**WISDOM and PROVERBS, PROVERBS 1:1-7, 2:1-6, 3:5, 6, 6:16-19, MAY 21/23.**

 The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream & offered to give Solomon whatever he asked for. Solomon asked God to give him “a discerning heart to govern [His] people & to distinguish between right & wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?” God was pleased with Solomon’s request. And God gave him what he hadn’t asked for—wealth & honour.

 “God gave Solomon wisdom & very great insight, & a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.” His fame spread. People from all nations came to hear his wisdom, among them the Queen of Sheba. She also came because she’d heard about his relationship to the Lord. Do people come to you because they’ve heard about your relationship with the Lord? The Queen of Sheba tested Solomon with hard questions. She brought him gold worth over $200,000,000 & huge quantities of precious stones & spices. When she experienced his wisdom & saw the palace & temple he built, she was overwhelmed!

 But later in life, Solomon lost his fervour for the Lord. With 700 wives & 300 concubines, as *The Story* worded it, “the irresistible draw of sweet perfume led to relaxing his guard against pagan worship as well”. His heart wasn’t fully devoted to God. Is yours? Are you keeping your relationship right with God through Jesus—honouring your body, mind & heart as the temple of God, remaining faithful every day to the grace & love He's lavished on you? God wants us to receive His forgiveness & live life that is really life—the abundant life He offers us through Christ.

Last week, on Mothers’ Day, we looked at the “woman of noble character” in Proverbs 31. Proverbs has a lot to say about women. It ends with a woman of strong character, great wisdom, many skills & great compassion. She was an excellent wife & mother. She was also a manufacturer, importer, manager, realtor, farmer, seamstress, upholsterer & merchant. Her strength & dignity did not come from her amazing achievements, however. They were a result of her reverence for God. In our society, where physical appearance counts for so much, we noted that her appearance was never mentioned. Her attractiveness came from her character.

Proverbs begins with the command to fear the Lord & ends with a woman who fulfills this command. Her qualities are mentioned throughout the book: hard work, fear of God, respect for spouse, foresight, encouragement, care for others, concern for the poor, wisdom handling money. When coupled with the fear of God, they lead to enjoyment, success, honour & worth. Proverbs shows us how to be wise, make good decisions & live according to God’s ideal.

Solomon’s proverbs offer practical insight into what it means to fear God, to have God-honouring relationships and how to wisely handle finances, work & life.”

 The 1st 9 chapters are about wisdom. Listen to the opening of Proverbs:

“for gaining wisdom & instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behaviour, doing what is right & just & fair, for giving prudence to those who are simple…The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction...If you turn your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding…& search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord & find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge & understanding.”

 Do you want wisdom? Do you want to be rightly instructed? Do you want to understand the intricacies of life & have insight? You might say, “I’m not a scholar? I don’t have a PhD. I’m just not that smart.” Welcome to Wisdom 101. God doesn’t say you should study at university to know your way around or tell you to memorize the dictionary or encyclopedia to be knowledgeable. He doesn’t tell you to read authors who have very sophisticated ways of telling you things that are difficult to understand. He doesn’t say you should watch TVO. He says He’ll give you wisdom. **God will give you wisdom**. From His mouth come knowledge & understanding. It’s not the knowledge of facts or the details of Biology, History, Math or English literature. While all these can be beneficial for our wellbeing & enjoyable, it’s knowledge & understanding about God & about your nature—the nature He’s given you—& about the life He’s surrounded you with that God wants for you. Col. says: “By Him (Christ) all things were created: things in heav-en & on earth, visible & invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him & for Him. He’s before all things; in Him all things hold together.”

 **When you understand that God is at the very heart of life, at the centre of everything you are & do, that He’s the purpose around which everything comes together & has meaning**, then, & only then, do you have wisdom. We’ve all met someone who’s very smart about things, but who lacks wisdom or who has no common sense or no sense of God whatsoever. The world is too full of people who are full of their own wisdom & too pleased with themselves. God says, “Take His wisdom. It’s a gift for you & it’s all yours through Jesus Christ. Once you have that, like Solomon, the wondrous world is yours to discover through science & engineering, literature or liberal arts or languages or technology. God doesn’t want you to be ignorant about any of these things; they are, after all, His creation. But start with Him. Start with that fear of the Lord, knowing that He’s over all things, capable of all things and desires your worship. That will set you up to receive right instruction, deep insight into life, to behave prudently & to know & do what’s right, just & fair. The world without Christ will never see or understand this.

Wisdom will settle down in your heart; it will prolong your life & bring you peace & pros-perity. Wisdom is **never letting love & faithfulness leave you**. Tie those around your neck, write

them on the tablet of your heart & you’ll win favour & have a good name with God & people.

 Proverbs 3:5 & 6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart & lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him & He will make your paths straight.” You can lean on God. He’s not shifting sand or a reed that will collapse or break. You can always count on Him. An older couple noticed a young couple driving in front of them, so close together it looked like 2 heads on 1 body. With a sigh the woman said, “Do you remember when we were like that?” Without losing a beat, the man responded, “I never moved.”

We’re like that. We drift from God, losing our passion, losing our course, then complain how God seems so far away. He’s never moved away from you. He’s the rock of your salvation. You can take refuge in Him! In **all** your ways acknowledge **Him**; He will keep your paths straight. You won’t lose your way when Jesus is your compass for life. He specializes in the times when we have to lean. Can you produce your own good health or keep yourself from disease? No. You may not get a disease, but once you have, you can’t rid yourself of it. Only God can heal. Don’t try to lean on your own understanding, or ability. It’s God who holds all things together!

If we accept God’s wisdom & keep Him in the centre of our lives, we avoid foolishness. Who hasn’t been trapped by what you say? Who hasn’t fallen into their neighbour’s hands? We wrestle, argue & deny our wrongdoing. God says, “Go to your neighbour & make it right.”

God speaks of the 1 who stirs up dissension. Is that you? “Oh, we can’t do that?” “That will never work.” “So & so is to blame for …” Be careful! God says disaster will overtake such a person in an instant. We always need to be on the side of a person, not working against her. I’d far rather be known as a Barnabas. Remember him? His name means “son of encouragement”.

Is there any name you’d rather be known by? Be a builder of others, not a destroyer.

Chapter 6 lists 6 things that the Lord hates, 7 that are detestable to Him:

1) **Haughty eyes**—I’m better than…fill in the blank. That isn’t just that I think I’m better, but that is what’s seen in what I say about others or in the way I treat them.

2) **A lying tongue**—do you find ways to make yourself look innocent & implicate others, distorting a picture to make you look more favourable? Jesus came to speak grace & truth. In being Christ-like, does that describe you? Jesus never tried to make Himself look better.

3) **Hands that shed innocent blood**—not just violence, but how about anger or getting a pound of flesh out of someone because you want to see them pay for some injustice or perceived injustice against you. Let your bitterness go. Move on in God’s peace & reconciliation!

4) **A heart that devises wicked schemes**. How can I make life miserable or awkward for another? If you’re not doing everything you can to help another, then you’re hurting them. Do you recognize the beast of negativity that lurks within you?

5) **Feet that are quick to run into evil**. Are you taking shortcuts? Compromising your integrity? Playing fast & loose with God? Taking other people for granted—particularly those close to you? Are you cheating, even on small things, on your income tax, in business dealings? Are people rightly confident to seek your counsel & assured of getting an honest response?

6) **A false witness who pours out lies**. Can others count on you to speak loyally about them, or do you mix in what you assume to be the motive for the other person’s words or actions? We can never assume someone else’s motive unless we check it directly with them.

7) **One who stirs up dissension among brothers or sisters.** Ouch! Do you unite or divide people? Are you always for or sometimes only partly for or sometimes clearly against a person? In Philippians Paul says:

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness & compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being 1 in spirit & purpose.”

Are you a cheerleader for every church friend, colleague, neighbour, family member?

 The individual couplets in Proverbs could each make for a sermon. That’s 1 of the difficulties of reading too many at once. But let’s close with a few lighter examples. “The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.” You’re not getting older, you’re gaining more splendor day by day!

I can’t resist this one: “Better to live on the corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” That’s worse than being in the proverbial doghouse!

2 good proverbs to close with: “The 1 who pursues righteousness & love finds life, prosperity & honour.” Would you like to have real life, real prosperity, real honour? Then pursue righteousness & love. And who’s the only 1 who can give righteousness & love?—Christ alone. So real life, real prosperity & real honour are yours when you pursue Christ with all your being.

The final proverb is: “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.” To be wise & insightful, & for your plans to succeed, invite God’s leading. The route may be different than what you yourself would have planned, but it will be remarkably better because you’ve asked God to lead the way; to your amazement, He will. Work on that this week & share your experience with others.