

Words *of* Wisdom



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 20; 1 Cor. 12:14–26; Jer. 9:23, 24; Proverbs 21; Matt. 25:35–40; Proverbs 22.*

Memory Text: “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?” (*Proverbs 20:6, NKJV*).

To some degree (a great degree, actually), we are all products of our environment. Though heredity plays a big role, the values we hold come to us from what is around us—our home, our education, our culture. From infancy we are impacted by what we see and hear.

Unfortunately, what we see and hear isn't always the best for us; the world around us is fallen in every way, and it cannot help impacting us negatively. Nevertheless, we have been given the promise of the Holy Spirit, and we have God's Word, which points us to something higher and better than the world does.

This week we will look at various proverbs and the practical truths they express, truths that, if taken to heart and followed, can, indeed, help us to overcome the negativity of this fallen world and prepare us for a better one.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 21.*

We Are All Equal

Read Proverbs 20:12. What does this teach us about the value of all humans?

Unlike the theory of evolution, which considers us all to be nothing but chance products of a mindless cosmos, the Bible teaches that all humans were created by God (*see also Acts 17:26*). It is no accident, either, that Thomas Jefferson asserted the equality of all humans precisely because they were “created” by God. It’s in the Lord, and in Him alone, that we have our equality.

Now, though we all have the same Maker, this doesn’t mean we are all the same. Even identical twins don’t wind up behaving exactly alike. In Corinthians, Paul talks about our differences, and stresses that they should not lead to a sense of superiority but should, instead, help us to see our need for one another. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (*1 Cor. 12:21, NKJV*).

Read Proverbs 20:9. What else makes us all equal?

Sin is another universal equalizer. To the rhetorical question of the proverb, the answer “no one” points to the tragic and hopeless condition of humankind. Humans are all weak and mortal, and all the money and power in the world will not change that. Yet, in the context of the Scriptures, this reference to human sinfulness should not lead to despair, because Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection have paved the way for anyone, no matter how sinful, to have the promise of eternal life. And this life comes solely through faith in Him—not by our works.

“If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 20.

Do you ever find yourself feeling superior (or inferior) to other people? (You shouldn’t be comparing yourself to others anyway.) If so, what should the Cross tell you about the equality of us all?

The Test of Life

“‘Their works follow them,’” says Revelation 14:13 (*NKJV*) about the reward of the righteous. Only the future will testify to the real value of the individual. People may boast now of their wealth, their knowledge, their physical prowess, and maybe that is all true. But what does it mean in the sight of God? So often the traits, accomplishments, and deeds that humans uplift as important or impressive are shown to be the meaningless dross that they really are. After all, look at some of the despicable characters, often in the entertainment industry, who are all but worshiped and adored by fans. What we idolize and worship presents a powerful testimony to how fallen we are.

Read Proverbs 20:6 (see also *Jer. 9:23, 24; Mark 9:35*). **What are these texts telling us about what is of true value to God?**

It is not the single sensational act of love or sacrifice that will demonstrate the high quality of our relationships, but the long and regular series of small actions that we perform day by day, patiently and surely. The daily meal served to your spouse, the constant attention to a sick parent, the continued effort in your job; all these humble acts throughout life are the evidence that your faith is authentic. Enduring faithfulness is more valuable than intense but rare acts of love.

This principle holds true for our relationship with God, as well. It is more difficult and more valuable to live for God than to die for Him, if for no other reason than that living takes more time than dying. The saint who lives for God is greater than the martyr who dies for Him. Anyone can claim to believe in God and to serve Him; the question is: *Does it last?* Or, as Jesus said, “‘He who endures to the end shall be saved’” (*Matt. 24:13, NKJV*).

How, through patience, kindness, and a willingness to meet other’s needs, can you reveal to someone something of the character of Christ? How willing are you to do this, no matter the cost to yourself?

Waiting for the Lord

Read Proverbs 20:17, 21:5. What practical lesson can we find in these texts?

The thief who steals bread gets it faster than the one who has to work for it. Salespeople who lie to sell their bad merchandise may become rich faster than the honest merchant (*compare Prov. 21:5 to the next verse*). Yet, says the proverb, the future will turn the sweetness into “gravel,” and the hastily acquired wealth will become poverty. The text gives a number of examples to illustrate the accuracy of this observation:

1. *The Inheritance (Prov. 20:21)*. The mention of an inheritance obtained too quickly (implying that the parents are still alive) follows the condemnation of the one who curses his parents (*vs. 20*). The association of these two proverbs is significant. It is as if the son (or the daughter) curses the parents and also wishes them dead. The child may even have plotted the death of the parents in order to get the inheritance. The prospect of this behavior is tragic: the lamp he is presently enjoying will become “deep darkness” (*vs. 20, NKJV*) and his curse against his parents will turn on him, for he “will not be blessed at the end” (*vs. 21, NKJV*).

2. *Revenge (Prov. 20:22)*. This time the proverb addresses the victim who may be tempted to seek revenge for the evil that has been committed against him. The counsel is just to “wait for the LORD” (*NKJV*). Only then will you be saved, which implies that if you do seek revenge you are taking a serious risk. Proverbs 25:21, 22 emphasizes the same instruction, using the metaphor of heaping coals of fire on the enemy’s head, an Egyptian ritual expressing repentance and conversion. If you refrain from revenge, promises Proverbs 20:22, you will be saved by the Lord and, in the process (adds Proverbs 25:21, 22) you will save your enemy, thus overcoming evil with good (*Rom. 12:21*).

How can you learn to emulate the character of Christ more closely when it comes to overcoming evil with good? Why is this so contrary to our inherent nature? Why is death to self the only way to achieve this end?

Compassion for the Poor

A person's character is measured less by wisdom or even religious commitments than by readiness to help the poor and the needy. It is not what you have that measures your character. Who you are to your neighbor is the measure of character. The Samaritan who saves his neighbor is closer to the kingdom of God than the spiritual priest (*Luke 10:26–37*). The book of Proverbs emphasizes and explains this priority.

For God's sake: The first reason to make this a priority lies in God Himself, who prefers human compassion for the poor over our religious zeal (*Prov. 19:17, 21:13*). Your sensitivity to the poor and your concrete deeds on their behalf will count more with God than will any of your pious acts. In fact, God is personally invested in that work, so much so that, when we give to the poor, it is as if we are giving to God Himself (*Matt. 25:35–40*).

Read Matthew 25:35–40. What does this tell us about how Jesus identifies so closely with those in need? How should this truth impact how we relate to such people?

For the sake of the poor: The second reason lies within the poor person, whom God has created just as He has created the rich person (*Prov. 22:2*). The equality between humans, based on the fact that God has created them all, makes the poor as worthy of attention as the rich person. We should love our neighbors for who they are: beings made in the image of God.

At the same time, think about how much good it does you to help those in need. Our basic natures are selfish; by default we tend to look out for ourselves over and above others. By giving of ourselves, we learn to die to self and to better reflect Christ's character, and what is of more value to us than that?

In what ways do you get a greater sense of personal satisfaction from helping others in need than only doing things for yourself?

Education

The Hebrew word for “education” comes from a word that means “to build up” and “to begin.” All these meanings are contained in the Hebrew idea of education: when we “train up a child” (*Prov. 22:6*), we build up, we begin, and we lay the groundwork for the future. Parents and educators are therefore responsible for their children’s future and, by implication, the future of the world. What we do with our children today will impact society for generations to come.

Read Proverbs 22:6. What does this say about the importance of educating children correctly?

It is significant that the Hebrew word for “educate” is the very word used for the “dedication” of the temple (*1 Kings 8:63*). Early education means to dedicate our children to God in the same way that the temple is dedicated to God. Education has an impact on our salvation, even beyond our own life. “To parents is committed the great work of educating and training their children for the future, immortal life.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 38. Such education has an eternal effect. The apostle Paul seems to allude to Proverbs 22:6 when he commends Timothy for his early training in the knowledge of “the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation” (*2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV*).

Read Proverbs 22:8, 15. What principles do we find here?

Education can be compared to the activity of “sowing.” The future of our society and of our children depends on what we have sown. If our seed was “iniquity,” then our education (“the rod”) will fail, and we shall reap trouble (*vs. 8*). If our seed touched the hearts of the children (*vs. 15*), then the rod of our education will drive the children’s foolishness far from them.

We so often teach others (especially children) by our example. Think about your example: What kind of legacy are you leaving? In what areas, if any, might your example be better?

Further Study: “Parents should be models of truthfulness, for this is the daily lesson to be impressed upon the heart of the child. Undeviating principle should govern parents in all the affairs of life, especially in the education and training of their children. . . . Parents, never prevaricate; never tell an untruth in precept or in example. If you want your child to be truthful, be truthful yourself.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 151.

“Many fathers and mothers seem to think that if they feed and clothe their little ones, and educate them according to the standard of the world, they have done their duty. They are too much occupied with business or pleasure to make the education of their children the study of their lives. They do not seek to train them so that they will employ their talents for the honor of their Redeemer. Solomon did not say, ‘Tell a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’ But, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 38.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the idea of Proverbs 22:6. Why must we be careful in how we apply this? That is, many parents have done a good job in rearing their children, and yet as adults those children make wrong choices. Why must we never forget the reality of free will and the reality of the great controversy as we look at the meaning of this text?
- 2 Look again at the final question at the end of Wednesday’s study. What does it tell us about ourselves that we get such a sense of satisfaction from helping others, especially when we get nothing in return? What should this truth tell us about why so many people who have so much of the world’s riches are miserable nonetheless?
- 3 Though we are not all equal in talents, education, experience, and so forth, we are equal in the most important thing: we all need the Cross for salvation. What should this teach us about the basic equality and worth of all human beings? More so, how should this truth impact how we treat all people?

Brayden's Testimony

Paul Brown and his family are a true blessing to me. A few years ago, when they moved in, my step-grandfather asked Paul if I could mow Paul's yard. Paul agreed, and soon a connection grew between me and his family, and I found out what nice people they are. His kids, Payton and Stormy, are very upbeat and friendly. Their mother, Christie, is really nice and is always there to help me.

One day I asked Payton why they were always away on Saturdays. I thought it was weird that I couldn't do any work for them on that day. Payton invited me to come to church with them. I liked it, but after a while I started slacking off. Six months later I was back—this time to stay.

I joined the Pathfinder Club. As we were coming back from a campout, Payton, my cousin Hunter, and I were talking about school. Hunter and I didn't like our school because there were so many fights. Hunter said that he hoped to someday go to a Christian college. Payton asked, "Why don't you just go to a Christian school?" Our parents agreed to let us go to Highland Adventist School here in Elkins, and Paul found sponsors for us. I like the school a lot. The teachers and staff are really nice, and the students are friendly, not fighting.

One day as we were going to church, Payton said he wanted to get baptized. Hunter and I said that we wanted to get baptized with him. So we all took Bible studies together and were baptized on November 2, 2013.

The church members are the nicest people I've ever met. They are always there for you. And the pastor, Dan, there's something about his preaching that just sticks with me. I like the people here a lot; they are like my second family that I've always wanted.

Being able to come here and know about the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been a real blessing to me. No one else in my family are Adventists. They don't understand why I don't do some things I used to do. My stepdad can't understand why I don't eat pork—all my life I've eaten it, and at first it was hard not to eat it. But I'm glad I went off of it. I've seen a change in my weight and my personality. Everything has gone up since I was baptized.