I. Proverbs 1

“Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” - Proverbs 1:7, NLT

The words “Some Assembly Required” can drive fear into the hearts of parents on Christmas Eve. Imagine opening up a box of bicycle parts to find the instructions missing. You can depend on your own knowledge, which only includes riding a bicycle, and think, “How hard can it be?” only to find out it is really hard and wrap up the handlebars to give your child the next morning. You could call up a friend who knows a lot about bicycles and be utterly at their mercy as to whether they want to walk you through the process or if they can even give you the proper instructions over the phone when they can’t see what you see. Or you could look up the manufacturer and find the instructions posted online. This seems like the obvious answer. Even with the instructions, it doesn’t mean we won’t make mistakes or end up with a few extra pieces in the end. It is still our best chance of success.

When it comes to life, we have the same options. We can pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and think, “How hard can it be?” only to find out that it is really hard. We can depend on others who seem to know a lot about life, but we put ourselves at their mercy and depend on them to know enough to help when they can’t see what we see. Or we could look at the instructions the Creator of life and this earth has left us. Even with His instructions, we will make mistakes and might leave out things He intends for us to use, but He is still our best chance of success.

II. Proverbs 2

“Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” - Proverbs 2:4-6, NLT

The work of a paleontologist who digs up dinosaur bones seems exciting as they uncover what’s been buried for so long. However, big discoveries are few and far between, if ever. Most of their work is tedious and most of us would consider it boring and unfruitful. A children’s museum has a dig site for children to dig in the sand and find “fossils” for themselves. The kids like to dig in the sand because they know they will find something. Proverbs teaches us to search out wisdom and knowledge like we are seeking hidden treasure. Like paleontologists, we need to meticulously seek His word for truth. It may seem tedious and boring in the beginning, but unlike paleontologists, we’re promised success! The treasure a paleontologist finds will be extracted and put back together and admired by the public. The treasure we find is not for display on cute wall decorations in our house or Facebook posts, but is displayed in our lives through our words and actions.
III. Proverbs 3

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” - Proverbs 3:5-6, NLT

Watching sports can be frustrating, whether it is first graders playing basketball or professional football players on the field. Sitting in the stands or watching it on television, you can easily see the open player, but the one with the ball doesn’t act on it and loses the perfect opportunity to score. We are frustrated because they don’t see what we see. Our perspective shows the whole picture. The players see it quite differently. To be honest the quarterback may not see it because his attention is also on the three-hundred-pound defensive player whose only goal is to flatten him.

In life, we are much like the player with the ball. We don’t see the openings because opponents are life-size and in our face. We have a heavenly Father who sees the whole field, though. We can trust Him because he knows the winning path. When we are connected to Him by reading the Word, praying, and worshiping Him, He lets us know the next step. If we try to do life on our own, we are much more likely to get flattened.

IV. Proverbs 4

“Watch your step, and the road will stretch out smooth before you. Look neither right nor left; leave evil in the dust.” - Proverbs 4:26-27, MSG

If you are one to seek adventure, seeing a pesky “Stay on the Path” sign at a nature reserve may dampen your mood considerably. These signs are there to either protect you, things found away from the path, or both. Sometimes snakes or other hard-to-see dangers like quicksand or poison ivy are found away from the path.¹ Proverbs tells us to find the straight path for our feet and stay on the safe path. When we crave adventure and want to veer off the safe path we need to remember the dangers off the path can be severe. If we are off the path, there is no guarantee of rescue, either. Turning off the path can have lasting consequences on others, too. One park sign stated: “Stay on Trails and Paved Areas. Plants grow by the inch and die by the foot!”² If we deviate from the path, who is likely to follow? When we think our mistakes and our sins only affect us, we are believing a lie. The beauty destroyed in our rebellion may never fully recover. So, stay on the path. It is the best for you and everyone around you.

V. Proverbs 5

“An evil man is held captive by his own sins; they are ropes that catch and hold him.” - Proverbs 5:22, NLT

If Houdini were alive today, he may not have made as big a wave as he did back in the early 1900s. Videos on-line show ways to escape handcuffs, zip ties, or duct tape

¹ https://findingfaithtoday.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/stay-on-the-path.jpg
around your wrists, you know, in case you’re kidnapped. Other videos show how to get out of strait jackets, too. Escaping what used to be thought of as inescapable, now seems just a few clicks away.

Proverbs teaches us our sins are like ropes that catch and hold us. There is no video out there to show how to wiggle out of them. Even what we consider to be small sins will cause discomfort, but as they multiply over time, we’ll realize we can’t move freely anymore. Only through the forgiveness offered to us by God through Jesus’ sacrifice are the ropes of sin removed.

VI. Proverbs 6

“You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two.” - Proverbs 6:6, MSG

Ants are fascinating creatures. If growing up you never watched ants on the trail or scurrying around on their nest, you need to look up some ant videos and watch. They are tireless workers. Even though they are very small, they can carry things many times their own weight. While our neck seems fairly puny, an American field ant’s neck joint can handle pressures over 5,000 times its own weight. That would be equivalent to a two-hundred-pound man lifting 10,000 pounds with his neck! Sometimes they carry seeds, other times leaves, or even other bugs.

Ants have been an illustration for hard work for thousands of years. Not only are they represented in Proverbs, but Aesop’s fables include a story of a lazy grasshopper who begs the hard working ants for food. More recently A Bug’s Life alters Aesop’s story a bit to portray the grasshoppers as more like the mob and the main ant character becomes an inventor to help the ants have more time to relax. But that’s not the nature of an ant. Ants work hard. If we take our cues from ants then we don’t lay down on the job, always preparing, always working. What if instead of turning this lesson into a motivation to become a workaholic, we think about it in terms of our spiritual life? What if ants only worked one to two hours on Sunday and maybe an occasional hour during the week? They wouldn’t be prepared for winter nor would they even have enough nourishment for the week. The same goes for our relationship with Christ. Pray without ceasing and praise Him in all circumstances!

VII. Proverbs 7

“Dear friend, do what I tell you; treasure my careful instructions. Do what I say and you’ll live well. My teaching is as precious as your eyesight—guard it!” - Proverbs 7:1-2, NLT

Did a teacher ever ask you which of your five senses (sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell) you would least like to lose? Sight usually tops the list. Hearing helps us communicate with others easily, but seeing our environment saves us from danger and helps us see our surroundings in the world. Here in America, we do lots of things to

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protect our eyes. We wear sunglasses, use eye drops to remove irritants, and even have surgery to correct vision problems. What if we were to take as much care to follow God’s commands as we do our own eyesight? If disobeying God were as irritating and painful as getting a piece of dirt in our eye, we might not be as keen to ignore God’s instructions.

VIII. Proverbs 8

“Blessed the man, blessed the woman, who listens to me, awake and ready for me each morning, alert and responsive as I start my day’s work. When you find me, you find life, real life, to say nothing of GOD's good pleasure. But if you wrong me, you damage your very soul; when you reject me, you're flirting with death.” - Proverbs 8:34-36, MSG

Apprenticeship, as understood in the colonial time of our country, was the system where young men and women worked for and learned a craft from a master craftsman, usually during their teenage years. They would learn the ins and outs of their craft, as well as the business side of it. Those who learned well and had means could hope to open up their own workshop. Those who slacked in their work, could be released from their contract and turned out onto the street. There was no good reason to shun the teaching of a master craftsman. In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as a woman. She desires pupils who are eager to learn, ones who are ready in the workshop before she arrives each morning.

If we were to think of ourselves as apprentices to wisdom, or better yet, to God, and we looked back on the last week, what kind of pupil were we? Were we waiting in the workroom first thing in the morning, or did we slide in after lunch? Did we approach God’s teaching like we do the weather report in the morning, with not much more than a glance? Or did we savor His Word like we would our favorite meal?

IX. Proverbs 9

“Skilled living gets its start in the Fear-of-GOD, insight into life from knowing a Holy God.” - Proverbs 9:10, MSG

Many of the proverbs can be summed up in this verse. This Fear-of-God is not like the fear we experience when we hear a window break in the middle of the night or when we find out our child was in an accident. This fear depicts reverence. In the book of Esther, subjects who enter into the king’s presence uninvited are condemned to death unless the king holds out his scepter. His people had a fear of the king based in reverence, but also knowing his power over their lives. When we realize the power of our King, who controls the winds and the waves, the earth’s rotation around the sun, and even the air that we breathe, we begin to understand His power. This reverence comes from our realization of who He is: “the foundation of wisdom” (NLT). So, if you want to do well at life, fear God. If you want to begin to understand what life is all about, know the Holy God. How do we know God? John 14 describes how knowing and loving Christ and God is doing what Jesus commanded us to do.
X. Proverbs 10

“That people who accept discipline are on the pathway to life, but those who ignore correction will go astray.” - Proverbs 10:17, NLT

The Food Network show *Worst Cooks in America* features two chefs who take over a dozen horrible cooks and try their best to lead them to learn how to cook. They teach basic techniques and test how well the cooks are learning with a variety of competitions. Each week each chef picks one contestant to eliminate from the competition. The chefs know these cooks will not become Julia Child or Bobby Flay overnight, but they do expect the cooks to put into practice the lessons they have learned. Contestants who balk at instruction or criticism often find themselves eliminated. Anne Burrell, one of the more outspoken chefs, often asks why the cooks are there if they are not willing to learn. She reminds them they are on the *Worst Cooks in America* for a reason. It is easy to watch the show and agree with her. It is another thing altogether to receive instruction in our own life and not bristle or defend ourselves. Constructive criticism is helpful, but our knee-jerk reaction is to be defensive. As parents, it is frustrating to see our children whine when they are disciplined. As children of God we need to remember take a step back and evaluate our actions, accepting God’s discipline as good and just.

XI. Proverbs 11

“That it is foolish to belittle one's neighbor; a sensible person keeps quiet.” - Proverbs 11:12, NLT

A family began construction on a large home in an affluent neighborhood, but it came to a screeching halt when neighbors complained that it was violating code by being ten feet too close to the street. The city council voted to let construction continue instead of having to tear down the front of the house. Angry protestors, led by the next-door neighbor, had to be escorted out of the council meeting. The neighbor complained to reporters that the new house dwarfed her own making hers look like the maids’ quarters, calling the new house all sorts of names. This situation highlights the wisdom of Solomon’s proverb. Nothing good will come out of her belittling her new neighbors.4

We may not make fun of our neighbor’s house to reporters, but when we broaden our view of neighbor, are we just as guilty? Neighbors include coworkers or parents at your child’s school. We are stuck with our neighbors. Our neighbors are also our most convenient mission field. Instead of belittling maybe we should even consider sharing with them how valuable they are to the Father who sent His Son to die for their sins.

XII. Proverbs 12

“That some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.” - Proverbs 12:18, NLT

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You will notice that nowhere in Proverbs do you read, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” We’ve all seen or felt the negative effects of words hurled at us or at those we love. What about words that are not necessarily hurled, but slip out of our mouths? Unintentional offenses still cause damage. Noticing reactions of hurt should stop us in our tracks and even lead us to reverse course quickly. While words can never be unheard, they can be forgiven. Some of the most tender moments with children are when we ask forgiveness for words spoken in frustration. Authentic words of encouragement are a balm for any hurt. Make a point to add these to your daily interactions with friends and family and watch the difference they make!

XIII. Proverbs 13

“A refusal to correct is a refusal to love; love your children by disciplining them.” - Proverbs 13:24, MSG

Imagine that your doctor has instructed you to lose fifty pounds through changes in your diet and exercise. You aren’t sure about your willpower, so you hire a personal trainer. You find a very sweet coach and think it’s a good fit. Your coach praises your every move and only suggests you make changes in your diet and exercise, but always ends with, “but it’s okay if you don’t.” Will you lose the weight? Probably not! You need a firm hand to draw the line and set higher goals. Without raising expectations, there is no hope of improvement.

Imagine a teacher who never graded her students’ work until the final at the end of the term. They assumed they understood the principles since they were never made aware of any errors. How would they do on the final? Poorly. A teacher who grades work is helping her students know the problems early enough to make the appropriate changes. We want our children to grow up and mature because we love them. By adding correction and discipline to our encouragement we are setting them up for the best chance of success.

XIV. Proverbs 14

“People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.” - Proverbs 14:29, NLT

Pixar’s 2015 film Inside Out looks into the emotional Headquarters of the main character, Riley. Characters depicting five main emotions: Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger, all contribute to Riley’s personality. She is a happy-go-lucky eleven-year-old, so Joy generally stays in control at Headquarters. Anger is personified by a small red, gruff-voiced creature that can go from content to raging mad with flames shooting out the top of his head in seconds. Joy does her best to keep him preoccupied because when he’s in control Riley reacts in ways contrary to her nature. Perhaps the writers at Pixar took notes from the wise King Solomon. When our anger is in the driver’s seat, it seems sense and logic jump out the window. We do and say things in anger we would never say in our
right minds. Anger in and of itself is not sinful. God gave us anger as part of our being. God gets angry. It is if and how we control our anger that is important.

**XV. Proverbs 15**

“A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare. The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing, but the mouth of a fool belches out foolishness.” - Proverbs 15:1-2, NLT

Have you ever thought about how many jobs require the ability to calm down angry people? Public servants like police officers are obvious examples, but think about people in education like teachers, principals, and superintendents. Almost all aspects of customer service and hospitality industries have the potential for angry customers. Even jobs devoid of customer conflict are vulnerable to employee skirmishes. It is a wonder we are not all given more training to diffuse intense situations. Some people have a knack in this area. I’ve seen a school administrator take someone yelling at them and after addressing the issues, the parent walks away happy. I’ve also seen happy people get mad enough to fight when prodded with just a few of the right words. In all situations, we need to choose our words, and tone, carefully.

Do our words make knowledge appealing or do they resemble the belches of foolishness? Could we follow our conversations with the gospel? Gossip and words of condemnation don’t easily lead us to present the hope of Christ. Words of wisdom and encouragement do, though. Consider our words in light of the gospel.

**XVI. Proverbs 16**

“Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.” - Proverbs 16:18, NLT

American culture promotes pride. Pride is the high opinion we have of ourselves. Therefore, pride leads us to focus on self: think of our obsession with self-esteem and selfies. Surely, Solomon is wrong about pride being tied up with destruction, right? Nope - he’s right on the money. When a toddler is learning to walk and falls down, are they likely to break any bones or have serious injuries? No, because they are only falling a short distance and tend to fall on their cushier backsides. What about toddlers who climb up and fall off the kitchen cabinet? The chances are much higher for injury because they have ascended above their normal place. Pride in knowing God created us with purpose is healthy and good. Pride that overestimates our value and lifts us up beyond our intended place sets us up for failure. The higher we allow our pride to take us, the farther we have to fall. Solomon also knew God’s opinion and actions toward the proud. Earlier in the chapter, he wrote: “The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 16:5, NIV). When the Lord wills destruction, you can be sure it will be carried out.

Although the word haughtiness is not as common today, we can relate to knowing what conceited and stuck-up looks like in those around us. Thinking about the term stuck-up we usually picture someone with their nose stuck-up in the air. When we are
walking, the higher our nose sticks up in the air, the less likely we are to see obstacles in our path, so the more likely we are to fall.

**XVII. Proverbs 17**

“Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.” - Proverbs 17:9, NLT

God uses children to reveal attitudes and actions of which we are all guilty. For example, if a brother walks by his sister and bumps her, she will claim it was intentional and he will claim it was an accident. The reason she claims it was intentional is because she thinks she knows his character and feelings toward her are negative. He will claim it was an accident because it was or he doesn’t want to get into trouble. After a few moments pass and a similar scene plays out with the roles reversed, they will make the same arguments. The brother assumes she is retaliating and she thinks if the excuse worked for him, it will work for her. What if, however, the sister doesn’t think her brother would intentionally bump her. What if she chooses to assume the best of her brother? The bump is forgiven without even mentioning it.

Our love for each other prospers because we trust and believe the best of the other person. We also realize sometimes we offend without intending to and know how it feels to be accused in those situations. Knowing how we would want to be treated in that situation and doing that for someone else shows we care. Grudges have more to do with our evaluation of the other person’s character than with the offense. We can work ourselves up into a frenzy when our perception of their actions are paired up with a negative view of their character. “Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others” (Colossians 3:13, NLT).

**XVIII. Proverbs 18**

“Answering before listening is both stupid and rude.” - Proverbs 18:13, MSG

Whether you use Google, Bing, or Yahoo as your search engine as you type your query, they begin to fill in the rest of your question. Sometimes it works great because you don’t have to finish typing it, but other times it makes you wonder what other people really search for on the internet. For example, typing, “why is my g” will produce options to choose “why is my girlfriend mad at me” “why is my gas bill so high” “why is my goldfish turning black” or “why is my gray hair turning yellow.” When we listen to other people, we can fall into the same trap of assuming the answer to the question before it has been finished. This immediately informs the other person you are not listening to them. Proverbs informs us this is both stupid and rude!

**XIX. Proverbs 19**

“Lazy people take food in their hand but don't even lift it to their mouth.” - Proverbs 19:24, NLT
Modern conveniences were supposed to make life easier. Some economists believed we would work less and enjoy more leisure time as technology let us take less time to do the same tasks. Technology, it seems, has let the two extremes, a workaholic and a lazy bum, venture farther down their respective paths than ever before. A workaholic businessman can call his wife and text his assistants while riding in a cab to a meeting with a client. You may wonder how technology can help lazy people become even more lazy, but it can. There are now Magic Scissors which are battery operated and cut for you, a Pet Petter can pet your cat or pet your dog up to 85 pets per minute, and a motorized ice cream cone saves your tongue and wrist from any extra work.5

As bad as these seem, it only takes reading Proverbs to realize lazy people have been around since biblical times. It is not the fault of technology that makes people lazy, it is part of our sinful nature.

XX. Proverbs 20

“Don't say, ‘I will get even for this wrong.’ Wait for the LORD to handle the matter.” - Proverbs 20:22, NLT

The Old Testament seems so harsh sometimes. So many actions had severe consequences. Much of the Law dealt with how people were to relate to one another and several dealt with how to punish those who have hurt you. Reading Proverbs 20:22, however, seems to call for a pause in acts of retribution. If people hurt you, it seems a lot easier to pay them back than to wait for the Lord to do it. To be honest, we really want to have a hand in the matter of punishment. For ourselves we are happy with grace and mercy, but other people need swift and severe discipline, right? Maybe not so much according to Jesus. Moving farther along in the chronological history of the Bible, we come to the New Testament and Jesus is on the scene teaching His disciples. “But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also” (Matthew 5:39, NLT). It is one thing to let God take care of a wrong instead of getting even, but it is another to not resist an evil person. Receive a blow to one side of your face and offer up the other? The New Testament is looking tougher than the Old Testament now. It doesn’t stop at offering up the rest of our bodies for a beating. During the first century of the Church, after Jesus had returned to His Father, Peter wrote “Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it” (1 Peter 3:9, NLT). Now we are not to retaliate or even resist, but let attackers have another swing, and bless those who curse us.

Maybe the progression of how to right a wrong has more to do with God’s purpose with our interactions with others. The Old Testament Israelites needed to live and work together, so rules set guidelines for life as a people. The New Testament presents God’s people as sharing Christ in hopes to expand the Kingdom. Nothing gets the attention of an enemy more than blessings in return for curses. How can you turn the attacks of an enemy you face into opportunities to love and bless them?

5 http://www.lifebuzz.com/lazy-inventions/
XXI. Proverbs 21

“There are those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor who will be ignored in their own time of need.” - Proverbs 21:13, NLT

The internet has connected so many parts of the world in ways never before imagined. We can video chat with someone in China or read detailed accounts of doctors treating Ebola patients in Africa. We know more about foreign peoples and cultures, but our awareness of the needs of people all over the world can be overwhelming. Loren Eiseley tells the story of a boy walking down a beach the morning after a storm, which brought thousands of starfish onto the shore. He reaches down to pick one up and hurls it into the sea. After several are thrown into the sea, a passerby asks the lad what he is doing and he said he was saving the starfish because by noon they would die. The passerby said it would be impossible to help them all. The little boy threw another one into the sea and replied that he had helped that one.⁶

We need to realize, just like a mother recognizes her baby’s cry, we may be more prone to hear the cry of a certain group in need. Maybe it is those in foster care, or starving children in third world countries. Maybe you ache for the victims of human trafficking here in the states and all over the world. Our church is blessed to partner with those who have heard the cries of the poor and daily live to supply their needs. If you would like to join us as we partner with missionaries who are feeding the hungry and giving clean water to the thirsty you can find the link here: goChristFellowship.com/Serve. Know that God will work through you to save the ones you can.

XXII. Proverbs 22

“Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.” - Proverbs 22:6, NLT

If only this were a guarantee! If only when we first lay eyes on our children, we could sign on the dotted line and know it was a done deal. Experience speaks of too many families whose children have strayed off the right path. As in grammar and mathematics, exceptions exist for every rule, or in this case proverb. As with most of the proverbs it is a generalization which usually comes to pass. This proverb brings hope for parents of all stages. It reminds us that maturity will complete its work. Your child will not be a toddler or teenager forever! Our children see us live out our faith. They see what they can expect to happen in their lives if they follow our road. If our lives are fruitful, they will seek the same fruitful life. If our children hear us speak of following Christ with our lips and see us following a different path, however there is a good chance they will follow our steps, not our voice. The best way to direct our children onto the right path is to walk His way ahead of them.

XXIII. Proverbs 23

“The father of godly children has cause for joy. What a pleasure to have children who are wise. So give your father and mother joy! May she who gave you birth be happy.” – Proverbs, 23:24-25

Grandparents don’t need much encouragement to tell you how wonderful their grandchildren are at everything. Parents, though, are much more likely to vent a few frustrations about whatever stage their children are in at the moment. Parents see the child every day in the nitty-gritty of life: when they are tired and hungry, selfish and temperamental. When children are very young, parents see their sin nature begin to creep out. Natural instincts are not inherently godly. However, as God works in and through their children, they see a shift from selfish desires to godly actions. Parents rejoice when they see this shift. Their child has not become perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but they celebrate God’s hand at work in their lives.

We realize how hard it is to follow God and turn away from our own desires. We need to understand the battle is real for our children as well. Pray for them. Pray for God to use you to encourage and build them up. When you have joy, because of who they are and what God is doing within them, tell them and help them know you see it. If you do not see it, pray for God to reveal His work in them. Pray for parents around you who struggle to find joy.

XXIV. Proverbs 24

“The wise are mightier than the strong, and those with knowledge grow stronger and stronger.” - Proverbs 24:5, NLT

They say necessity is the mother of all invention. In war, generals with fewer troops with less training and supplies than enemy forces have two options: march in and hope for a miracle or develop a strategy that either evens the playing field or even provides the advantage. If they gather intelligence and use their knowledge wisely, they will beat out strength in numbers. If you remember your history lessons about the American Revolution, the British had great numbers of trained troops with supplies and authority to seize more. The Americans were mostly farmers and townspeople who organized underground militias. Supplies were limited and if their involvement became known, their families were at risk. They had to fight differently than marching in rows and forming a line.

The enemy’s schemes can feel like an opposing army of giants. We think there is strength in numbers, but in reality, there is only strength in our God. “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking” (James 1:5, NLT). His plan for you is to outsmart the enemy and break down his strongholds in your life. Therefore, God gives us these instructions, “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2, NLT).
XXV. Proverbs 25

“Patient persistence pierces through indifference; gentle speech breaks down rigid defenses.” - Proverbs 25:15, MSG

Jesus told His disciples a story describing a judge who cared little for people and nothing for God. A widow came to him repeatedly begging that justice be done for her. Because of her persistence, the judge finally gave her justice. Jesus told them the story to illustrate the importance of prayer. He told them if a corrupt judge came around because of a widow’s persistence then their heavenly Father, who loves them, will surely answer their prayers.

If you’ve shared the gospel with friends and family, and they seem indifferent, keep sharing, every chance you get. Do not badger, but continually share the truth in love. Show how much you care and pray for their heart to soften to the gospel. If you know someone who needs to hear about Jesus, but haven’t shared with them, pray for opportunities and for courage to speak the words God will put in your mouth.

XXVI. Proverbs 26

“If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead.” - Proverbs 26:27, NLT

This proverb represents the plotline for every Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner cartoon. The slapstick humor always had the Coyote’s ingenious plans backfiring spectacularly. If a contraption was supposed to deliver dynamite to the Road Runner, the contraption would work as designed, but leave the dynamite behind. Boulders meant to roll down a hill or fall off a cliff to squish his prey would inevitable bounce or somehow fly back up to crush him.

Have you noticed how plans to gossip sometimes come back to look worse on the gossiper than the victim of gossip? “People may be right in their own eyes, but the LORD examines their heart” (Proverbs 21:2). Even if we do not plot the demise of someone, God knows our heart. Most of us do not scheme against others, but gossip has a way of slipping out. Not standing up for those who at the center of gossip may lead you to be associated with the gossip, too. “A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends” (Proverbs 16:28). Ask God to examine your heart and let you know where sin still lurks and seek forgiveness before it causes problems.

XXVII. Proverbs 27

“As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.” - Proverbs 27:17, NLT

When Evander Holyfield entered the ring with Mike Tyson in November 1996 for the World Boxing Association’s heavyweight championship, he was the 25-1 underdog. In training for the big fight, he told his sparring partners to “imitate Tyson’s bulldozing style” and they took him to task. He said it was discouraging to not even be able to beat them, but he said “I prayed during training. I prayed when I got in the ring with Mike,
and I still prayed when I was fighting because I knew what a great fighter I was facing.” Tyson was known to take out his competitors early. Holyfield survived the early onslaught and managed to knock Tyson down in round six. Holyfield ended the tenth round with a slew of punches, but Tyson wouldn’t fall. Tyson was “reduced to a punching bag” in the eleventh round and Holyfield finished him off with a knockout punch.\(^7\)

How do we train for what life may throw at us? We find another believer and train together, not in the gym, but in His word and on our knees. What do we do when we size up our enemy and realize he is bigger and tougher than we are? We pray and we train and we pray some more. God places other believers with us because they are a part of His family and so are we. Let’s train together and win together.

**XXVIII. Proverbs 28**

“When corruption takes over, good people go underground, but when the crooks are thrown out, it's safe to come out.” - Proverbs 28:28, MSG

Littered throughout history is the rise and fall of numerous evil entities, which prey on the innocent. When they rise, individuals who stand against them are targeted causing others to blend into the background, almost vanishing from the scene. Only when good people unite and stand up to these regimes is their evil brought to an end. Many in Nazi Germany stood up alone, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian preacher who publicly denounced Hitler and the Nazis. At the time, many of the Christians were too wishy-washy or accommodating to the ideas being forced on the German people. Bonhoeffer famously wrote, “If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction.”\(^8\) to try to convince fellow Christians to stand with him. He was singled out and thrown in prison where he eventually hung for crimes against the regime. However, many Christians in countries taken over by the Germans united to protect Jews and even the old and disadvantaged which were just as likely to be executed. An underground system connected like-minded people to rescue thousands. When Germany fell, many were able to come out of hiding and began to live free again.

As Christians, we should seek to help those persecuted by evil leaders and take measures to keep them from gaining power where we live. Even in the midst of seemingly unchecked evil we must remember we serve a just God who fights for His people, “For evil people have no future; the light of the wicked will be snuffed out” (Proverbs 24:20).

**XXIX. Proverbs 29**

“When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful.” - Proverbs 29:18, NLT

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This year two movies come out telling the story of boys who grew up in the jungle, raised by animals. *The Jungle Book* presents Mowgli having to sort out whom he can trust, escaping from those hunting him and sticking with the ones he loves. *The Legend of Tarzan* tells a similar story, but throws in a little romance as Tarzan tries to sort out how he fits within human society. As wild as both of these seem swinging and jumping through the jungle, living with wild animals, they have nothing on those who turn their backs on God. Trusting yourself to make your way in this world, created and designed by God, denies you the experience of living this life to the full. The world paints the false picture of the fun, carefree life with the killjoy persona of Christians. Obeying the law and joyful seem at odds with the way the world describes it. David had it right though. He was king and could have pursued life to its fullest extent, satisfying any desire. When he followed the instruction of the Lord, all was well, but seeking sinful pleasures, he found life devastating. He penned these words, “The LORD is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving” (Psalm 28:7, NLT). Let’s be a people so filled with joy we burst out in songs of thanksgiving.

**XXX. Proverbs 30**

“First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.” - Proverbs 30:8-9, NLT

The American version of this verse might read, “Help me to never get caught doing anything that might get me in trouble. Next, give me more of everything with no strings attached. If you don’t, I’ll chase after anything that will give me what I want, and because I’m so great I know you’ll meet my demands.” The seeds of discontent have grown roots into every area of our lives. The rate of divorce and statistics of extramarital affairs show we aren’t content with our spouses. The debt we carry from credit cards shows we are not content with the income God provides. The seemingly endless supply of self-help books and the size of the plastic surgery and weight loss industries say we are not satisfied with ourselves, body or soul.

In God we find life. When we seek purpose in anything but God, the path leads to destruction. God doesn’t keep us dependent on Him because He is spiteful or mean-spirited. He helps us by reminding us the world is His and does not revolve around us. So many proverbs and psalms speak of God as our refuge and strength. It is in His care we find our best purpose and life.

**XXXI. Proverbs 31**

“Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades. The woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-God - Proverbs 31:30, NLT

The Fear-of-God referenced in this verse describes approaching God as the perfect creator of this world and being completely aware we are sinful, in need of a
Savior. Women in the days of Solomon were tempted to pay more attention to their bodies than their character, just like in 2016. There is more to this than the cliché of it’s what on the inside that counts. It is how we approach God that matters most. Do we turn our backs on Him so we can pursue our own pleasures? Do we see Him as our personal Santa Claus who gives us stuff if we’ve been nice? Or is He the One who made us in His image and loved us so much, He sent His Son to die for us, so our sins could be forgiven and we could live in fellowship with Him? Someone who approaches God like that will be a light to shine on a hill. Others will take notice!