

## Upward, Inward, Outward

*“You will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth.” (v. 8)*

**A**fter a sloppy game, a basketball coach may spend an entire practice concentrating on the fundamentals—the basics of the game. These may include setting solid screens, squaring up to the basket, or rebounding with aggressiveness.

Through the next fifteen devotionals, we will concentrate on the basics of being the church. These basics can be divided into three areas. Think of these “fundamentals of the church” as pointing in three different directions: upward in worship, inward in growth, and outward in mission.

As he prepared to ascend into heaven, Jesus called the disciples to be his witnesses. Acts says that after the disciples witnessed Jesus’ ascension they were found gazing into the sky. The angels asked the obvious question: “Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”

In light of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the Great Commission he has called us to fulfill, we can’t afford to stand around sky-gazing. As individuals and churches, we must worship the Lord, build up the body of Christ, and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. These are the basics we must faithfully and diligently put into practice.

—Steve Petroelje

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*Prayer: God of mercy, mold us by your Spirit into followers and churches who upwardly praise your glorious name, inwardly build up the body of Christ, and outwardly testify to your saving grace. Amen.*

## To God Be the Glory

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. (v. 8)*

**W**hen we begin to understand God's glory and what he has done for us, we should respond by worshiping him. The psalmist makes it clear that God is worthy of praise. Families of nations and elements of nature praise and worship the creator, sustainer, and righteous judge.

In the book of Revelation the apostle John encounters the risen and glorified Christ and falls at his feet as if dead (Revelation 1:17). The apostle Paul declared that those who believe in Jesus will marvel at him upon his second coming (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Worship is not primarily something tailored to meet our needs or bring us comfort. Joyful worship that acknowledges God's holiness and celebrates his grace will lift our hearts. However, worship must be directed toward God. He is the one who is worshiped. When worship becomes a matter of pleasing the worshipers, then our adoration becomes entertainment and our focus is placed on ourselves.

The next time we go to church or worship God in the quietness of our heart, will our primary focus be "what can I bring to God in adoration and praise?" or will it be "what's in it for me?" —Steve Petroelje

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*Prayer: Lord of splendor and majesty, may the worship that comes out of my heart be forever centered on you. Amen.*

## Living with Gratitude to God

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.*

*Give thanks to him, bless his name. (v. 4)*

**W**hat motivates you to worship the Lord? For some, worship is motivated by guilt, duty, what others will think, or an effort to earn God's blessing. The Scriptures teach us that our greatest motivation for worship should be gratitude. We can all enter into worship with thanksgiving because we have all been blessed by God.

It always strikes me how ungrateful the Israelites were despite the tremendous deliverance God provided. In the book of Exodus, we find God punishing the Egyptians while sparing the Israelites. He brought his people out of slavery, only to hear them grumble, complain, and even express a desire to return to slavery. He led them into the promised land, only to watch them worship other gods. They had so much to be thankful for, yet often neglected to show gratitude to God.

In light of God's rich grace, most powerfully revealed through the gift of Jesus Christ, are we people who live with gratitude or complaint? Given what God has done for you, ask yourself whether you have more reason to complain, or to worship. —Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Gracious God, help me to worship you with a spirit of gratitude in light of all that you have done for me. Amen.*

## Worship with the Christian Community

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. (v. 25 NIV)*

**H**ave you ever enjoyed playing a team sport such as soccer, football, or baseball? Team sports provide opportunities for different kinds of people to work together for a common goal. Each person on the team matters and everyone has a role to carry out.

I suppose it's possible to play a team sport alone. You could throw a popup into the air and stand under it and catch it. Or you could kick a football and then run after it. But that would hardly be playing the game.

Trying to be a Christian without belonging to a local Christian community is like playing catch with yourself. The author of Hebrews 10 makes it clear that although some are in the habit of avoiding community worship, "we should not give up meeting together."

Worshipping with others, whenever possible, allows us to join our hearts, voices, gifts, and prayers together as we encourage one another and share in Christian fellowship. This kind of community worship on earth is a foretaste of how saints will gather before the throne in heaven and join with others to worship the Lord. Are you an active part of a worshipping Christian community? —Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Father, thank you for opportunities to meet together for worship. Amen.*

## Continuous Worship

*Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (v. 1)*

Yesterday we considered what God's Word teaches about the importance of regularly worshiping with a local church. However, worshiping God does not stop after the closing prayer or benediction. We are to worship God continuously. Every day life provides us with opportunities to worship our Creator with our life, breath, actions, and talents.

Too often we are quick to separate sacred from secular. We assume that Sunday is sacred and Monday through Saturday is secular. In doing so, we miss out on God's intention for living our daily lives in ways that honor him. Since God created the world and everything in it, all that we see and do has sacred meaning.

We worship God continuously when we honor him through our lifestyle, raise our children according to his Word, carry out our work with honesty and integrity, care for his creation, share our faith with words and actions, pray without ceasing, or show love to our neighbor. When the church service ends, a week of worship begins! As God is glorified through community worship in the sanctuary, so must we worship and glorify him in the marketplace, home, school, neighborhood, and workplace. —Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Lord of all creation, help me to worship you continuously everywhere and every day. Amen.*

## Together Is Better

*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs. (v. 1)*

**T**he Gospels remind us that we are to do more than worship God on Sunday. We are to build up and encourage one another as we serve God together. The fellowship of believers in the early church, as described in Acts 2:42-47, reveals a communal atmosphere of worship, care, and evangelism.

Today, we turn from worship (focusing upward on God) to thinking about discipleship (turning toward the church). The church is meant to be a body, a group of committed followers of Jesus Christ. We are not to serve alone, but together, just as Jesus sent the disciples out to minister in pairs. Together is better. Together we pray for one another, share one another's burdens, visit the sick, comfort the oppressed, teach and encourage, maintain accountability, and combine our God-given gifts in ministry.

In God's kingdom, there must be an attitude of humility, teamwork, unity, and a servant's heart. Is there teamwork and unity in your church? Do you seek to minister effectively with others? The Lord did not send people out alone. He sent them ahead in pairs to do his work, proclaim the good news, and minister to those in need. —Steve Petroelje

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*Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to work together as believers, faithfully serving, edifying, caring, and witnessing for your glory. Amen.*

## The Word Must Be Our Guide

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple. (v. 7)*

**W**hat do the following have in common: a compass, a map, and a global positioning system? Answer: they each provide direction for finding one's way to a desired location. The greatest source for direction is the Bible, God's holy and inspired Word. This Word must be the foundation for every Christian's life and every church's ministry. To build on any other foundation is dangerous and unwise.

Whether we are looking for direction about how to upwardly worship God, inwardly grow and build up one another, or outwardly reach those who are lost, our motives and methods must be biblical. The Word must be our guide. In order for that to be true, we must regularly read, hear, apply, memorize, and study God's Word.

Are you growing in your knowledge and application of God's Word? Is God's Word being lived out in your life and through the ministry of the church you are a part of? We often talk about the authority and truth of God's Word, but the real test is how we live. —Steve Petroelje

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*Prayer: Awesome God, we thank you for your Word and ask you to help us stay true to it in all that we say, think, and do. Amen.*

## A Unified Body

*I ask . . . on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. (vv. 20-21)*

**H**ave you ever been in a group where dissension was evident? It can happen among friends, co-workers, family, a church, or an athletic team. Division occurred between the disciples as they argued about who was the greatest and between Paul and Barnabas after their first missionary journey. Distrust and division was what Satan used to lead Adam and Eve to act in a way that separated them from God.

Jesus knew the importance of unity and teamwork. He prayed for oneness among believers in order that the world might believe. The word *one* appears four times in three verses in John 17:21-23.

In light of what Christ has done to unify us with God, we must do everything in our power, with the help of God, to be unified with other believers. Quarreling believers and divided churches endanger our ability to witness to those who are living apart from Jesus Christ.

The greatest threats to unity come from arrogance, self-centeredness, and the struggle for power. Oneness comes through humility, servanthood, teamwork, and sacrifice. Which list of characteristics is most visible in your life?

—Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Father, unify us around the cause of Jesus Christ so that the world may know of your great love. Amen.*

## Everyone's Gifts Matter

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.  
(v. 27 NIV)*

Imagine the frustration a race car driver would feel if he pulled in for a pit stop only to see half of the pit crew remain on the other side of the wall. What if the tire changer sat sulking because he wasn't allowed to fill the gas tank? Would that lead to victory?

As crazy as such a scenario sounds, it happens all too often in churches where members have taken vows to be an active part of the body of Christ, yet sit on the sidelines. They have been created by God, redeemed by Christ, and equipped with gifts through the Holy Spirit, but they do not use the gifts God has entrusted to them.

This not only hurts the joy and fruitfulness of the believer but it is also harmful for the overall ministry of the church. When members of the body neglect to identify or use their spiritual gifts, the whole body suffers (v. 26). Have you identified the unique talents and gifts that God has given to you for service in the church and beyond? Don't just sit there; get up and get serving! —Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Everlasting Father, help me to identify and use the spiritual gifts that you have entrusted to me for service in your kingdom. Amen.*

## On Respecting Our Leaders

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. (v. 17)*

**C**hurch leaders are a part of the body of Christ. They are not necessarily holier or better than others, though of course they should always be striving to grow in holiness. But every Christian has been given gifts to use for the kingdom. To some, though, God has entrusted the gift and responsibility of leadership. Hebrews 13:17 calls all Christians to obey and submit to their leaders.

Sadly, many leaders in the church today are treated with disrespect and distrust. Servant-leaders are being judged according to business CEO principles. Pastors with moral integrity are being forced out or fired. If churches are looking for perfect leaders who manifest every gift, they will be looking forever in vain.

Those in positions of leadership have been called by God to serve humbly and to give an account of their stewardship. They need to display transparency and integrity. Church members, in turn, are called to respect their leaders. Think about how you treat those called to positions of leadership in your church. People who respect, pray for, and encourage their leaders make ministry a joy. —Steve Petroelje

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*Prayer: Lord, help us to respect those in positions of leadership and help leaders to be faithful to their calling. Amen.*

## Concern for the Spiritually Lost

*We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found. (v. 32)*

If we look upward in worship and inward to build up the body of Christ yet neglect to reach outward in mission, we miss the three-dimensional focus God wants us to have. When churches fail to be outwardly focused, they become stagnant and die.

When the father of the prodigal saw his son coming, he was filled with compassion, ran to him, put his arms around him, and kissed him. He threw a great party because he realized that his son had experienced a transformation of heart.

Every day, you and I lock eyes with people who are living “in a far country.” They are spiritually lost, but they can be found! We cannot convict them of sin. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. But we can and must be people of God who are willing to live out our faith in visible ways, testify to the hope we have, and do everything we can with God’s help to reach those who need Jesus. Churches that are making a difference for Christ in their community and the world are always on the “look out.” —Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Precious Savior, push us beyond our comfort zone to boldly proclaim and model the hope we have in you. Amen.*

## A Passion for Witnessing

*For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard. (v. 20)*

Children talk excitedly about something they have enjoyed for the first time. They will tell anyone who listens about their trip to the water park, week at camp, or event at school. As we age, we become less outspoken or exuberant about such things.

This is often true when it comes to sharing our faith. New believers are quick to share the blessings they have encountered through faith in Jesus Christ. New church starts emphasize efforts to reach others for Christ. Yet, without intentional and persistent effort, Christians and churches can lose their passion for sharing the good news.

The Jerusalem authorities recognized the impact of ordinary people proclaiming the power of an extraordinary God. They tried to do everything they could to stop the witnessing efforts of Peter and John (v. 17). But no punishment, warning, or discouragement would keep Peter and John from their missionary calling. They could not keep from speaking about what they had seen and heard (v. 20). They knew that there is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus (v. 12). With the opportunities that God provides, let's boldly share our faith and pass on the excitement of new life in Christ!

—Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Lord, give me a greater passion for sharing with others what I have seen and heard. Amen.*

## The Relevance of the Church

*You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. (v. 18)*

**W**hen Jesus spoke about building his church to Peter and the disciples, he was speaking about a movement, not a facility. He was referring to the body of Christ, the living Christian church that has spread throughout the world.

Methods of ministry may change, but nothing can defeat the church that Jesus Christ calls us to be a part of. The church, according to Jesus in Matthew 16, is on the offensive. This text does not portray evil advancing against the church, but the church advancing against the evil of our culture. We are to be people of God empowered by God to reach out with the good news. When this happens, not even the gates of Hades can prevail against the work of God.

The church will always be relevant because the message that we are called to proclaim is always relevant. Are you and the church you are a part of seeking to be comfortable in your culture or are you standing up against it? Are we reaching out in active ministry or retreating into a fortress mentality? —Steve Petroelje

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*Prayer: Jesus, head of the church, help us as members of your body to be relevant and effective witnesses for you. Amen.*

## The Focus Is the Kingdom

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (v. 15)*

**S**eek ye first the kingdom of God,  
and his righteousness;  
and all these things shall be added unto you,  
Al-le-lu, A-le-lu-ia.

Perhaps you have sung those words at summer camp or in a time of worship. Both that song and the teaching of Jesus call us to focus on the kingdom.

In recent decades, much more focus has been placed on the church. We have lived through a church growth movement. Churches and church members are influenced by the measurements of success rewarded in our culture. “Successful” churches are often defined by the three “B’s”: swelling budgets, buildings, and number of bodies.

Jesus did not teach us to pray “Thy church come,” but “Thy kingdom come.” The focus must be the kingdom. The kingdom is much larger than the church. If we belong to the kingdom we ought to see signs of God’s growing rule in our lives. Our church’s fellowship should point to the reality of God’s reign, God’s peace. Don’t settle for worldly success or material comfort in your church. Instead, pray that God will use you to build his kingdom. —Steve Petroelje

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*Prayer: King of the kingdom, work in us so that we do not settle for nice churches but rather seek first the kingdom you have called us to inhabit. Amen.*

## Your Kingdom Come

*Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven. (v. 10)*

**F**or as long as God gives us breath, we can worship him, grow as believers, and impact his kingdom on earth. As we do so, we must remember that there are really two aspects to the kingdom of God. There is the kingdom here and now, and the fullness of God's kingdom that will only come when Christ returns.

Revelation 21 describes the wonder of this new heaven and earth, the end of pain, sorrow, and death, and the glory of the Holy City. As we follow Christ in this world, we do so never forgetting what is to come.

The kingdom here and now, and the glory that awaits, motivate us to thank, praise, serve, follow, and depend upon our great God and King. As a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of his body, keep the faith! Worship him in the fellowship of the church. Strengthen and build up the body of Christ. Look outward in mission, proclaiming and living out the good news of the gospel for the world to see. Let the Father's will be done in your life until that glorious day when you see him face to face. —Steve Petroelje

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Prayer: *Lord of all, take my life, be glorified through me as I anticipate the fullness of your kingdom. Amen.*

## Life's Big Instruction Book

*For learning about wisdom . . . to teach . . . knowledge and prudence to the young. (vv. 2, 4)*

**I**n the summer of 2007, the staff of a Young Life camp met each morning and looked at the book of Proverbs to help guide them in their work with young people. These devotions are based upon their study.

There are connections between the ancient proverbs and youth ministry today because Proverbs was produced primarily for youth to learn how to live a meaningful, godly life. A few years ago there was a best-seller called “Life’s Little Instruction Book.” A few thousand years before that, Solomon had already compiled “Life’s Big Instruction Book” in the proverbs.

The proverbial key to a good life is wisdom. If you were asked to shut your eyes and imagine someone who personified wisdom, whose face would you see? When we asked our camp staff, they saw characters like Yoda from *Star Wars* and Gandalf from the *Lord of the Rings*. Some folks said Albert Einstein. Einstein may have had the greatest mind of the past century, but was he wise by biblical standards?

Biblically, wisdom is not the same thing as intelligence. Wisdom is practical, not theoretical. Wisdom is shown by a godly life. Such wisdom, Paul reminds us in First Corinthians 1, may look foolish in the world’s eyes. But remember, “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom.”

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, help us crave wisdom.*

## The Beginning of Wisdom

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. (v. 7 NIV)*

**A**re we supposed to be teaching young people to be afraid of God? This idea seems contrary to our notions of God as a loving Father and sounds old fashioned and foreign to our ears. One modern commentator even begins his explanation of verse seven by saying, “To fear God is not to be afraid of him.”

Really? Maybe Solomon chose the right word when he said “fear.” Look at the rest of Scripture. What are the first words God must say whenever he breaks through and speaks directly to humans? “Do not be afraid!” Facing God can be terrifying.

Fear is the proper human response in the presence of God. Fear means we understand who we are (and who we aren't!) and who God is. The fear of the Lord means living in a proper relationship to God.

In contrast, the rest of the first chapter of Proverbs presents the fool, who despises wisdom and instruction. Eugene Peterson says fools “thumb their noses at wisdom.” Fools don't get it; they don't realize there is more to life than what they can see, taste, smell, touch, and hear. It is foolish not to know we ought to tremble and be on our knees when we come into the presence of God.

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, may we live in a right relationship with you.*

## No Shortcuts

*... seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures . . .*  
(v. 4)

**W**hy, in the first pages of the Bible, did Eve make the poor choice that she did? We know the fruit was tempting, but there is also this in Genesis 3:6, “the tree was to be desired to make one wise.” She tried to take a shortcut to wisdom.

Proverbs 2 says there are no shortcuts. To gain wisdom we have to be willing to learn and to work. As these verses say, we learn by listening (“make your ear attentive to wisdom”) and by memorizing (“treasure up my commandments within you”).

Listening is the first step of faith. We respond to what we hear. No wonder Jesus said “Let anyone with ears listen!” (Matthew 13:9). Memorizing is a way to deepen our faith. As the ancient rabbis said, “A person who repeats his lesson a hundred times is not to be compared to him who repeats it a hundred and one times.”

All of this implies work. In the words of one Bible teacher, “The Scriptures don’t yield their secrets to the flip-pant or casual reader.” There is treasure available in God’s Word, but only to those who are willing to do some digging.

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *We have ears that can listen. We have minds that can memorize. Give us the desire to work to be wise.*

## Trust

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. (v. 5)*

Oswald Chambers said, “Beware of refusing to go to the funeral of your own independence.” Is there anything more important in the Christian life than relinquishing self and trusting God? We’ve sung “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way” for years, and yet this is a lesson we struggle to learn. We had our camp staff memorize verse five, not only because it’s the central truth we hoped to teach young people; it’s the central truth of our lives.

Novelist Frederick Buechner tells the story of when, during a difficult point in his life, he was sitting in his car “sick with anxiety, depressed, and doom-ridden.” Another car came along with a personalized license plate that said on it the one word he most needed to hear at that moment: TRUST. The license plate now hangs on a wall in his home, as holy a relic as ever there was. The plate belonged to a bank trust officer, who presented it to Buechner after reading about the incident. To Buechner, though, the message on the license plate wasn’t a coincidence. It was a miracle—“I had turned up at the right place at the right time. I had been expected.”

God keeps his promises. God can be trusted.

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, help us to trust and obey.*

## Control

*Do not despise the LORD's discipline. (v. 11)*

**N**o one in baseball history threw harder than Steve Dalkowski. Although radar guns weren't yet invented when he played, it's thought that he threw somewhere between 105 and 110 mph. He could throw so hard that one day he won five dollars by throwing a baseball through the outfield wall. Once he threw an inside pitch that took off a piece of the batter's ear. Ted Williams faced him and said, "I hope I never have to do that again."

So why have you never heard of Steve Dalkowski? He lacked one quality for success both on and off the field: control. As a pitcher, he didn't know where the ball was going. As a person, he couldn't stop drinking. As a result, he never made it out of the minor leagues. His battle with the bottle continued long after baseball gave up on the promise of his golden arm. He eventually quit drinking, but sadly lives now in the fog of an alcohol-induced dementia.

It's a risk to ignore discipline. Steve Dalkowski didn't intend to go down in baseball history as a curious footnote, but that's what happened. "Discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant . . . but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11). Are we bold enough to want the old-fashioned virtue of discipline? Bold enough to teach it to young people? —Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, we want to be disciplined people.*

## Generation to Generation

*Listen, children, to a father's instruction. (v. 1)*

**I**n youth ministry we see too many young people growing up without the wisdom of a father's instruction. Reflecting on his experiences as a fatherless boy in his book *To Own a Dragon*, Donald Miller says he became a wild, unsettled kid who would not listen to anyone. He writes, "A guy like me who resists authority is begging to be useless."

Who wants to be useless? Yet that's the sad result for many who live without discipline or self-control. What a gift to have a loving parent who helps you learn discipline!

Solomon fondly remembers learning wisdom from his father. King David, of course, had a high profile failure. But what Solomon recalls is not the failure, but the time spent with his father and what he learned: "When I was a son with my father . . . he taught me and said to me . . . Get wisdom, get insight, do not forget, nor turn away." This was great home schooling!

Parents need not be perfect, but they do need to be present. The greatest need young people have is for adults who will lovingly care about them. Kids need adults who will share honestly about how life works, hand down wisdom, and show them the way. Every generation needs the previous generation to teach truths to it and inspire it to pursue wisdom. —Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, help us hand down wisdom.*

## Two Roads Diverged . . .

*I have led you in the paths of uprightness. (v. 11)*

**L**ike elsewhere in the Bible (Psalm 1, Matthew 7:13-14), Proverbs describes two paths: the way of wisdom and the path of evil. Sophisticated people like to think that's way too simplistic; the world isn't just black and white, right? Well, what do they think, that there's a third path where they can enjoy the darkness while claiming to walk in the light? The third path isn't really a different road; it's just a fork off of the path of darkness. Sometimes life is complicated, but the difference between good and evil doesn't happen to be one of those occasions.

Biblical wisdom is more practical than theoretical. Wisdom isn't just what you think with your mind; it's what you do with your body. Here are wisdom's "body" questions:

1. What are you saying? The tongue, James tells us, is like fire. Words can accomplish great things but they also can destroy.
2. What are you looking at? Our eyes, Jesus tells us, are the windows of our souls. Greed, lust, and gluttony all start with the eyes.
3. Where are you walking? All paths don't lead to the same place. The path of wisdom brings life to those who find it. Where do you think the other path leads?

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, may we walk on the path that leads to life.*

## Fidelity

*I did not listen to the voice of my teachers. (v. 13)*

**E**very form of abuse is a perversion of a gift from God. The same mouth that can say “I love you” can also say “You’re stupid and ugly.” The same hand that can caress can also hit in anger. Even God’s wonderful gift of sexuality can be used as a weapon.

After 30 years in youth ministry, I am convinced that abuse causes more pain to young people than anything else. Some kids are victims—of broken homes, broken promises, and even predatory relationships. Some kids become victimizers, and the sad cycle gets repeated in yet another generation. I don’t think it is possible to overstate the pain so many young people live in or to overstate the burden too many are asked to carry at too tender an age.

Sometimes people think nostalgically that problems like ours didn’t exist in past generations. Not so. Read Proverbs 5. Here is Solomon, extolling the virtues of fidelity. Then read First Kings 11 about Solomon’s seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines and these sad verses: “his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the LORD his God.”

If only Solomon had heeded his own wisdom.

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, help us be faithful people—faithful to you through being faithful in our human relationships.*

## A Cautionary Tale

*I observed among the youths, a young man without sense. (v. 7)*

**T**he vividly written story in Proverbs 7 is from the “R”-rated portion of the Bible. From his window, the sage can see a simple young man who wanders into the arms of a seductress.

What are we to make of this? Some commentators draw us back to Israel’s history of being attracted to foreign gods and pagan fertility cults. Maybe so, but when the woman says, “I have perfumed my bed,” we are not dealing with symbolic language but flesh and blood reality. The bed of this woman promises the delights of illicit sensual pleasure. And it feels good.

The fun comes at a cost—adultery breaks relationships, homes, and people. This is the road to death, and the feather-brained young man walks down that road like an ox to the slaughter, like a stag toward a trap, like a bird to a snare.

Death waits—presumably because the woman’s husband will come home—but death also waits in a larger and more terrifying sense. This is the road to Sheol, the Old Testament’s word for hell, and death there is not just a one-time event but an unending experience of loss. A person walks down this road long before ever leaving this earth.

“I set before you life and death. . . . Choose life . . .”  
(Deuteronomy 30:19). —Jeff Munroe

## Who Is Lady Wisdom?

*When he established the heavens, I was there. (v. 27)*

**W**isdom is personified as a woman, a noble woman who presents a sharp contrast to the seductress Proverbs talks about. Lady Wisdom gives life to those who find her. She was present at the creation of the world, and those who keep her ways are blessed. She is to be desired more than any treasure.

Who is Lady Wisdom? There is both a Hebrew answer to this question and a Christian answer. To the Hebrews, wisdom was the personification of the Jewish law, the culmination of all the law intended to teach. It was possible to break no commands and still not lead a full life. Wisdom calls the faithful Jew to a higher life.

For Christians, Lady Wisdom points to a real person: Jesus Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, the firstborn of all creation, the visible image of the invisible God. For Christians, everything Proverbs says about wisdom is found in Christ.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Jesus Christ *is* the law and the prophets. He shows us the wisdom of God in the fullest sense.

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Heavenly Father, as we read these ancient words of wisdom, may we discover your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.*

## The Man in the Mirror

*A wise child makes a glad father, and a foolish child is a mother's grief. (v. 1)*

The style of Proverbs changes beginning with chapter 10. We are introduced to a series of pithy couplets, each complete in itself. These adages—or maxims—are often what we think of when we imagine a proverb. The Hebrew word for *proverb* can also be translated “parable,” which is fitting since the Greek roots of *parable* (*para* + *bolos*) mean “to throw alongside of.” Chapters 10–22 of Proverbs continually throw one example alongside of another.

Often these proverbs contrast the behavior of the wise and the foolish. It is tempting as we read this to separate the world into these two kinds of people and thank God we're not fools. Honest introspection tells us this isn't true. There is really only one kind of person—people like us, who are both wise and foolish. The British theologian N.T. Wright says, “The line between good and evil runs right down the middle of me.”

When I was a kid, I'd watched enough cowboy movies to think the world was made up of good guys and bad guys. As I grew older I came to realize the world is made up of just—“guys.” Becoming wise requires looking in the mirror and telling the truth. —Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, deliver us from the foolishness inside ourselves.*

## Direction for the Directionless

*The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life. (v. 14)*

“**M**y heart is breaking for these guys,” said Dave, a retired pastor who had brought some kids to camp from a small town in Wisconsin. “When I asked them to describe their families, the wildest guy in the group said he didn’t know his father because his father had been in prison since he was six months old. This kid is just wild—he seems so far from God. Would you pray for him?”

Of course we prayed. Not only did we pray for Dave and his guys; we also prayed for every kid we met at camp. Each kid is God’s beloved creation, and we lifted up every one of them in prayer.

Reading Proverbs daily in the context of a youth camp is refreshing. The proverbs offer structure, wisdom, and direction. So many young people are brought up in a directionless, “anything goes” sort of haze, where there are no rules, and no one who cares enough to make them.

Some kids, like the ones with Dave, have been wounded by families who have abandoned them. Other kids, it seems, have been wounded by a culture that has abandoned them. The proverbs offer God’s wisdom, a fountain of life. Here is direction for the directionless, if only we’ll help them see.

—Jeff Munroe

## Oh, for a Long Nose!

*One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly. (v. 17)*

*Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding. (v. 29)*

**T**he Hebrew word for *anger* is the same as the word for *nose*. In verse 17, the phrase *quick-tempered* could also be translated *short-nosed*: the short-nosed act foolishly. In verse 29 the words *slow to anger* could be translated *long-nosed*: the long-nosed have great understanding. There is even a play on the *anger/nose* words in Proverbs 30:33: “as pressing the nose produces blood, so pressing anger produces strife.”

Bill Hybels points out the difference between a toddler’s temper tantrum and a grown man’s. We are amused by a toddler’s, we are afraid of a man’s. In the United States we use the words *angry* and *mad* interchangeably. The British have got us here—they’ve kept the meaning of *mad* as “insane.” In the British sense, we can affirm that an adult who has lost his temper is indeed quite mad. Uncontrolled anger is madness.

Anger is meant to warn us that something is wrong, that we perceive some sort of injustice happening. Unchecked anger is a self-destroying emotion. Frederick Buechner puts it along these lines: “there’s nothing like smacking your lips in anger . . . except the chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.”

—Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, let us be long-nosed, slow-to-anger people.*

## The Personal God

*The eyes of the LORD are in every place. (v. 3)*

In other wisdom books of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *Elohim* is used to refer to God. In Proverbs the word *Yahweh* is used. This is the personal name of God, the name God spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). In chapters 15 and 16 of Proverbs, *Yahweh* is referred to 19 times.

The name *Yahweh* is usually used in the parts of the Old Testament more directly related to Israel's redemption story—the stories of the exodus and Passover, the temple, and the Promised Land. Proverbs has no direct connection to Israel's redemption story, but *Yahweh*'s name appears all through the proverbs. One commentator says it is useless to speculate *why* that happened, but important to explore *what* it means to use this name.

The God of the proverbs is the God we know: a dynamic, moving force, not a fixed, static object. *Yahweh*'s eyes are in every place. He is offended by evil. He tears down the houses of the wicked. He hears the prayers of the righteous. He didn't just create the world and set it into motion; he is involved daily in what happens in our lives. This is the God we desperately want young people to know—and to know ourselves! —Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for being active and involved in our lives.*

## What Is Success?

*Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.*

*(v. 3)*

**A**s a month of camp comes to a close, it's natural to wonder if we've been successful. How do you measure success in a venture such as ours? There isn't a bottom line; we made no product or profit. Oh sure, like anything in life, there is a business side to what we do, and the camp has to at least break even to stay afloat. But that doesn't motivate any of the one hundred volunteers who worked here for the month or the hundreds of others who brought kids here.

On second thought, there is a product we were making. The product is changed lives. Our mission—"to introduce adolescents to Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith"—was also our motive. And there is a profit—a profit to the Kingdom of God.

"Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established" is balanced by verse nine: "the human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps." We've spent a month living faithfully to God. We've planned hard and worked hard, and we've seen the Lord's direction. This month almost 2,000 young people have been touched by our ministry. Success is found in the proverbial concepts we've been studying: wisdom, trust, discipline, and faithfulness. —Jeff Munroe

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Prayer: *Lord, may we be successful in your sight.*