler, they were depressed and defeated. Therefore, righteous rulers were very important.

This same principle is certainly true today whether one considers government on all levels, or leadership in the Lord’s church. A corrupt leader in any capacity brings sadness to those following. During a campaign year, many promises are made which we know so often cannot be carried out. Those

who are honest will suggest these promises as goals, and will then faithfully work to carry them out. Even if such is not possible to accomplish, we respect them if they are righteous men and women. And be assured that their right actions will bring rejoicing to the people, but those who are corrupt will bring mourning.

In choosing leadership, we should certainly seek those qualified to lead, but we should never overlook their moral lives. Regardless of their ability, they will bring sorrow to those they lead, if they are not seeking that which is right.

When Paul (guided by the Holy Spirit) gave the qualifications for elders and deacons in the church (*1 Timothy 3; Titus 1*), he placed great emphasis on these men having good, clean, moral lives with good reports from within and without! May God help us all to seek righteous people to fill the various positions of leadership is my hope and prayer.

“Five things are requisite to a good officer—ability, clean hands, dispatch, patience, and impartiality” (Penn).

**THE IMPORTANCE OF VISION -
Proverbs 29:18**

Devotional 94

“Where there is no revelation (prophetic vision), the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18).

The vision that Solomon is speaking of here is that vision or revelation which comes from the Word of God. There are three important questions that mankind should ask in regard to his existence and purpose of life: (1) Where did I come from? (2) Why am I here? (3) What is my destiny? Those who seek answers to these questions from sources other than the Bible, will be blinded. Those who seek the answers from His Word will have true vision and will find happiness. May we please examine each of these questions from God's Word:

The answer to, “Where did I come from?” is found in the book of Genesis. Here, in the beautiful story of creation, we learn that we came from God. Not in the sense of explaining our physical bodies only, but also in the sense of our inner beings—our souls! When God anticipated making man, He said, **“Let Us make man in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26)**. Later in creation we are told, **“So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (v. 27)**. We are no accident or chance; we are not an evolved sophisticated animal! We have in us a soul made in God's image.

The second question, “Why am I here?” is also very important. Millions live and die without finding the answer to this question. Solomon, by the wisdom that God gave him, knew the answer. He viewed life from every angle and came to this conclusion: **“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13)**. All

the other things of life have their place, but only as they compliment glorifying God. We can do this by rearing God-fearing families, by working for our livelihood, by engaging in clean recreation, and in our worship and service to God.

Our God did not make us like the rest of creation. Man was given an eternal soul with dominion over creation. He said to man: ***“Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”*** (Genesis 1:26). The animals die and disappear forever, but mankind has a living soul that lives after death.

The third question, “What is my destiny?” is also answered. The Bible lifts the curtain beyond death and describes one of two places where man’s soul will live throughout eternity. His soul will either be with God, saved, or separated from God, lost! The sacrifice of Jesus makes salvation possible. However, dying in sin (without Him) causes one to be lost.

How is your vision? Are you living ONLY for today? Are you raising your vision to eternity by keeping God’s will?

“The thought of eternity consoles for the shortness of life” (Makesherbes).

**ADDITIONS TO GOD'S WORD ARE WRONG -
Proverbs 30:6**

Devotional 95

“Do not add to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:6).

There has been a temptation down through the centuries for man to add to the Word of God, but in all ages of time, such has displeased God. His Word is authoritative and no man, regardless of how wise he considers himself, should add to it.

Why has it been a temptation in all generations to add to God's Word? Because man's will and desire are often different from that of God. Isaiah recognized this in the following words: ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8,9).*** Since man's ways and thoughts are different from that of God, he often adds them to the Word of God. Be assured that God is displeased, because those who add to God's Word, disobey Him!

An example of this is found in the actions of the first king of Israel, King Saul. When God gave him a command to destroy the Amalakites and all their animals, Saul did not agree. Therefore, he brought back from battle some choice animals as well as King Agag. God spoke through Samuel and rebuked Saul. The king tried to justify his actions by claiming that he brought back the animals to be used for sacrifices to God. Notice Samuel's answer to him: ***“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”*** Then he delivered God's verdict to King Saul: ***“Because you have rejected the word of***

the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22,23). When Saul followed his own wishes, he added to God's Word, disobeyed God, and lost his position as king.

How does God feel today under the Christian age? When we observe all the religions that are practicing things not found in God's Word, and wearing names which are not found in the Bible, we might get the impression that God has given man the right to add! Not so! Man has added to His Word in spite of the many warnings. The apostle Paul warned: ***"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).*** John wrote: ***"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).*** As John closed the New Testament and the book of Revelation, he warned of a great punishment to those who would "add to" or "take from" the book (***Revelation 22:18,19***). Therefore, those who do not let God's Word stand, will fall!

The scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying" (Flavel).

Devotional 96

“Two things I request of you (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food you prescribe for me; lest I be full and deny you, and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:7-9).

This text describes an individual seeking contentment. Doesn't this sound different from the prayers of modern man? In regard to poverty and riches, we seek riches, but in so many cases, they bring sorrow. Here, the wise man considers the extremes of poverty and riches as being dangerous. He feared riches because of the temptation to disown God, and to say, **“Who is the LORD?”** Haven't we seen this happen often in our lifetime? It doesn't have to be this way, but so often it is! One becomes rich and forgets God. This is why Paul instructed Timothy: **“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10).**

The other extreme to avoid is poverty. Solomon warns that there is a temptation for those in poverty to steal, and to dishonor the name of God. Again, this is not always the case! Most of us know extremely poor people who are honest, and would go hungry before stealing. However, this is not the general rule. There have been millions down through the centuries who have allowed poverty to lead them to steal. Paul must have recognized this principle when he wrote: **“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28).**

Thus, we can see that these extremes, riches and poverty, bring temptations. In Solomon's prayer he further prayed: ***"Feed me with the food you prescribe for me."***

In our modern age of inflation, the essentials for survival have increased, but the spiritual principles in this passage are still true. The lesson is, "Lord, don't let the material things of life, either abundance or scarcity, keep me from serving you." Jesus taught how to keep our lives in balance with physical things when He said: ***"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"*** (Matthew 6:33). This is the rule that Paul followed and was therefore able to say: ***"For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content"*** (Philippians 4:11). Have you found this contentment?

"He who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have. Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty" (Socrates).

**THREE AMAZING THINGS NOT
UNDERSTOOD - Proverbs 30:18,19**

Devotional 97

“There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a virgin” (Proverbs 30:18,19).

Whether we consider these literal or merely illustrations to point out truths, the things mentioned in these verses are amazing. It should remind us of the fact that God has made amazing wonders in His creation. When God, day by day, created the heavens and the earth, He was able to say, **“It is good.”** How true today is this statement! The more one studies all the creatures of His creation, the more one realizes that all is amazing. Even though years of study has brought much enlightenment to the understanding of God’s creation, man has only scratched the surface.

It is further amazing how anyone can study the universe, the plant and animal kingdoms, along with mankind, and then say that all of this happened by chance. To believe the atheist, requires more faith than to believe that God made all things with design and pattern. As one writer put it: “To be an atheist requires an infinitely greater measure of faith than to receive all the great truths which atheism would deny” (Addison). Another, “The footprint of the savage in the sand is sufficient to prove the presence of man to the atheist who will not recognize God though His hand is impressed on the entire universe” (Hugh Miller).

Why can’t they see their foolish stand? Why would they want to trade God for chance? Jeremy Taylor wrote: “What can be more foolish than to think that all this rare fabric of heaven

and earth could come by chance, when all the skill of art is not able to make an oyster? To see rare effects, and no cause; a motion, without a mover; a circle, without a center; a time, without an eternity; a second, without a first; these are things so against philosophy and natural reason, that he must be a beast in understanding who can believe in them. The thing formed, says that nothing formed it; and that which is made is, while that which made it is not! This folly is infinite."

Why would anyone want to destroy God? Atheism is the death of hope, the suicide of the soul, and those who trade God for chance, make a poor trade. One author penned it this way: "The atheist is one who fain would pull God from His throne, and in the place of heaven's eternal King set up the phantom chance" (Glynn).

Yes, there will always be things about God's creation that we do not understand, but these should increase our faith to believe the words of the song about God: "How Great Thou Art!"

"Atheism is a disease of the soul, before it becomes an error of the understanding" (Plato).

**FOUR SMALL WISE THINGS -
Proverbs 30:24-28**

Devotional 98

“There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer; the rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags; the locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks; the spider skillfully grasps with its hands, and it is in kings’ palaces” (Proverbs 30:24-28).

In this passage Solomon chooses four small creatures that are very wise to emphasize some important traits. These are very small, but great lessons can be learned from them. May we observe each and the lessons they teach.

The ants are tiny and weak, and can be destroyed between two fingers, but their littleness does not stop them from preparing their food in the summer. It is sad, but millions among mankind are not this wise. They will not prepare for their physical needs, and more importantly, they do not prepare for eternity. The Bible echoes over and over the importance of spiritual preparation. The prophet Amos wrote: **“Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” (Amos 4:12)**. Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins to show the foolishness of the five who did not prepare, and the wisdom of the other five who made full preparation (**Matthew 25:1-13**).

Solomon further says that the rock badgers are feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags. These little animals act wisely. Even though they are not able to fight a strong enemy, they become secure by hiding in the rocks. We must find our strength in Jesus the rock of ages!

Next, the locust is used to teach the strength found in unity. Even though they have no leader or king, they all advance in rank and accomplish their mission. There is strength in unity and weakness in division. Our Lord prayed for all believers: ***“That they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21).***

Finally, the spider teaches the importance of working with our hands. We can never be happy in this life, nor can we please God, without working. Paul wrote to the Philippian brethren: ***“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).***

May the four little things help us to be BIG as we give our lives daily to the Lord!

“Little drops of water, little grains of sand, make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land; so the little minutes, humble though they be, make the mighty ages of eternity” (Mrs. Julia A. Fletcher Carney).

Devotional 99

“If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, or if you have devised evil, put your hand on your mouth” (Proverbs 30:32).

If we desire to keep our lives right with God, we must control our thoughts. Evil thoughts will often invade our minds, but we must run them out. **“Put your hand on your mouth”** suggests putting an end to evil thoughts. Be assured that if we don’t stop them in our minds, they will materialize and become evil deeds.

The question that needs to be considered is, how does one keep his heart pure and refuse evil thoughts?

(1) There must be a commitment to a pure heart. Once we decide to keep our hearts pure, we will work harder to keep out the evil. **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).** Seeking a pure heart is a high and noble goal. Although we may falter at times, this true goal of purity will lead us to try harder.

(2) Keep our hearts filled with pure thoughts. The mind is so designed that it will not remain idle, for thoughts of some type must come through. Knowing this, we should choose good things for thought. **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).**

(3) We must stop evil thoughts from staying in our hearts. Yes, they will come in, but we should exercise all will power to remove them. At the time, they may seem exciting and tempting, however, we must remind ourselves that such will

only lead to sin and hurt. It may be necessary to stop and pray them away. Once we pause and pray a sincere prayer, it will be more difficult for the evil thoughts to return.

(4) Evil thoughts can be refused by filling our lives with doing good. It is still true that "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." It is just as true that, "A busy mind for good, helps keep the devil away!" Remember, we cannot rise above our thoughts. Good thoughts and good actions go together, and so do evil thoughts and evil actions! (**Proverbs 23:7**).

What about you, are you trying to control the evil that invades your heart, or can it be said that you are encouraging it? Remember, the people with whom you associate, the books you read, and your desire to seek either good or evil, will influence your thoughts.

The next time you are tempted to have evil thoughts, put your hand on your mouth and stop them!

"Guard well thy thoughts; our thoughts are heard in heaven" (Young).

A VIRTUOUS WIFE - Proverbs 31:10

Devotional 100

“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies” (Proverbs 31:10).

The virtuous wife described in Proverbs chapter 31, has been admired and studied more than most proverbs because she represents the ideal wife. It is a fact that not all women are virtuous because they do not desire to be. However, those who choose to be, are valued above the price of rubies.

The writer does not stop with proclaiming the value of a virtuous wife, but proceeds to explain her worth. He begins by saying that she is trustworthy. Her husband has full confidence in her since she brings him good and not evil, all the days of her life. Some wives do good for a time, and then change to evil, but not this virtuous wife. She makes and keeps a lifetime commitment.

Her life is filled with profitable labor as she works with willing hands. This includes the proper selection of wool for clothing, and the gathering of food like a faithful merchant ship from afar. In order to provide for her household, she must arise from sleep while it is yet night, but she does this willingly. To extend her usefulness further, she buys a field for the purpose of planting a vineyard. With strong arms and a willing spirit, she goes about her work vigorously. She is a successful business woman making sure that her trading of merchandise is profitable. To accomplish all that needs to be done, she must work late into the night. Since she feels the need to clothe her family against winter snows, she provides them with scarlet. Her fingers work skillfully as she stretches them out to the distaff and holds the spindle.

Although she is deeply concerned about her family, she does not forget others and their needs. She extends her hands to the

poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. She keeps her own house beautifully decorated—even makes herself tapestry. Her appearance is such that it reflects dignity and beauty for she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

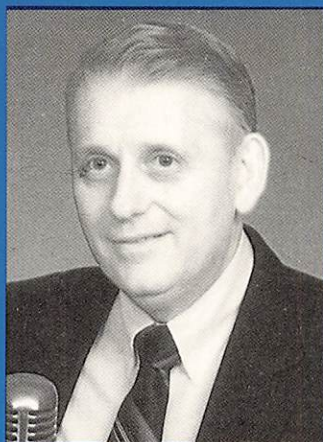
She helps her husband to be respected in his role of life as he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She plans for the future by making linen garments to be sold to the merchants. With strength and dignity, she can laugh at the time to come. In order to accomplish all of this, she possesses wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue.

Her heart is thrilled when her children rise up and call her blessed, and her husband praises her. This virtuous wife, the model for all women to follow, excels them all. What is the real secret of her greatness? Is it simply charm and beauty? No! ***“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.”*** (v. 30).

“A handsome woman is a jewel; a good woman is a treasure” (Saadi).

Thinking with SOLOMON

One Hundred Devotionals



About the Author

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