



*Dan Nolta*

In my daily reading from *Through the Bible in One Year*, I often find my mind wandering through some numbing violence, backsliding, and just plain evil on the part of “God’s people,” the nation of Israel. I have been tempted time and again to skip over the chronicling and numbering books and just read the Psalms and the Proverbs portions of the Old Testament.

My mind has been captured by the many couplets in Proverbs. They display such wisdom all wrapped up in the power of brevity. I think, “True wisdom on display.”

I have been challenged once again to follow such wisdom in this day. The value of God’s wisdom is never diminished in time. It is as true and valuable as thousands of years ago. Proverbs is timeless wisdom on display.

No matter the culture, no matter the times, God’s wisdom for *that* time is God’s wisdom for *this* time.

My daily reading takes place in our living room, one part of a home we have lived in for 43 years. Our home is down a little dead-end street, high on the hill overlooking much of the city of Tacoma. It is the home in which Judi and I have raised our kids and welcomed the grandkids, neighbors, and occasional “live-ins” that have come for extended periods of time. We have been blessed.

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 1:1-4*

In the last number of years I have succumbed to a telephone solicitor selling family friendly DVDs. The call always comes with the pitch about wholesome family entertainment. “And wouldn’t you agree, Mr. Nolta, that there is just too much negative and unwholesome input into children’s lives today?” Of course I agree, and the stage is set for me to once again purchase their DVDs.

Most parents and grandparents within the circles I travel want the best for their kids. We want our children to be all that they can be. We seek the best input for their lives so that their character will be as described in our Scripture reading for today: wise, disciplined, understanding, insightful, prudent, right, just, and fair—all descriptive words that any parent would be proud to hear spoken of their child.

The writer of Proverbs tells us that when taken to heart and incorporated into life, these proverbs of his and others produce just such a child. From childhood into the mature life of an adult and on through to old age, Proverbs offers to shape life into the picture painted for us.

The next time our youngest grandson comes over, I am going to put a proverb in front of him. Of course, he is smarter than most people’s grandkids and will know exactly what it means and how to apply it.

*SONG: The Family of God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, embed the meaning of Proverbs deep into our hearts. May we incorporate their bits of wisdom into our daily lives and the lives of those for whom we are responsible.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 1:7-9*

For the first sixteen years of my life I cannot honestly say that I feared, revered, or respected the Lord. In later years I would let my mom know that what I feared and respected growing up was the little red plastic belt she used to threaten us boys.

We found ways around that. My mother laughed easily, and our antics would usually receive her words “No more noise, get to sleep” instead of the belt. I loved my Momma.

My father, separated from us boys by WWII and then divorce, never once in my memory got out his “little red belt.” But I did get some real wisdom from him: “Don’t force it; get a bigger hammer.” I have long pondered that saying for its meaning and application in my life, but I believe it wholeheartedly, because my dad said it. He also said to me, “Danny, I don’t care what you do in life. Just be the best.”

“Listen my son to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.”

The wisdom gained with years, coupled with the love with which it is imparted, is a powerful and credible teacher.

“A garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” With the Olympics in full swing as I am preparing these devotionals, I cannot help but think of what the parents of those young athletes have given to their children—time, energy, money—all to win a medal to hang around their neck, but also the wisdom to use every gift of God to achieve the utmost.

*SONG: Praise Him, All Ye Little Children*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, thank you for all those who have been a part of my life and have shared your wisdom. (Mention by name some who have influenced your life.)*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:1-2*

“My son.” These words represent the closest of familial relationships, that of parent to child. What an awesome responsibility to be a parent! The village concept comes into play as we have a part in the lives of many other children: those of our neighbors, Sunday School kids, and the children of our friends. But what are they learning and what should we be teaching them?

God’s commands bring two promises: long life and prosperity. Right about now in my life, I am concerned about the prosperity part, which expresses itself in the question: “Will our money last as long as our lives?” My financial adviser tells me not to worry. Barring some very major financial catastrophe, we will be ok. How is that possible? Then I think back to wise advice that came from adults in my life. As a child I was taught very down-to-earth, practical advice: “Live frugally, eat leftovers, save for a rainy day, don’t buy what you don’t need, ‘a penny saved is a penny earned.’”

In the maturing of my spiritual life, others taught me to honor God with my body. “Take care of your body; it is the only one you will ever have.” Even with prosthetic knees and hips, transplants, and the like, it is still true. Wisdom encourages us to honor God with both our material wealth and with our health and in the honoring of him, gain the benefits of living long in a body well cared for. And hopefully we come out in the end with enough material riches to share with those we leave behind.

*SONG: This Is My Commandment*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, give me spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear the children you bring into my life. Attune me to their needs; ready my heart to love them and share your wisdom.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:7-8*

Looking back almost 50 years to the beginning of my time of ministry, I would describe my faith as being very much a heart faith only. But after hearing a lecture by Granger Westberg, a pioneer in wholistic healthcare, my biology-major mind was set on fire with the truth of being “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Westberg’s lecture on the integrated body, mind, and spirit played right into my biology background and enriched my understanding of how it all works. The body, mind, and spirit work in concert, each one affecting the other. That brought a real Aha! moment to my faith, and my head finally caught up with my heart.

In our proverb for the day, we are challenged by the notion that the Lord’s wisdom (not our own) coupled with good behavior (brought by an obedient spirit) will bring for us a healthy body. It all works together.

I saw it all working together the other day as I watched the Olympic women’s gymnastics. There she was, little Gabby Douglas, adorned with a second gold medal, saying, “The glory goes up to him and the blessings fall down on me.” Indisputably she has an in-top-shape body that does magnificent, unimaginable gymnastic feats; and before the world, she praises God.

While we may not be Olympic gymnasts, we all have a God-given body for which we are responsible. Good stewardship (“my body is his temple”) brings good decisions (wisdom), and we are the healthier for it.

*SONG: No, Not One!*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we acknowledge again that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Thank you for the miracles that are our bodies. Help us not only to be aware but to care for these bodies you have given us.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:9-10*

The year was 1953, my freshman year in high school, and I was walking home with two friends after the first football game of the season. There was an after game event at the school and I needed a dime to attend. I asked my folks, but there was no dime they could spare for me to pay my way in. I remember telling my friends with great embarrassment, “I can’t go.”

Fast forward—really fast—60 years. My wife has been reminding me, “We have spent a lot of money in the last few weeks.” We are getting our home ready to sell with new sidewalks, new paint, and more. We were able to pay cash for all of it. Historically, we put four kids through George Fox University and one through another Christian college on a pastor/chaplain’s salary. Retirement is our daily lot and we are debt free. Tax time is a joy when we can count up not what we have to pay, but recount what we were able to give because of “brimming vats and overflowing barns.”

To all of this every day I say, “I can’t believe it.” That is pure unadulterated awe at the grace, mercy, love, provision, and blessing of a God who has honored his words: “Your barns will be filled and overflowing.”

My voice of experience says, “It is never too early for a young one, never too late for someone older to ‘Honor the Lord with your wealth.’”

*SONG: Fill My Cup, Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, we thank you today for every crust of bread, every penny in our pocket, every opportunity that money can buy that becomes ours. We acknowledge your provision and thank you for your generous blessings.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:11-12*

I had one of those “my son” talks with one of my sons some years back. It went like this: “Do you think you got too many spankings when you were growing up?” The answer was reassuring: “No, I deserved every one I got.”

I loved and still love each of my children. When they were disciplined in any way, we often told them that we wanted people to like them and want to have them around. In short we wanted them to be people that others appreciated and loved. And they are.

Today I would be more apt to try other means of discipline first and more frequently, but this proverb really speaks to the motive of discipline and not the method. The proverbial motive for the Lord’s discipline is a clear and heart warming love that goes well beyond an earthly parent saying, “This is going to hurt me more than it does you.”

I heard a wonderful pastor friend of mine speak yesterday and describe a disciple as a follower. I conclude then that discipline is to improve “followership,” to make us better followers. The more closely we follow the Lord in character and in deed, the more he (and others) will “delight in” us.

The pathway to godly character and behavior is often a painful one and may include discipline, correction, rebuke, admonition, which we might sum up as “spiritual spankings.” Can we try a pun? “Spiritual spankings” are worth it in the end.

*SONG: Through It All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help us to receive your discipline as an expression of your love for us. Help us to respond with insight and thanksgiving that you care enough about us to bring correction into our lives.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:13-18*

A blessed man might be called a happy guy. A wise man might be called a wise guy. Somehow wise guy has come to have a less than sterling meaning. In spite of all of that, this summary section of Proverbs offers up to us moderns all that we seem to be looking for in these perilous and uncertain days.

Silver, gold, rubies—all considered precious and profitable, but of what good if we don't have an understanding of their value and the wisdom to put them to their best use?

A quick review of the lives of those who have won the lottery (who struck it rich by any man's opinion) and Proverbs make perfect sense. The great majority of those who won the “mega millions” have really come to the end of their so-called luck with their winning of these fortunes. Lacking the wisdom to deal with such riches, their lives have spiraled out of control; the money has been squandered, and they find that the riches have not brought pleasant ways nor paths of peace.

God's offering to us is the “full meal deal.” He offers to us wisdom as a key foundation stone of life, promising that this wisdom will guide us to a true prosperity and, best of all, it will teach us how to use both our health and wealth for his glory.

*SONG: Be Glorified*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, like Solomon, we ask for only one thing: wisdom. Make us wise in your sight and wise in your ways.*

—Dan Nolta