God-given dignity and potential as the oppressor, but each has found himself at a different place in life because of personal choices and the effects of the world. Throughout, Proverbs reminds the reader God sees both and will ultimately defend the poor and punish the oppressor (31:8-9). He remains Sovereign.

 When one considers the majesty of God and the infinite reservoirs of His wisdom, humility is the only appropriate response (30:3-4). “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar” (30:5-6). The writer knew his desperate need for God to keep him from falsehood and to keep him satisfied in Him (30:7-9).

 Proverbs closes with a description of a noble wife and mother (31:1-31). Marriage is the primary relationship on earth which illustrates the connection of Jesus to the church, so this is a beautiful picture of godly wives and healthy churches.

 Pray for a personal life and a church family marked by wisdom.

Saturday, June 10, 2017—Ecclesiastes 1-3

 In *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller summarizes human idolatry under three main pursuits: money, power, and sex. Those three things are the foundation for all sinful pursuit. Ironically, they are all good things because God made them, yet they are absolutely destructive as idols because God never intended them to be such.

 The writer of Ecclesiastes has a variety of names—Teacher, Preacher, Qoheleth. He was the leader of the assembly of God’s people, and as such he had wisdom to impart to those who followed Yahweh. His beginning chapter quickly illustrates his frustration with life in general because there is no way to control it. If one is seeking to serve the idols of money and power—those things which give control, he will throw his hands up eventually and say it’s all meaningless, vanity, a grasping of the wind (1:2).

 Keller’s naming of sex as an idol might be broadened to “comfort” or “pleasure.” The Teacher decided to use pleasure as his guide (2:1), but this, too, proved to be meaningless. He had everything a man would want, yet in the end he felt as if he had nothing. He was chasing the sun, never to catch it (2:11). To be sure, he understood wisdom to be a better pursuit than folly (2:13-14), but the wise man and the fool have the same fate (2:15-16). If wisdom becomes the goal rather than the means to something else, wisdom is an empty goal. The same is true for work (2:17-26).

 Pray for a life of meaningfulness based on the pursuit of God.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 23

Sunday, June 4, 2017—Proverbs 12-14

 Families have certain conventions about language. Some words are never acceptable, like the “s” word—stupid. When God Himself allows the use of that very word, those families would certainly take notice. “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid” (12:1). Solomon isn’t casually throwing this word around. He is contrasting those who are passionate about God and His ways and those who blatantly disregard it. They are stupid.

 This chapter gives numerous examples of the flourishing of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked. “In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality” (12:28). To choose any other way truly is stupid. Solomon knows the power of words. “He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin” (13:3). His use of “stupid” is no accident or hasty decision.

 The use of words is critical, but listening is important, too. “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death” (13:14; compare to 14:27). The one who listens and obeys is honored (13:18). “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (13:20). A nation filled with people who live like this becomes great. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (14:35).

 Thank God for His giving His Word and for His intentional use of words. Pray for a life that listens to and heeds His life-giving, wisdom-shaping communication.

Monday, June 5, 2017—Proverbs 15-18

 “The Family Circus” cartoon illustrates the daily life of a wholesome family of six. The Sunday edition occasionally details the outcome when one of the children is asked to retrieve an item or complete a task. What follows is a check-marked path representing the amusing, wandering path taken through the yard, over obstacles, and around the house. Going from one point to the other should have been more direct.

 Proverbs compares and contrasts the choices of the wise and foolish, and chapter 15 discusses the paths resulting from those choices. “Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course” (15:21). Instead of wandering from interest to interest or from distraction to distraction like the one who has little discipline or no calling, the wise man stays focused on the task to which God has called him. Wandering like “The Family Circus” may be entertaining, but it is not wise.

 Solomon knew the power of wise living. “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him” (16:7). The life of wisdom cultivates humility and displaces prideful mistakes. The wise one realizes God tests the heart just as fire tests silver or gold (17:3) Wise living promotes love and unity (17:9, 14). “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for diversity” (17:17).

 Thank God for His Spirit who indwells us to counsel us and make us wise and for His Son, a friend who sticks closer than a brother (18:24).

Tuesday, June 6, 2017—Proverbs 19-21

 From the days of the Garden of Eden, humans have played the blame game. When something goes wrong, the fault lies with someone else. Rather than admitting personal frailty and fallibility, people place the blame on someone else, at times going so far as to blame a perfect, holy God. “A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord” (19:3).

 This is the essence of foolishness—to assign responsibility for a mistake to One who is perfect. This is why wisdom literature continually links the fear of the Lord with wisdom and life (19:23; 21:16, 21). Knowing Him and walking in His ways develops an understanding of His righteousness and power. When tragedy strikes, the wise man rests in the knowledge of God’s presence and sovereignty over it. When evil is present, the wise man knows God has not done evil but allows it because of the consequences of all sin, including his own.

 Living by wisdom requires continually opposing self for the sake of God. As a result, wise people are unusual and valuable. “Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel” (20:15). Living by wisdom means enduring physical discipline to purge the natural inclinations toward sin (20:30) because “[a]ll a man’s ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart” (21:2). Living by wisdom means controlling a tongue which could so easily run rampant (21:23).

 Worship God today as true King and source of wisdom.

Wednesday, June 7, 2017—Proverbs 22-24

 Jesus welcomed little children and said coming into the Kingdom required child-like faith (see Matthew 18). There is an important element of humility and trust required for following Him. Paul talked about growing in maturity as he followed Christ so that he left childish ways behind (see 1 Corinthians 13). Disciples are child-like without being childish.

 The Proverbs speak to the importance of maturing as a believer. “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (22:6). This training is necessary because of the flawed inner nature. “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him” (22:15). Often, good discipline from the parents is foundational in this growth. “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death” (23:13-14). As a result, parents rejoice when the child speaks with wisdom (23:15-16).

 Maturity moves from family life to social impact. “Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them” (22:22-23). Maturity helps the wise one avoid the influence of those who could impart their foolish ways (22:24-25). “Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join the rebellious” (24:21)

 Thank God for the maturing power of His wisdom.

Thursday, June 8, 2017—Proverbs 25-28

 A life filled with God’s wisdom is a life lived differently from the norm. Solomon saw the opportunity to search the depths of God as something truly glorious (25:2), and he knew the power of patience and appropriate words. In pursuing God Himself and discovering His truth and glory, the wise one grows more trusting of God and more able to live differently. “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you” (25:21-22).

 In contrast, the fool—the one who is morally bankrupt—does not know the things of God or enjoy His blessing. “Like snow in summer or rain in harvest, honor is not fitting for a fool” (26:1). “Like a lame man’s legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool” (26:7). Even worse is the man who is wise in his own eyes (26:12).

 Wisdom shapes the mind and the heart. Pride diminishes as the wise one recognizes how great and righteous God is. Praise comes only from others (27:2), never self. Greed diminishes as trust in God increases (28:25). Accountability is welcomed as friends point out areas of weakness and lack of wisdom (27:6), effectively sharpening one another (27:17). Walking in wisdom makes one more fruitful in society and more acceptable to God Himself (28:9, 14, 26).

 Ask God to continue shaping you with counter-cultural wisdom.

Friday, June 9, 2017—Proverbs 29-31

 Every person has the capacity to be a blessing because every person is made in the image of God, yet not every person fulfills this capacity. God breathes life, but He does not force behavior. What one does with possessions and how one responds to blessing are an indication of wisdom or folly.

 “The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The Lord gives sight to the eyes of both” (29:13). The poor man has the same