

A Month of Wisdom (Proverbs 1-3:8)

By Sam Pritchard

Day 1

Reading: “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth - Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance,” Proverbs 1:1-5

Message: Now I have a very vivid memory from when I was in primary school, I remember it was Friday and the class had come in after lunchtime and this meant we would be having a reading session. I was quite an eager reader at that age and so used the routine that the second the teacher had stopped talking that two of us got up and collected our books from across the other side of the classroom and walked back towards our desks.

The problem I had was that my desk was right at the front of the classroom and as I was walking back to my desk I stumbled on a lead of the projector. Now for those who are around my age would appreciate this brand-new and rather expensive form of technology was not the sturdiest of objects. Thankfully being quite a thin child, my weight did not pull the projector onto the floor, instead my punishment is an inability to forget this moment. As I took my seat the teacher uttered the words still ringing in my ears “That’s why we should always listen, think and follow instructions”

I had noted how I went to get my book as soon as my teacher had stopped talking, I got up, however I had not been listening to his instruction to stay being the projector so that we do not trip on the lead. The Book of Proverbs focus’ heavily on the importance of good instruction. The opening five verses should hopefully provide us with a character description that we should all be searching after. Do you long to be the type of person described in verses 1-5?

As I learnt that fateful day at primary school coming under wise instruction does not make you wise, unless you stop to listen, think and act based upon that advice. In that classroom all the children heard the very good instructions, but not all were wise. I came under good teaching, sound advice and yet I still stumbled.

Over the course of this year we will be exploring and diving into the great truths and guidance given to us from this book of wisdom however do not think it is enough to simply read the book of proverbs and these short accompanying notes and think you have grown in wisdom.

I cannot put it better than my year five primary school teacher Mr Davies as we read and study through the book of proverbs with all the instructions we must “Listen, think and follow”.

Day 2

Reading: “to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Proverbs 1:6-7

Message: As we come to the book of proverbs it can be a real danger that we heed the teachings and guidance but separate it from the God who inspires all scripture. In the opening section of proverbs, we are told that the beginning of knowledge does not stem from revising for a test or memorising the entire book. The beginning, the very start of knowledge comes from a fear of the Lord.

There can be many misunderstandings regarding the meaning behind what it truly means to fear the Lord. The first misconception is to assume that fear is always a negative response, fear exists because of the fall (Genesis 3:10) however in this fallen world fear can often be the driving force to keep us safe. There are many positive actions we do that are in some form motivated by fear, I wear a seatbelt in my car for fear of injuring myself.

One example from my childhood that I can remember was going to a zoo and for the first time in my life I saw a lion, a ginormous mighty beast the so called ‘King of the jungle’ prowling around. His wide paws fitted with razor sharp claws prowling around his den. As he yawned his teeth like swords became visible this magnificent creature filled a young me with terror while simultaneously in awe of the sheer magnitude. As much I feared the lion I was impressed by his characteristics.

Hopefully this story serves as a helpful yet inadequate illustration of what it means to fear God, to have a deep and profound appreciation for His magnitude, might and character. It also serves as a reminder that we cannot separate God from the book of proverbs. As we go through the book of Proverbs, we must always remember the importance and centrality of Christ throughout the scriptures. We must also remember the awesome power and holy character of the risen God we worship.

Seeking wisdom and knowledge by following these proverbs is meaningless if you are failing to acknowledge and by extension rejecting the one true triune God.

Day 3

Reading: “Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.” Proverbs 1:8-9

Message: Here we see quite a common theme in the book of Proverbs where the writer struggles with the poverty of human language to describe and define the value and worth of virtue. So here we see a comparison or almost a simile between remaining steadfast to the teachings of your parents and the worth and honour of jewellery.

Those of you who know me know that I am a simple man in many ways, but I do struggle to understand why so many people spend such vast quantities of money on something that fits around their wrist, neck, ears or head. The allure and joy of jewellery has really passed me by, however there is one neckless that I would love to own. The L'Incomparable Neckless. This already has a very bold name, but it is eye wateringly beautiful to look at. However, even more eyewatering than the neckless is the price tag with the last valuation being set at \$55 million.

Now if somebody was to hand you \$55 million and you bought a single neckless with the money, I think you have completely wasted an opportunity but what does it say about the person who possess such wealth just for show? When the person wearing the L'Incomparable neckless walks into a room people would see and immediately recognise and see the beauty. If you were to wear a neckless like that it would not be tucked into your top hidden away, it would be displayed and obvious.

Those who follow the teachings of their parents are noticeable, those who are virtuous are obvious. Something else we must come to realise about the truth found in the proverbs is that generally it offers principles more than exact prescription. There might be some people to whom their parents did not impart much good advice or Godly character, but we all have older Christians in our lives who when we were young (or just younger) took the time to help us and guide us.

Sometimes as we get older, we lose the humble obedience of a young child, no matter how old we are we must hear our father's instructions and not forsake our mothers' teachings for they are precious. For even Jesus Christ the second person of the God head submitted, listened and obeyed the direction of his parents and if Christ followed instruction how much more should we?

What do you value more, what would you rather have? A lovely shiny Rolex watch (Other brands available), a jewel encrusted neckless or to remember how you were brought up with a Godly character that is more visible and shines brighter than any diamond.

Day 4

Reading: “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;” Proverbs 1: 10-12

Message: The word that jumps out at me from this passage is the word “entice” defined as to “attract or tempt by offering pleasure or advantage”. As followers of Jesus we must always be on our guard to be following and living in our new nature and resist any enticement from sin.

However, if we are being completely honest with ourselves even though we hold firm to Jesus there is something about sin that wants to snatch us back, Paul phrases this dilemma “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Romans 7:15).

So often there is an enticement with sin, we don’t want to go against the God who loves us, but we do, often, daily. The great Puritan theologian John Owen in his book ‘the mortification of Sin famously said, “Be Killing sin or sin be killing you”. So often we can be lured towards sin and we can ignore the inherent deadly nature of sin. I am remembered by an illustration that has stuck with me for many years, and one I don’t think I will be able to forget, it’s not a very pleasant picture but it is one that highlights the end result of what we do wrong.

It is often said (though the accuracy might be debated) that the most effective way to kill an arctic wolf is to use its nature against him. When the wolf gets a taste of blood it gets sent into a blood thirsty frenzy. It is rumoured that some tribes would bury a knife in the ground attached to something solid and sprinkle the blade with a few drops of blood. When the wolves find the blood, they would start licking away, unaware to them that they will eventually cut their own tongues and begin to bleed. However, in their bloodthirst they would continue to lick the blade. Many of the wolves would eventually bleed out.

This is the reality of sin, what looks so attractive to us is deadly. It tempts us toward it and it is pleasing and enjoyable however we are not aware of the great damage it is doing to our lives and our spiritual walk. Sin is enticing but it is like a knife sprinkled with blood.

Do not let sinners or sin entice you back to it, because you have been saved for something better. The empty promises of sin will fade, but the reality of Christ’s cross is forever.

Prayer: Father we pray that you would help us to not try and resist sin with our own strength but instead of being enticed by sin we want to be captivated by Christ. Fill us with the Spirit and the lasting knowledge of your eternal purposes to which the fleeting pleasure of sin can never compete. And thank you Lord that despite the numerous times I have sinned forgiveness was still made available.

Day 5

Reading: “we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse”— my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.” Proverbs 1:13-16

Message: In this passage we see a continuation in many respects from yesterday’s reading where we are to resist the enticement of sin and the here read about the promise of precious goods for those who follow sin. As we looked at previously this pleasure is fleeting and false and cannot be compared to the hope we have in Christ.

In today’s devotion I want to primarily focus around the imagery surrounding where we walk and who we walk with. I am sure many of you can relate to being younger and going on a long walk with your family and just being bored or tired. Perhaps the sun was too strong and beating down on you, and every step became harder and harder. Sometimes when we were younger, we might not have wanted to go and so we would drag our feet, often ruining our shoes in the process.

When people ask us to follow them, do as they do or go where they go if it is contrary to scripture we should resist. Who is our ultimate master, we need to decide and make a conscious decision of who are we going to follow? Who will you follow, will you follow the crowd to be popular amongst friends or work colleagues or will you follow Jesus? The reality of the gospel is that you cannot follow both Christ and this world. It is essential that we make sure we are not on the path of sin or walking into what is immoral.

The reality is the path of the wicked might be easier, the paving might look more even and less difficult to follow. The path of the wicked might look better, but ultimately it will take you to the wrong destination. Jesus says himself saying “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Today what a pivotal question to consider in my daily life which path am I on and who am I following?

Prayer: Thank you that you have made a way through Jesus for a path of light for those who will believe on you. As the world tries to drag us away from you help us to keep firm footed on the path that leads to eternal life and not persuaded to the path of wicked.

Day 6

Reading: “For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.” Proverbs 1:17-19

Message: Here we read of an almost humorous analogy depicting and illustrating the complete folly of those who gladly peruse evil and the desires of their hearts. It is foolishness because nobody can escape the pending judgement from God. More than this God has persistently given us warnings Jesus himself mentions Hell more than he does Heaven. These warnings of what is to come for those following their heart instead of following Jesus are given not as gloating but out of a love to see people saved.

The image that this passage you can imagine vividly as someone desperately tries to catch a nearby bird perhaps sitting above in an adjacent tree branch. As this man struggles and untangles his large net with which he then sets up and after all of his struggles in constructing the trap they have finally paid off when the trap is set. Unfortunately for the person who has set this trap he has been watched from start to finish by the very bird he wishes to catch. What is the likelihood that a bird who has witnessed the setting of this trap would so easily become entangled in it? The whole benefit of a trap is the element of surprise, even a bird is not foolish enough to watch someone setting a trap to catch it and then fly directly into it.

However, that is exactly how so many people are living their lives today. This passage describes the efforts and labours of setting up the net as “vain” or pointless, for the net will never come to anything. In the same way the work of the wicked is in vain, living a life for self is pointless and will never reach the desired outcome.

Birds are not known for being the cleverest of animals but even the birds of the air are wiser than those that reject the offer of forgiveness that Jesus offers. By extension the works of those who are in Christ have more meaning and worth to them than we often consider. If the works of the wicked are in vain then the works of someone living out their Christian faith must be the opposite. Let me assure you today, there is no futility in following the gospel.

Prayer: Father we thank you that you are the ultimate judge of the universe in many ways we thank you that the evil we see around us will not go unpunished, we praise you that you are the bringer of justice and what is right. But even more we thank you that your justice is dipped in mercy and there is forgiveness available. We pray now and ask you to bring more people to the reality of the gospel revealing the foolishness of a life spent apart from you.

Day 7

Reading: Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; (Proverbs 1:20-21)

Message: One night I peacefully drifting off to sleep, I was in that lucid state not quite asleep and not quite asleep but quite relaxed. But out of my peace and relaxing suddenly my eyes shot open and I sat upright in bed looking around. I had heard a noise, quite loud out of the darkness. It resembled a baby crying but it sounded close, eventually it grew fainter and tiredness grew more so I went back to bed.

When morning arose, I was glad to hear how many neighbours had heard the loud wailing last night and glad that it was not just me. We all concluded that it must have been a fox, which was later confirmed by one neighbour who went out and saw the rather noisy fox. We all heard the noise but only one person made the conscious effort to find what was making the noise.

The image we have in this portion of Proverbs is wisdom personified (portrayed with human traits or characteristics) crying out loud in the marketplace one of the busyness and most filled areas and a street that are filled with people.

Wisdom does not make itself hidden, it is so easy to blend into a crowd however it much harder to hide in a crowd if you are raising your voice and crying out. Many people would be able to hear the noise but how many stop to take the time from their busy day to seek after wisdom. In a similar way everyone heard the fox, but only one person took heed.

People cannot say or argue that true Godly wisdom hasn't been made known to them elsewhere in Scripture it is written *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse"* (Romans 1:18-20).

From this passage in Romans we read that God has made it plain to them, everyone who rejects Jesus has had the opportunity to listen and hear. In our own Christian lives how sensitive are we to seeking after Godly wisdom (which starts by knowing and fearing God). Even as Christians there is a danger that we listen more to the busyness of the world than we to God and his Words.

Prayer: Help us to not be drawn in by the things of this world but help us to remain focused on God and his Wisdom as it calls out to us. Be with us through every day helping us not to blot out or ignore your guidance but to embrace it and follow it.

Day 8

Reading: How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Proverbs 1:22

Message: I wonder if you can remember back to your school days If your school was anything like most there was always very clearly defined, distinct and generalised friendship groups. Whether that was those who loved sport, the group of giggly girls, the misbehaved children and inevitably the 'nerdy' children.

I don't know what type of pupil you were at school but inevitably I can guarantee that there was always a small group of people who disliked those who were intelligent or tried hard. Whether they were just secretly jealous or there was a deeper routed problem they just seemed to hate it when anyone excelled or did well in the classroom.

Leading on from yesterday's passage where wisdom was making itself known by crying in the streets but more than just rejecting them, they are mocking wisdom. In the same way that people would mock those with knowledge in school that destructive futility.

The problem is not that God has not made the truth about himself clear the reality is that people do not want to know. I am always amazed by the anger and vitriol that some contemporary atheists have for God considering they reject His existence. This is similar to the scorning and hating knowledge that the verse mentions, the godless world in its ignorance actively rejects God and his precepts as being unmoral and outdated.

However, in many ways we should not be confused as to why they would hate this knowledge as the Bible says "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:43-44).

We should not be surprised that people mock Christians or hate God and his laws because before God dealt with us, before he revealed the cross to us in an effectual way that was us. We were all once rejecters and haters of God and so no matter how much somebody hates Christianity or our God, they are not beyond His power to save.

Prayer: Father when we look at this world, we see people who hate you, reject you and act in a way contrary to your commands. Help us to love them, care for them and be positive and effective witness to them taking your message of hope to those who desperately need it.

Day 9

Reading: “Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.” (Proverbs 1:23)

Message: In these verses we see the blessings that are made available for those who will turn and listen to the message that God has. Previously we have had warnings not to follow the footsteps of the wicked and descriptions of wisdom and how it makes itself known. But in these verses, we see the generosity of God revealed.

If I was a bartender, I think I would be much beloved, for whoever I pour my drink it is always right to the brim. If I am pouring myself a cup of tea I want as much tea as I can fit into the mug, the only problem with that is that I often misjudge and pour too much causing it to spill over the sides. Having a full mug with no room also makes it very hard to steadily carry. However, after years of this tradition I don't think I am any closer to stopping this habit, regardless of how much tea I drip around the house when trying to carry my mug.

I really like this illustration for Proverbs 1:23 God says that “I will pour out my spirit unto you” this word pour is so powerful. God could have promised to sprinkle his spirit on us, but instead there is a promise of a pouring out. Being Welsh I understand the phrase very well, when I look out of the window (often on a summer's day) and the rain is beating against the house we use the expression “It's pouring down”. God gives us his spirit seemingly unsparingly.

There was an old puritan tradition of Christian meditation where the Puritans would simply survey the things around them and let relevant scriptures come to mind, and to rest and dwell on them. Next time you see it raining, really pouring down, why not take the time to reflect on how much God has blessed his people with by his spirit? Next time you follow my bad example and pour a drink that bit too full, remember that you are filled with his promised Holy Spirit.

Finally, why does God give us the spirit? Because he is making his words known to us and the spirit moves powerfully revealing the truth of who God is to our hearts. The only reason we were able to appreciate and see Jesus for who he is was because the Spirit regenerated us. God's spirit helps, to understand the spiritual things of God and guides and points us to his son.

Prayer: Father we thank you that you have sent your Spirit, we thank you it was not a sprinkling but a pouring out amongst your people. We pray that we would be people who are led by the spirit, we ask that you continue to reveal truths about who you are and what you have done for us. We thank you for the undeserved blessings we receive from you, make your words known in my heart. Amen.

Day 10

Reading: “Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,” (Proverbs 1:24-25)

Message: Today we are going to focus on the idea that wisdom is freely available, but many ignore all counsel, there can only be two options you either hear and listen or you hear and ignore. Chapter one has presented us with imagery that suggests everyone is exposed to wisdom, but many actively reject it.

These few verses we are looking at today remind me of a very common sight, whenever I go to the park, I cannot help but be amused by the number of dogs running around, but more accurately the number of disobedient dogs. There is always at least one dog who is being called hundreds of times and you know he can hear his owner, but he is having a whale of a time running around the park, so he ignores his owner. After a while a disgruntled owner then tries to intercept or chase after the dog.

Of course, the dog can hear his owner, however as we have read in proverbs the dog has been called but refuses to listen. God has made himself clear and visible and yet so many people refuse to listen, they have heard but they refuse to let what they have heard affect them. They are enjoying their lives and they do not have a care in the world and the master calls, but they go in their own direction for they think they know best.

I wonder if you have seen the common film trope in various action films where for whatever reason there is always a character hanging off a cliff edge. The dialogue around this scene is always the same across every film the character on the cliff will lean over put out their hand and say “Grab my hand”. In these passages we read that there is a stretching out of a hand and “No one has heeded” help is made available and yet is rejected.

Whatever reason be it pride, busyness of life, comfort, fear of being ridiculed, god has provided a lifeline. We are in a state of danger, and sin we cannot save ourselves the Bible says “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1. What could a dead person do to save themselves? We had no hope and then God has stretched out his hand to us. It is vital that we do not ignore and reject the merciful salvation that only He can offer.

For those who have accepted and are trusting in him, we must never lose a sense of wonder and joy at the thought of God stretching out his hand to us. Never forget how bad you once were, how without hope you were living for yourself. Christ has offered us life let us rejoice in it.

Prayer: Father help us to appreciate and know the joy of that saving outstretched arm, while we had no hope. We pray Lord that your pouring out of the spirit would bring people to accept that they need to heed the words of your voice.

Day 11

Reading: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, (Proverbs 1:26)

Message: Have you ever experienced that awkward moment when in conversation with someone they make a joke and you laugh and they respond with “I wasn’t joking, that was serious”? There are so many potential examples perhaps your wife has turned to you and said “I’m going to take up jogging and rise early each morning” maybe your husband has said “I think I’ll have a go at fixing that so we can avoid having to buy a new one”.

I’m sure we all have experienced something like this when someone lays their plan or vision and without realising, we assume they are making a joke because their plans seem so unachievable. This is a similar idea underpinning the way God laughs at those people we studied yesterday who are actively ignoring the entirety of God’s counsel. God laughs at those who have rejected him and go their own way searching after the desires of their heart.

In previous days we have studied how God has made wisdom available for all, but if you ignore his wisdom then do not be surprised if it leads down a very unappetising path. For those who are rebelling against Him, is God fearful or worried at our rebellion is there anyway man can overpower God? The mocking that is referenced is not anything like bullying it is more a reference to the wisdom that has been actively ignored. If I had to paraphrase the sentiment into an idiom it might be close to the phrase “I told you so”. The path of righteousness is clear and obvious and yet people are almost shocked when disobeying God brings about negative consequences.

There is also a very serious implication in this verse those who reject Jesus are heading for calamity, there is no other way we can read this verse. Calamity is coming for all those who are rejecting God. This should be a verse that challenges our gradual evangelism to become urgent evangelism.

Prayer: Lord we want to thank you that if we are trusting in you through Jesus’ work on the cross we have been pardoned from any eternal spiritual calamity. We ask you Lord to be merciful and remember those who actively perusing a life without you, ignoring your wisdom and counsel. We pray that we might be better witnesses to our friends, loved ones and community in your strength so they might be saved as we have been.

Day 12

Reading: when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. (Proverbs 1:27)

Message: Here we see the state of those who reject God and the panic, fear and audacity that they have when their life starts to go wrong, they will cry out to the God whom they have spent their years rejecting.

The image that these verses use to describe this is “When terror strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind” this is very descriptive, and I am sure many of us can relate to one of these. Many of us might love to watch and listen to a storm late into the night as we are cwtched up warm in bed as the rain beats against the windows and the bright flashes of lightening light up the sky, and the deep rumble of thunder in the air.

But the one thing none of us like is when we have left the house and those thick black clouds come over us and catch us unawares. Growing up and living in Wales has taught me one thing about the weather and that is that it could always rain. However, when a storm comes out of nowhere and you are taking shelter wherever you can maybe huddling together in a shop doorway until the worst of it passes. This is just the fear we have when we are on land, I wonder how any of you have been in a storm while in a boat on the ocean?

Many of us can relate to what a storm means, to feel trapped, surrounded with no hope of escape or freedom, not knowing how long it will last. We will all experience true storms in our lives events and tragedies that seemingly come out of nowhere and knock us off course. In the darkness, pain and misery of the storms of life we need to realise that we are not in control of our lives, so often our plans fail.

When the difficulties of this world arise the question is where is your hope? Who are you rooted in, who have you been trusting? I cannot put it better than the old hymn that speaks of the storm but also reminds of us of the hope we have in Jesus:

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour’s love!

Prayer: Father we thank you that even in the storm, even in the problems and issues I face I can always hold onto my saviour, we pray that we would spend more time appreciating you in the calm and in the storm, we praise you for your faithfulness to us.

Day 13

Reading: Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, (Proverbs 1:28-29)

Message: There is a continuation from yesterday, as the storms of life have descended upon the wicked and we read that in the midst of these difficulties those who have mocked and rejected God and his wisdom cry out for help.

I am sure that many parents can relate with this sentiment, how often have you told your children not to do something because they will get hurt, perhaps there is a particular area of a park or field that is dangerous and you warn your child stay away from that area. Not even five minutes later there are screams and tears of "Mammy, Daddy, I hurt myself!".

In this passage we read that those who have rejected God and followed their own desires and own wisdom actively hating knowledge and the things of God. Then the storms of life shake them and as a child they come running to the person they have ignored. Diligently they hunt after God there is an element of desperation as they struggle with life, but then we get a very hard and sombre verse.

For all of the searching and desire for God to step down and intervene and rescue them they search diligently "But will not find me". What a terrifying thought that there are some who might never find God. We need to make sure our salvation, regularly asking ourselves do I know what it means to know God the father, through Jesus by the Holy Spirit?

There are many people who do not really have a belief in God but in times of troubles they will pray anyway, just to try it. They just want God on their terms, no trusting in Jesus, no service, no changed life, no spiritual future just physical assistance and pleasure. God is not just there for when things in this life go wrong, He is not just concerned with the physical, but his primary concern is with the spiritual.

Those who call on God when life gets difficult but have never called on Him for forgiveness, they will look but they will not find Him.

Prayer: We pray to you with thanksgiving and relief that forgiveness has been made available. As we look at our world and the depth of depravity man can sink to we pray that people would come to know and see you not as a wish granter, not as someone to pray to if all else fails. We pray that more people will come to see you as saviour, sovereign and substitute.

Day 14

Reading: therefore, they shall eat the fruit of their way and have their fill of their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; (Proverbs 1:30-32)

Message: Continuing on from the storms of life and the wicked who call out to God for His help while still rejecting Him we then read about this fruit analogy, “They shall eat the fruit of their ways”.

This phraseology reminds me of a story of two twins who were identical, same hair style, eye colour, height they looked exactly the same, except for the fact they had two very different personalities. One was a quiet boy who did what he was told by his parents and followed their instructions to the letter, the other did not.

One day the two boys went on a visit to a local park, both of the twins were given an apple as a treat and they ran off into the park. One of them made sure to keep his apple safe as he played on the swings and slide, the other did not. The other child ran around playing football with his apple and on a few occasions tried throwing it at some of the girls nearby. After an hour or two the boys were called back to enjoy their prepared park side snack, one of the boys was able to sit and enjoy his perfectly preserved treat, the other boy had a battered, bruised and quite unappetisingly muddy apple.

The fruit of the wicked is what they have grown, cultivated and they will reap however positive or negative. I wonder, which of the twin’s fruit does yours most resemble? This imagery surrounding fruit made me think of a verse in the New Testament, but probably not the one you expect. When Elisabeth visited Mary Luke records “And when Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb (Luke 1:41-42).

I love this description of the person of Jesus, when we consider this passage in Proverbs looking at the fruit that we are going to eat we have to acknowledge the fruit the wicked have is the accumulation of all they have done wrong. But for all those resting in Jesus we have a new life, a greater hope we have forgiveness though we were once living a life of wickedness. Will you one day partake in the fruit of your work, or will you share in the fruit of Jesus’ work?

Prayer: We thank you that though we have all sinned against you there can be forgiveness available to all who turn to Jesus. We thank you for the judgement that we are deserving of was poured out on your own son instead of me. Through his death we thank you that we can have life and fruit not of our own deeds but of Christ’s.

Day 15

Reading: “but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.” (Proverbs 1:33)

Message: After a few days of examining the negative we come to this verse which is the reversal for those who listen. This is a message for those people who are listening, those who are actively following and perusing the precepts and principles that God has set in place. Again, we have to make reference to the conditional offer that is on offer, if you are not listening then this promise of help and security does not apply to you and your life.

I love the relaxing and peaceful phrase “secure and will be at ease” this reminds me of a very famous scene in an equally famous cartoon. The episode begins with the main character sitting slovenly in his pyjamas on the sofa drinking a beer and eating crisps perched in front of the television. There is not a care in his mind as he is having a relaxing morning enjoying what he has around him, I would fully describe him as at ease. The man takes a large stretch and proclaims, “I love these lazy Saturdays” it is at this point his wife leans into the living room and says, “Its Wednesday”. The husband then screams “I’m late for work” and runs out of the house.

The next scene we have a similar looking set up as he is lying on the sofa in his pyjamas with a large bowl of popcorn and he contently utters “I love these real lazy Saturdays, they are so relaxing, unlike the fake Saturday that almost go me fired”.

You might be slightly confused by what in this story pointed me to this passage in Proverbs but for me I think this image demonstrates to us that we cannot search or find true comfort or ease in ourselves. There are so many people who think they have found true security in this world, and then something happens and their whole façade collapses. So many people might think they have a comfortable life, but disaster will come to all those who anchor their security to the joys of this life.

What we are offered in this passage is true security, and true ease which can only be made available through Jesus Christ. For the things of this world are passing however God is offering us eternal security, today you might have many worried about day to day life. But as a Christian their needs be no worry about your eternal home where you will one day dwell without any dread of disaster.

Prayer: We thank you that in you, I can have security and ease in where my heavenly home is. I am so grateful that I am not reliant on my earthly circumstance’s security or protection, I thank you that my future is secure not in my works but in Christ’s work on the cross.

Day 16

Reading: My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; (Proverbs 2:1-2)

Message: Who is there that does not like receiving gifts? Proverbs chapter two opens with the imagery about receiving which implies both a giver and a receiver. There is also a conditional within the statement with the word 'if you receive' meaning that not all receive this gift.

When I was younger, I loved pirates, from Peter Pan, 'Treasure Island' or 'The Muppets Treasure island' there was something even from an early age that could never fully understand. The mission and focus of pirates always seemed to be to acquire often by immoral ways gold and riches, and they would have a large chest bursting with coins and jewellery. Once they had secured this treasure they would then sail to an abandoned remote Island and bury it, after all their hard work they would bury it to keep it safe and hidden from thieves. This still strikes me as very strange behaviour, but they value the treasure so much they are willing to do anything to protect it.

It would appear to me that everything a pirate did was rooted, inspired and driven by a desire to possess or protect their treasure. I wonder what we honestly value, what is the thing that we treasure? Is it our job and the sense of meaning derived from it, family or loved ones, our beautifully maintained garden what do we value?

Here in proverbs we are told to treasure up, hold onto appreciate and love God's commandments. Could you be described as somebody who is dedicated and devoted to treasuring up the things of God or are you somebody who takes their treasure from the things of this world.

I'm sure this is the first passage that came into your mind speaking of treasure Jesus says "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[a] destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 6:19-21).

Even as Christians we must ask ourselves am I focusing on God being the thing I delight in or am I often distracted by the things of this world which do not last.

Prayer: We thank you that those of us who know Jesus have received a great treasure that the world cannot compare to. We apologise and are sorry for the times when we have elevated and taken enjoyment in fleeting things more than we have enjoyed and focused on you. Help us in every area and aspect of our lives to have a greater appreciation of the treasure you have given to us.

Day 17

Reading: “yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,” (Proverbs 2:3-4)

Message: We learn from. Very young age that if someone cannot hear you the obvious thing to do is raise your voice, there is a greater chance of the person hearing you. The illustration here highlights the desire and need for us to seek after wisdom and understanding. This should not be passive but something we are actively trying to search for.

When I was younger, I remember like many children receiving a present probably for Christmas or my birthday and unwrapping it to find a money-making device. The second I peeled back the wrapping I knew I was on the verge of being a millionaire. So, after a few weeks we went out somewhere for me to try my faithful metal detector and what I discovered was like most people all a metal detector does is trick you into exercising and helps you pick up a few minor coins.

I remember enjoying as a child and using it on occasion I never found anything of note and the greatest use of my metal detector was probably being able to use it as an illustration. But as a child I was eager and committed to finding anything valuable. This verse says “Seek it like silver” the commitment I had to finding something of value. If you have ever lost some money you know the desperation to find it, overturning the entire house to find it.

In the same way a younger me dedicated so much time and effort and energy to searching after treasures with my metal detector how much more diligently should we seek after understanding and knowledge about God?

In your spiritual walk with him could you be described as somebody who is actively searching wanting to know more letting the knowledge and person of Jesus fill you and guide your actions. Are we actively seeking God perhaps for the first time or millionth time, we need to be active in our walk for him?

Prayer: We thank you that in you there is a treasure greater than silver, we pray that we would raise our voice to you calling out for wisdom and assistance. We thank you that if we search for you, we can find such greater wealth than this world can offer. Please help us to have a focus on searching out further and deeper truths about you and your son.

Day 18

Reading: “then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;” (Proverbs 2:5-6)

Message: The problem we have as humans is that our mighty God is so distinct and far removed from us it can be incredibly difficult to describe and try and describe and accurately reflect His nature and character with the limitations that we have. We have limitations both in our understanding and conception of God but also our language is unable to fully explore the magnitude of God. God cannot be fully explained reasoned by our words, He is that transcendent of us.

With this in mind we have in this passage a description that almost humanises God purely because our language cannot fully explore his depth, so the phrases used are designed to help us to better understand God. In this passage God is assigned a mouth largely to help us in our understanding of God by assigning him an attribute that we can relate to.

Living in Wales we have an abundance of rivers and often very beautiful meandering ones and for those who are feeling very fit and healthy you can walk the stretch of a river. Starting from a very small trickle until it begins to build and eventually you will reach the mouth of the river. A Mouth of the river is where the contents of the ocean flows out and enters into a larger body of water such as a sea, lake or ocean.

I think this is a very helpful illustration of the mouth of God that knowledge and understanding flows from God. There is no doubt that knowledge and understanding comes from the Lord the wider question is what is our response? How do we react to God? As you read through your Bibles do you act upon what you read. Do we focus on what stems from the mouth of God or are we sometimes preoccupied and distracted by what proceeds from the mouth of our friends or family?

Prayer: We thank you Lord that you are a God to whom we struggle to fully understand the extend of, we are humbled by your majesty and deserving of all the honour. We thank you for the certain hope that there is a confidence that you are a God who speaks to us informing us with the knowledge that we need to be saved and to grow in you. We ask that you would be with us, working within us so that we would not take for granted or become distracted by the things of this world over you.

Day 19

Reading: he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; (Proverbs 2:7-9)

Message: Who among us could have predicted the spread and life altering impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) as for months our lives were completely altered. There was also a lot of new language being used as uncommon phrases became incredibly popular such as 'lockdown' 'social distancing' 'second wave and 'flatten the curve'.

One of these newly popularised words is 'shielding' now we know that in the context of this proverb in the ancient society in battle a shield was a literal life saver. As the arrows or swords of the enemy descend the men of old would have clung tightly to their shield for it was the only thing between them and certain death. How dependent would they be on their shield, how much confidence would they have in it?

For us who have lived through the Coronavirus we know this world shielding in a different way but the reason it was attributed this name remains obvious. We know shielding as the most vulnerable in society staying inside their houses because our homes are a safe place of protection. The application of this is that our God is a shield for those who are walking according to his command and we need to make sure that we are keeping as close to his principles as we can.

This passage continues describing God as guarding us and watching over the way of his saints, do you ever feel like you are not very important or that nobody cares about you? Because if you are a Christian who is trusting in the fulfilment of Jesus' work on the cross God is watching over you. God himself cares and values you enough to go further and actively be your shield, refuge and hiding place.

Prayer: We praise you, that most difficult situations, problems and events we do not have to rely or find strength from within, but we can look above to you who is our shield. We thank you for the certainty that nothing can ever overpower you might your shield is unbreakable. We rejoice in the reality that you delight and watch over us. If I am ever feeling unloved or alone, I ask that you remind me that you are always watching over my life.

Day 20

Reading: Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; (Proverbs 2:9-10)

Message: Today we will look at the beautiful image that wisdom will come into your heart and this knowledge of God will be pleasant to your very soul. I love the certainty that if we are walking in integrity if we are trusting in Jesus then wisdom will come into your heart. There is no uncertainty or flexibility but if we are walking with God wisdom will come into your heart.

I once heard a story about a young boy named Johnny, he was recovering well in hospital he was not any trouble for staff he was the ideal patient. Until one night one of the doctors walked past his room and he was muttering late into the night. A while later the same doctor again walked past and there was a definite whisper coming from the young boy. The doctor looked at his watch and concluded that the boy would be asleep very shortly and went about his business.

As I am sure you can guess the doctor walked past Johnny for the third time and there was still whispers and noises coming from him, by this point it was late into the night well past the young boy's bedtime. So, the doctor marched over to the intercom system and kindly but sternly announced through the system "Okay, thank you Johnny that's enough for now, time for sleep" then out of the quiet little Johnny responded, "Okay God goodnight, Amen". The doctor noted that he did not hear any other mutterings from the boy until the morning.

In this story we have a young boy who has a deep desire to pray and talk to God, I'm sure this stems from the fact that his soul delights in God and the knowledge and presence of Him is pleasant. If we think of the pleasant people in our lives, they are the people we want to be around and spend time with that encourage us when they are near.

The wisdom of God dwells in the heart of those who trust in the name of Jesus, and we should delight in Him. Just like little Johnny felt compelled to pray long into the night because he loved and wanted to be with his God. Do we have the same passion and desire to rest in him in his ever-pleasant knowledge to our souls?

Prayer: We pray to you asking that would captivate our hearts, we pray we find our pleasure and delight in you and not the things of this world. We echo the great hymn that says "Floods of joy over my soul, like the sea billows roll, Since Jesus came into my heart".

Day 21

Reading: discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness (Proverbs 2:11-13)

Message: If you are trusting in the Lord you will be delivered from the way of evil, what an encouraging reminder that while we were all once walking in the way of evil can be lifted out of it and saved for something so much more.

Have you ever been wondering somewhere new, or perhaps late at night when everything appears different? You might have thought you knew where you were going when you began your journey, but as you are in the middle of travelling uncertainty has gripped you. Maybe you felt so unaware of your surroundings you even had to stop to ask for directions from a local resident who described the correct direction and sent you on your way. I wonder how many of us have ever stopped for directions and then thought 'That can't be the right way' have you ever been totally unconvinced by the way the passer-by has sent you on?

Even if you managed to get despite having good reliable advice have you ever been walking or driving somewhere battling a suspicion that you are travelling in the wrong direction. So inexplicably we veer away from the instructions to follow an inkling we have or a new shortcut that has emerged. It doesn't take us very long to realise that the shortcut we have taken clearly was a shortcut to somewhere we were not travelling to. Even though we stopped to listen to advice something within us knew best and deviated from the correct route, meaning we now need to stop and ask for more directions.

This illustration is hopefully helpful at highlighting the passage we have just read those of perverted speech forsake the path of the uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, they have abandoned the correct route and are walking on the paths they choose but there is darkness. How far can you get walking in pitch darkness along a path? How much harder and slower does it make the journey how foolish it is to reject the well-lit righteous path to follow our own desires contrary to God's commands.

Why would we forsake the right path in which God offers us deliverance from evil why would we forsake that for darkness, in our lives which path are we walking on?

Prayer: We praise you that though we do not deserve it in your mercy there is salvation and deliverance from what we have actively done wrong. We pray you would help us to stay firmly on the right path, following in your way and your presence. We also pray for those in the path of darkness we ask that you move and bring them into your Kingdom.

Day 22

Reading: who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. (Proverbs 2:14-15)

Message: As a continuation we read more about those people who are walking in the wrong we learn that they are not merely lost and searching for a way back onto the path. In actual fact they are rejoicing and delighting in what they do and the presence of evil.

We see this often in children, there is an old story which I really enjoy with a boy named Tommy and one day his mother said to him I have made some jelly in the fridge for after food, do not eat it. The mother then leaves to run some errands and left in the house is just little Tommy and the jelly.

He thinks to himself, I will just have a look, so he opens the fridge and sees it, he then thinks I will have one smell. So, he built up the will power and went back into the living room to watch tv. Still unsatisfied he thought I will just have one small spoonful, so he had some and then he returned to watch the tv. As he was watching the tv, his mind was not focusing, and he was thinking about the cartoon it was centred on the jelly. So, he went again to the fridge and had a second taste. By the time his mother arrived home she opened the fridge and found that there was no jelly left, Tommy instinctively blamed the cat for the missing jelly and would not change his story until his mother responded with 'I don't think the cat would have used a spoon'.

But this highlights the enjoyment and rejoicing that people feel, he knew the first spoonful was wrong, he knew the second was wrong and the third, fourth and fifth until it was all gone. Why did little Tommy keep eating, because it was pleasing, and he enjoyed it? Every spoonful he ate not because he was forced but because he enjoyed each mouthful. This reminds me of the New Testament verse in the famous Corinthians passage talking about love "It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth." (1 Corinthians 13:6). Godly love does not rejoice or delight in what is wrong. If we are transformed by Christ, our loves and pleasures should be found in him and what he delights.

Prayer: Help us to find pleasure and delight in the things of God keeping us enjoying and rejoicing in you instead of the futile things of this world. We remember those who are delighting in evil and we pray that you will reveal to them a greater delight and joy that can be only found in Christ.

Day 23

Reading: So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. (Proverbs 2:16-19)

Message: These verses give us an overview of some of the people who have rejected God and abandoned the teachings of their younger days to seek after the desires of their own heart. When I was at school there was one subject which always seemed to be very repetitive whenever I was in Design and Technology (D&T) there was always one action everyone in class would spend hours doing.

Whenever we were working with wood before we did anything, we would need to refine the products that we had. The wooden pieces we were working with would be rough, sharp edged often jagged and would result in splinters if you handled them without much delicacy or care. We would spend hour after hour, lesson after lesson sanding down the wood, filing the rigid pointy edges until they had a smooth curve.

It was incredibly tiresome work, particularly if you had a double lesson and spent two hours manually sanding down your wooden blocks. You would leave the lesson with an aching arm and sore wrists sometimes with a few splinters. However, when all the sanding had been completed and you were left with equal sized smooth pieces of wood, we were ready to begin constructing.

All those hours the class collectively poured into smoothing the edges has given me a great appreciation for smooth well filed objects. Here in Proverbs we are warned about the forbidden woman and the adulteress who use smooth words to lure people into their way of living. In this sense we have to always be on our guard from people seeking to draw us onto the wrong path.

But we have this great hope in these verses we can be delivered from corruption and evil of those actively living against Jesus.

Prayer: Help us to not be attracted to or drawn to anything contrary to your commands but help us to take pleasure and delight in you. We thank you that there is deliverance available in the person of Jesus for all those who believe in you and your sacrifice.

Day 24

Reading: So, you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. (Proverbs 2:20-22)

Message: This next portion is one of contrast and choice, will you walk in a leasing and acceptable way to God (which starts by accepting Jesus Christ). The upright will inhabit a land, they will receive inheritance and be rewarded what they could not earn themselves. However, the violent will be cut off, this violent imagery shows the seriousness of the response towards those who are rebelling.

I am sure many of you with gardens no matter how lovely or how much care you take to cultivate and grow beautiful flowers and always well-maintained lawn. One of my next-door neighbours always appears to be outside pottering about in the garden. The effort she puts in two or three times a week means that inevitably her garden looks nicer than mine.

The primary reason for her garden looking nicer is the absence of weeds, for any keen gardeners you will know that weeds are the bane of your life. As they spring up taking the nutrients and goodness from the soil, overshadowing the plants and flowers you want to grow. The best way to kill a weed is not to tackle the leaves or the stem or really any of the visible features. If you really want to abolish weeds from your garden, you need to do something to confront the roots.

Here the statement made towards the wicked is that they will be rooted out of the land. No matter how safe and cosy you think your life is or how entrenched you feel, we are not the masters of our own destinies. As safe as we might feel there can be no security outside and apart from God. Those who resist and rebel against God will be rooted out, nobody will be able to stand against God's judgement in themselves.

Prayer: Father we thank you that for the peace and inheritance that is available to those who are trusting in you. we thank you that we were once part of the fold of people who were trusting in themselves who are destined to be cut off and rooted out. But Christ came and transformed our eternal destinies from something to be fearful and worried about to a great hope in him.

Day 25

Reading: My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. (Proverbs 3:1-2)

Message: We must hold firm to the positive teachings of our youth, we must not forget the teachings or thing we learnt thinking that we are older and wiser in ourselves. The great thing about truth and righteousness is that it never changes with time. Our biblical teaching should ground us and set us up for life and we should never seek to replace or strive away from it.

We also read a very interesting phrase in this passage where we are told that we should let our hearts keep my commandments. We should not just follow God's commandments, but we should have a heart and a love for God's order and ruling over society. It seems that there is a connection here between what we love to do and eventually what we end up doing.

There was a test that was done on children when they were around 5 years old where the children would be sat down at a table with a single sweet or biscuit. They would then be told if they could last five minutes without eating the treat, they would be rewarded with two. The children are then left in a room alone with the snack as they mull over their options, perhaps some of the children turn their chairs around to avoid looking at the treat. However, after five minutes alone in the room very few of the children managed to stop themselves from eating the biscuit.

In this test the challenge is that the heart of the kids is for the biscuit, and once their heart has settled on something it can be so hard to resist the temptation. What we find in Proverbs is a warning about what we love is so often what we do. As Christians we need to not only follow the commands of God, but we need to learn to love them and by extension Him. For when we allow ourselves to love God and be filled by him following his commands does not become a chore but something we want to do out of love for our God.

Prayer: Father we pray to you asking that your Spirit will be powerfully working that we would have a greater and deeper love for our saviour. We pray that we would not be distracted or drawn away from you by the things of this world, but that you would be our greatest hope and longing. Father we ask that you would give us a heart for you so that we may be nearer to you and keep your precepts.

Reading: Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So, you will find favour and good success in the sight of God and man. (Proverbs 3:3-4)

Message: How encouraging to read that we are not to let steadfast love and faithfulness forsake us let's keep firm in Jesus resting in the steadfast love of God. We need to find our favour and success in the sight of God first and then man as we live our lives for Him.

Locked out. Do you know that feeling? Have you ever forgotten or lost your key? Do you know that feeling of being so close to where you want to be and yet trapped outside? At university in particular I experienced so many people locking themselves out of so many others locking themselves out of virtually anything. Housemates who locked themselves out of rooms, houses, cars. So often at university halls the doors would lock when closed, this frequently caught put student who would leave their keys in their rooms.

Thankfully I was never locked out of any of my rooms, because I foresaw the potential problem and knowing myself and my own personal forgetfulness. I cleverly attached my keys to a lanyard which was always around my neck, wherever I went I knew I would always be able to get back in.

Here in Proverbs 3 we are told to bind faithfulness and the steadfast love around our neck, hold it close to you. We are never to forsake or abandon the things of God for anything in this fleeting world. We must keep these things close and around us. Binding them around us, writing them on the table of our heart. Yesterday we addressed the heart of the wicked, this is the difference between the heart of those made righteous in God.

However, if we keep ourselves rooted in Jesus' commands then we will reach success in the eyes of God himself.

Prayer: Father we thank you that available to your people is steadfast love and faithfulness, we pray that you help us to write your plans and precepts on our heart. We pray that each day we live we might get closer to you. We praise you that through Jesus we might find success and favour in the sight of the Lord.

Reading: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

Message: What is my message to you today, I cannot put it better than Proverbs three as we urged to trust in the Lord. We are to trust in the Lord but when, is it as much as we can, a little bit, every now and then, when it suits us? We are reminded to trust in the Lord with all of our heart, our every being should lean towards and love our saviour.

I am reminded as I read this passage of the infamous scene from the hit sitcom 'Only Fools and Horses' just by mentioning the show many of you will already know what I am about to explore. Allow me to remind you, as Del Boy and Trigger are standing at a bar, Del is leaning on a bar before he leans towards Trigger and utters "Play it cool, play it cool" as he mutters this the bar tender lifts up the section of the bar and walks out from it, unbeknownst to Del Boy who then goes to lean on the bar and falls directly through the gap.

This scene reminds me of what happens when I lean on my own understanding, it is not a firm source of support, it is weak and often leads to our downfall. We need to be trusting and leaning on God and his wisdom, for he is the God of truth. As the great hymn reminds us of how we should be living:

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand"

Why do we sometimes look for ourselves in our own wisdom when we know our hearts are so far from what God has called us to, let us not trust in ourselves but continue and strive to be focused and dedicated on him.

Prayer: Father I pray that you would help us to trust in you entirely, with every fiber of our beings, we pray that you would flood our hearts with a greater love for you. We apologise for when we focus inward instead of heavenward and ask that you would forgive and guide us closer ever closer to you.

Reading: In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:6)

Message: In this verse we read about the seriousness and importance of thinking about and dwelling on God. Thinking about God should never be an afterthought or an occasional consideration, we are told here that in all of our ways we should be acknowledging him. What a challenge, can we honestly say that we have always acknowledged God in everything we have done. Are our actions, thoughts and deed based on our wants or are they done in acceptance and knowledge of the Almighty.

Have you ever wondered why the Roman Empire (and Republic) famously built roads in a very efficient and prescribed method? The roads built were a huge advantage to the Empire with such modern methods of engineering and professional infrastructure. So impressive was the infrastructure that many of these roads are still visible today.

One often distinction of a Roman road appears to be although not exclusively, that they tended to be built in a straight formation. But this must beg the question why did the Romans build straight roads, what was the purpose behind this design? The straight roads tended to be for security purposes as they were travelling there was little room for an ambush from behind corners, heading straight also is inevitable the shortest distance.

If you have ever seen a long meandering river you will know it is so much easier to walk in a straight line, rather than following the long curving path of the river. So often we can live without acknowledging our saviour and following our own plan, which is inevitably harder, longer and has the wrong destination.

Prayer: Help us to acknowledge and find you in all of our ways as we live our lives may we live them close to your presence, being aware of you in all things. We long to be walking on the straight path of you, because you know best and will lead us on the path of righteousness with eternal safety.

Day 29

Reading: Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. (Proverbs 3:7-8)

Message: Again, the writer of proverbs tries to stress the importance that our wisdom cannot and should not be compared to the wisdom and knowledge of ourselves. In our own eyes, by our own standards we might think we are much greater and knowledgeable than what we truly are. Let us not be wise in our own eyes, but in the eyes of God. We are to fear the Lord and actively be involved in turning away and rejecting evil and Turning towards what is good and God honouring.

But we also get this imagery that resting in God will be a healing to our very beings. For those of you who used to play contact sports when you were younger, or if you have ever had a painful accident you might well know the pain of breaking a bone. For those who have had the unpleasant experience of breaking a bone you will know a lot about the long painful recovery. If you have ever broken your leg you know the weeks and months of having to keep your leg upright.

For some people the worst aspect about a broken bone is the concept of rest, some people just cannot rest and so having to is a great strain and effort. So many people despite being told to rest will try and move around and put pressure on their broken bone suffering through the pain.

When you have an injury or a broken bone the one thing you are longing for is when it heals, and your life can return to normality. It is interesting that this proverb we read that turning to God, relying on him will be a healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. It is hard work leaning on your own understanding, it is so much easier to lean and embrace the blessings of God. Are you in need of a refreshing that is deep and healing, because you cannot find this outside of Jesus?

Prayer: Father we thank you that as Christians we can know the spiritual refreshing and healing that only you can offer. We thank you that for all who are trusting and believing in you refreshing is available.