

A serene winter scene featuring a snow-covered path that leads into a dense forest of evergreen trees. The trees are heavily laden with snow, and the sky above is a deep blue, filled with numerous small, bright stars, suggesting a clear night. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and quiet.

Jan/Feb 2023

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

**FILLED WITH THE
FULLNESS OF GOD**

ALSO: THE VOICE OF WISDOM

Friends:

Jesus tells us in John 10:10 that he came so that we “may have life, and have it to the full.” What does full life with Jesus mean? How can we live that out on a daily basis? This month, Pastor Beth Fellingner will explore that topic with us. We’ll find—through Scripture, stories, and anecdotes—that Jesus is inviting us into a deeper relationship with him. In addition, we’ll be challenged to share God’s love with others as a way to be “Filled with the Fullness of God.”



Then, in February, we’ll listen to the wisdom that the book of Proverbs offers to us. Pastor Jenna Fabiano has done a wonderful job providing clear connections between Proverbs and the teachings of the New Testament. Together we’ll find that the Bible and the Holy Spirit work in tandem to open our hearts to “The Voice of Wisdom.”

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God’s Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

Today

Jan/Feb 2023

refresh, refocus, renew



**"Filled with the Fullness
of God"**
Beth Fellingner



"The Voice of Wisdom"
Jenna Fabiano

Managing Editor: Jeff Bulthuis
Executive Editor: Kurt Selles

TODAY (USPS 185-140),
Volume 73, Number 1,
published bimonthly by
ReFrame Ministries, formerly
Back to God Ministries
International, at 1700 28th
Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI
49508-1407. Periodicals postage
paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan,
and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes
to Today, 1700 28th Street SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407.

Copyright © 2023, Reframe
Ministries. Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture
quotations in this publication
are from The Holy Bible, New
International Version®, NIV®.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984,
2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by
permission. All rights reserved
worldwide.

Cover photo: Radu-Andrei-
Razvan/Pexels



**ReFrame
Ministries**

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

february

The Voice of Wisdom

Jenna Fabiano

For much of my life, I tended to avoid the book of Proverbs in the Bible. I simply wasn't intrigued by or interested in its short, pithy statements, which seemed not to apply much to my life. There was little or no narrative or storytelling, and I couldn't see much of a connection to the biblical story. There seemed to be no connection to Jesus either.

But when I revisited the book of Proverbs a few years ago, I was struck by how often Jesus' teachings are reflected in these words. That's because the wise sayings and general wisdom in Proverbs flow from the wisdom of God, made clear to us in the gift of Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord and Savior.

For the month of February, let's rediscover the book of Proverbs and reflect on some of the treasures it offers. We'll focus on a number of proverbs in the first half of the book, and my prayer is that these pages may inspire you to explore the book further. May Jesus grant us the Spirit of wisdom as we seek to know him more.

Jenna Fabiano is an ordained minister and pastor at Willoughby Church in Langley, British Columbia. She and her family live in nearby Coquitlam, B.C.

WHY REPENT?

"Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you. I will make known to you my teachings." —Proverbs 1:23

Not many of us like to hear the word *repent*, because it tends to have negative connotations. But here in Proverbs, when the voice of wisdom cries out that everyone should "repent" at her rebuke, it's for the sake of offering them a great gift.

Here Wisdom is pictured as a person who wants to "pour out" her thoughts and make known her teachings. "Repent," she is saying, "so that I can give you more of myself." A more literal translation of the text here says, "I will pour out my spirit on you. . . ."

In some other Bible passages, God speaks the same words through his prophets, promising to make known his thoughts and mysteries. Perhaps the best known of those passages is Acts 2:17, where the apostle Peter declares, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit

on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams" (see also Joel 2:28).

God has always desired to give us more of himself, to encourage us toward a humble and contrite posture so that we can receive him. And Jesus, who is fully God, became human, just like us, so that we can receive God's wisdom and have new, full life. We cannot receive his thoughts and teachings (and become more like him) if we have not opened ourselves to recognize that we need his help.

Lord, help me today to hear your voice of wisdom. Encourage me to come with an open, contrite heart to receive your Spirit. Amen.

HIDDEN TREASURE

If you call out for insight . . . and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
—Proverbs 2:3-5

In every life stage we learn to ask questions and seek understanding in order to be “successful.” In school we ask questions when we don’t understand. At work we gain experience and learn to do our jobs well. To own a home, we figure out how mortgages and interest rates affect our finances.

It seems intuitive to seek wisdom in every area of our lives, and yet we often ignore the wisdom of God. Maybe that’s why Proverbs includes lots of phrases like the ones in our reading for today. We are called to actively search for insight and wisdom from God so that we can know the Lord.

Jesus encouraged us in a similar way: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went

and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matthew 13:44).

Scripture urges us to make the knowledge of God *the most important* knowledge that we can gain—more important than any other type of insight or wisdom. The knowledge of God and his wisdom helps us see everything else more clearly. By the wisdom of God, we have greater wisdom and insight to do our tasks here on earth with a kingdom focus.

How might you need God’s wisdom in your life today?

God of all wisdom, inspire me by your Spirit to search for wisdom from you. Guide me to long for your insight so that I may know and love you more fully. Amen.

ENGRAVED HEARTS

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

—Proverbs 3:3

I remember hearing a popular Christian speaker ask his audience if their lives would look any different if they had “Christian” tattooed on their foreheads.

Similarly, what if you had a scarf around your neck that had “Love” and “Faithfulness” written on it? Or a T-shirt with those words on it? Would it change anything about the way you lived?

Scripture does not shy away from urging us to keep the commands of God in focus. Moses taught the Israelites, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart . . . soul and . . . strength. These commandments . . . are to be on your hearts. . . . Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).

Humans are incredibly forgetful, and the Spirit knows how often we neglect to focus our hearts and minds on the Lord. We often seek the wisdom of the world before we seek the wisdom of God.

Galatians 5 lists love and faithfulness with the fruit of the Spirit, who calls us to live like Jesus. Jesus always showed these characteristics. As we engrave love and faithfulness on our hearts, we will grow more open to being led by the Spirit before being led by anything else.

What might help you today as a symbol or reminder of God’s love and faithfulness?

Spirit of God, guide me to write your virtues and your will on my heart, that I may follow Jesus. Amen.

ALL YOUR HEART

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. . . .
—Proverbs 3:5

The other day, my niece gave me a little card that she had made in school, and on the cover it said, “I love you with all my heart.”

Since ancient times our heart has been associated with our emotions, even though it isn’t actually the source of our feelings. The Bible often uses “heart” to refer to the central place of one’s being—where one’s whole mind, soul, and spirit operate. So the heart was what guided a person to make sense of the world, and it was where one’s emotions flowed from.

What does it mean, then, to “trust in the LORD with all your heart”? This means that you can put your trust in God with absolutely everything you’ve got—your emotions, your understanding, your strength, your intelligence, your whole personhood.

In other words, “Trust in the Lord with your entire being.” Don’t let any piece of you fall away or fail to depend and rely on the God who created you.

Lean on the Lord, because he knows how to make your paths straight.

Loving Father, help me today to submit my whole self into your hands. Guide me along the way I should go, and help me to lean on your wisdom and understanding. Amen.

HEALTHY WISDOM

*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.
This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*
—Proverbs 3:7-8

We tend to believe that we will be the most happy—physically and spiritually—when we have everything under control. We want a wisdom that tells us how successful we will be, how much money we'll make, where we'll be in five or ten years, and what our retirement will look like.

When everything feels controlled, we feel happy and content. So we try to do whatever we can to control our circumstances, or else stress will overwhelm us, and our mental and physical health will suffer.

These verses in Proverbs teach us otherwise. Trying to be wise in our own eyes is actually not what is best for us. To help our bodies flourish, we need to surrender ourselves to the Lord.

Gaining wisdom from God and seeking to be wise in

God's eyes will bring health to our bodies. The book of James instructs us this way: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously . . . and it will be given to you" (James 1:5).

God wants to give us his wisdom because he knows it will enable us to flourish. In his love for us, God knows that this true wisdom will release us from worry and allow us to surrender our lives to him—that we may live fully, as he intends for us.

God of all wisdom, help me to be wise in your eyes. By your Holy Spirit, keep me from seeking control and running after worldly ideas about wisdom so that I can focus my attention on you. Amen.

A FATHER'S DISCIPLINE

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline . . . because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

—Proverbs 3:11-12

The Bible shows that one of the most common ways God interacts with us is by calling and treating us as his children.

But what does it mean that “the LORD disciplines those he loves”? When we think about discipline, we may be reminded of harsh words, consequences, and punishment for bad behavior. Parents sometimes discipline their children in those ways, but does God do that with us?

The writer of Hebrews sheds some light on this. Hebrews 12 quotes these verses from Proverbs and encourages listeners to “endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children” (Hebrews 12:7). The writer even says we are not legitimate sons and daughters of God if we are not disciplined by him.

But what does this discipline look like? Hardship. God most often disciplines his children by allowing them to endure hardship, difficulties, and trials. So “discipline” is less about giving consequences for bad behavior and more about shaping and forming us to depend on God fully and to trust him completely.

Think about Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). That was a trial sent by the Father to “discipline” his Son—showing that he could depend on and fully trust the Father. How might your heavenly Father be disciplining you today?

Loving Father, thank you for adopting us as your children. Guide us to endure trials, and strengthen us to trust and depend on you in all situations. Amen.

FOUNDATIONAL WISDOM

By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place. . . . —Proverbs 3:19

Setting a foundation for anything can be a difficult and sometimes complicated task. Whether it's constructing a house, engineering a bridge, laying down pavement for a new road, or installing a retaining wall, the foundation is essential to whatever is being made.

Proverbs tells us that the Lord God, our Creator, founded the heavens and the earth by wisdom and understanding. What exactly is the writer saying here?

The New Testament gives us some clarity on this. Now that Jesus has come, the mysteries of God have been revealed. As the apostle Paul puts it in Colossians 1:16, "In him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth . . . all things have been created through him and for him." The apostle John also notes that "in the beginning

was the Word [*Logos*]" and that "through him all things were made." What's more, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," and he is "the Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

So Christ himself is our source of heavenly wisdom, of knowledge and understanding from God. He is the foundation and the means by which we can grow.

This means that if we are to pursue wisdom, we will find it in Jesus and no one else.

Wise and awesome God,
you created the world
and each one of us; and,
Lord Jesus, all things are
created through you.
Help us to find wisdom
and understanding in you.
Amen.

FIX YOUR GAZE AHEAD

Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.
—Proverbs 4:25-26

Regret is something that everyone struggles with. Depending on the situation or circumstances, the emotions of regret can linger for months or even years before one is able to refocus.

Many of us are inclined to look back on what could have been or should have been. People can also tend to look behind them to “the good ol’ days,” when life may have seemed sweeter, simpler, and less frantic.

But whatever might cause us to fixate on the past, Proverbs encourages us to look ahead. This is not because it’s bad or inappropriate to look back. We can learn a lot from our past mistakes, trauma, or the good times we enjoyed. However, Scripture calls us not to linger in the past but rather to glean

from it (however long that takes) and then look ahead.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Set your gaze on the road before you and follow Jesus steadfastly. Let him be the focal point of your pathway in life. Run the race knowing that his Spirit is running with you and that he is ahead of you, waiting at the finish line.

“Guide me, O my great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but you are mighty; hold me with your powerful hand.” Help me, Jesus, to fix my gaze on you. Amen.

GAINING PRUDENCE

"You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, set your hearts on it."
—Proverbs 8:5

The word *prudence* is not one we use or hear very often. But the book of Proverbs seems to enjoy using it, so perhaps it is worth reevaluating.

Prudence can be defined as the ability to discipline yourself, to manage your affairs well, and to discern and have good judgment. We need prudence so that we can make good decisions and not act rashly or too quickly without first considering the costs or consequences.

In Proverbs, Wisdom calls everyone to gain prudence. We should act with discernment, thinking carefully even if our intentions are good. For example, it can be good to give money for important causes, but we should first pray and discern how and where to give it so that we can be sure our gifts are distributed well.

Jesus encouraged his disciples to have prudence. In Luke 14:28, for example, he says that if you want to build a tower, "won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?"

In a similar way, Jesus wants us to assess the cost of being his disciple. We need to consider his words and discern his ways so that we can confidently follow his example and set our hearts on him.

How might Jesus be calling you to seek prudence today?

Jesus, as your Spirit gives me wisdom to know you more fully, give me prudence to love you more deeply and follow you with greater intention. Amen.

A RICH INHERITANCE

I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me. . . .

—Proverbs 8:20-21

When you think of the word *inheritance*, what comes to mind? Money? An estate? Someone you love passing away? A family member who has left all their belongings to you—whether you want them or not?

God wants to give us a rich inheritance, which means he wants us to be part of his family. God has made it possible for us to be his sons and daughters so that we can receive an inheritance from him.

How has God done this? Through Jesus. Jesus' death paid our debt of sin, and his resurrection and ascension show that he is victorious over sin and death. And because of Christ's victory God sends his Holy Spirit to us all so that we can be adopted as his children.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:17, "Now if we are children, then

we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. . . ."

All who believe in Christ are adopted children of God, heirs of our heavenly Father's estate and his blessings. Just as a will indicates how someone's wealth or belongings should be distributed, God promises that his children will share in his inheritance through Jesus. And that includes eternal life with him.

So when you think of the word *inheritance*, what comes to mind? Do you think of Jesus and the promise of full life forever?

Gracious and generous God, thank you for the promise that we will inherit the treasure of full life with you. Amen.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. —Proverbs 9:10

Both my husband and I grew up near a seacoast—he in Angola, Africa, and me in British Columbia, Canada. But we have very different responses to the ocean.

My husband will take every opportunity to go into the water. He loves exploring, isn't bothered by the salty feel or smell, and doesn't seem to worry about strange creatures touching his feet.

I, on the other hand, have a "reverent fear" of the ocean. I love watching the water, listening to the sounds of the waves, and delighting in the ocean smells. But I know the power of the ocean, and I remain fearfully in awe of that power.

When I read this verse in Proverbs, I wonder if that's the kind of fear the writer is describing. It isn't that the Lord wants us to be afraid of him,

but there is an awe and reverence necessary when we're talking about the Creator God of the cosmos.

Fearing God implies that we recognize his great and awesome power, and this allows us to grow in wisdom. If we underestimate God or trivialize his power, we won't understand him at all. If we treat God as less than he is, are we really loving him?

What is one way you can delight in God's power and show reverence for him today?

Mighty and powerful God, it's amazing that you who created the heavens and the earth would care so deeply for me. Help me to grow in wisdom so that I can delight in you more. Amen.

THE WAY TO LIFE

Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray. —Proverbs 10:17

In Luke 19 we read about a man named Zacchaeus who was a wealthy tax collector. In the Jewish society of that day, tax collectors were despised as traitors because they worked for the Roman Empire and took money away from their own people. They also grew rich because they could charge extra fees and keep that money for themselves.

But one day Zacchaeus met Jesus, and the next thing he knew, Jesus was inviting himself to Zacchaeus's home and inspiring him to be a better person. It's a beautiful story of how transformation can happen through Jesus.

We don't know what Jesus was teaching to the crowds that day. And we don't know much about what Jesus said to Zacchaeus. But other passages show clearly what Jesus taught about loving God and loving

our neighbors, and something definitely stirred Zacchaeus's heart to change. Whatever was said, Zacchaeus became open to receiving Jesus. And Zacchaeus decided to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back four times what he had cheated from anyone.

Through Jesus' teaching, Zacchaeus found the way to life. The Spirit of God convicted him of his sins against others, and he became open to correction and discipline. And by his actions he became an example to lead others.

Faithful Father, thank you for loving me, even when I refuse your discipline and often think my way is better. Correct me and guide me so that I can show others the way to life. Amen.

IMPRESSIVE CHATTER?

Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.
—Proverbs 10:19

Today it seems as if the more words you say, the more powerful or popular you can be. Whether you're on social media, in the daily news, in politics, or in a board meeting, the more you say (and the louder you say it), the more influence you seem to have.

But what does God think of all our chatter?

Scripture warns us that we need to be careful with our words and how we use them. In Matthew 6:7, Jesus encourages his followers to refrain from using many words in their prayers, as if that would make them more impressive to God. He says, "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words."

How often do we think we will be heard—by God or by

others—when we use many words to try to impress them? Do we try to prove ourselves by speaking quickly, dominating the conversation, and coming out on top?

Proverbs 10:19 says that people who are prudent *refrain* from using too many words. They speak with discretion, wisdom, and discernment. They know that listening is more important than speaking. (See also James 1:19.)

Jesus was thoughtful and discerning, and that should be our aim as well.

Faithful God, thank you for loving us despite all our faults and failures. Forgive us if we think you'll be impressed by our prayers, and help us to be prudent with our words. Amen.

ENDURING THE STORM

When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.
—Proverbs 10:25

We all go through trials in life. They may be health trials, relationship trials, financial trials, or emotional trials, but all of our hardships and difficulties end up being spiritual trials as well.

Where is God when it hurts? Why does God allow us to face the struggles and storms of life?

Scripture never promises that we will be able to go through life without encountering storms and setbacks. There is no promise that life will be easy, or simple, or smooth sailing.

Nevertheless, God promises to be with us always. Through the storms of life he will be our anchor. And the best way to test the strength of an anchor is to endure a storm.

Jesus taught that whoever follows his teaching is “like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24-27):

when a heavy storm came, the house did not fall; it was built on a solid foundation.

Similarly, Proverbs calls us to build our lives on wisdom and righteousness—that is, having a right relationship with God. When we do that, we will be securely anchored and able to endure the storms of life.

With God as our foundation, we can stand firm, trusting that our destiny is safe in his hands.

Mighty God, guide and protect me through the storms of life. Help me to trust you in the midst of trials, and lead me to live in right relationship with you. Amen.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.
—Proverbs 11:2

In my journey toward a career I remember hearing friends and family say, “Your parents must be so proud!” Or after a major accomplishment or graduation, people would say, “You should be so proud of yourself!”

While we may certainly feel good about our accomplishments, we need to be wary of putting too much emphasis on our own efforts. When I look back on my achievements, there’s never been a time when I was completely on my own. Whether it was the financial support of a family member or the loving and prayerful support of parents and friends, everything I’ve done has been a communal effort.

The book of Proverbs reminds us that pridefulness is a dangerous road. And although it is entirely appropriate to be satisfied and grateful for our achievements, we must remember

that we haven’t reached these places by ourselves.

Christ shows us the better way. Philippians 2:6-8 tells us that Christ “did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather . . . he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

Jesus’ humility shows that even though he accomplished incredible things, he never gave the glory to himself. Whatever he achieved he did out of obedience to the Father and in service to others.

Lord Jesus, help me to humble myself rather than being prideful. By your Spirit, empower me to be like you. Amen.

WHERE IS YOUR HOPE?

Hopes placed in mortals die with them; all the promise of their power comes to nothing.
—Proverbs 11:7

In a worship song from the early 2000s, singer/songwriter Brian Doerksen sings, “Jesus, hope of the nations/ Jesus, comfort for all who mourn/ You are the source of heaven’s hope on earth.”

As believers in Christ, we recognize and worship Jesus as the true hope of the world, and yet it’s astounding how often we pin our hopes on human beings. In all of our history books, it is clear that people are inclined to find hope in leaders, politicians, and celebrities rather than in the one true God.

Why do we do this? Proverbs warns that placing hope in humans is futile because any human power will come to nothing. As the apostle Paul tells us, “There is no authority except that which God has established” (Romans 13:1).

By saying this, Paul is assuring believers that in all situations, even in the midst of national turmoils and global crises, God is the one who holds all authority. Any human who has “power” has it only because God allows it to be so.

In other words, our hopes and desires must lie with the One who is on the throne of the universe. Our prayers must be oriented toward Christ, for he is truly the only hope—the one who can change minds, transform hearts, disperse powers, and bring restoration.

Creator God, you made every living thing, and you hold all things together. Lord, bring restoration to this world that desperately needs your leadership and authority. Amen.

GENEROSITY

A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.
—Proverbs 11:25

Acts 20:35 notes that Jesus said, “It is better to give than to receive.” But why would he say this? Is it because being generous feels good? Is it because we feel appreciated when we give? Is it because “what goes around comes around”?

Proverbs 11:25 says that those who are generous will prosper. And what does it mean to “prosper”? We tend to think of prosperity in financial terms, but that would be quite limiting. In the Bible, prosperity has a lot to do with well-being and flourishing, enjoying the fullness of life as God intends for us.

Reading the second half of this verse is essential: “Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.” This is less about material gain than about soul care. It brings to mind Psalm 23, in which the Lord as our shepherd leads us “beside still

waters” and restores or refreshes our soul.

Our souls are refreshed through generosity because when we seek the prosperity, health, and wellness of others, we ourselves are refreshed by Jesus in the process. He blesses us with humility, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, and more. We become more like him who emptied himself for our sake.

We give not so that we can get something in return. We give so that we can draw nearer to the heart of Christ.

Generous God, you have shown us the perfect example of self-giving love and humility in Jesus. May we become more like him and find refreshment for our souls. Amen.

SAVING FRUIT

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives.
—Proverbs 11:30

The Giving Tree, a book by Shel Silverstein, tells a story of a boy who routinely comes back to his childhood tree with all of his problems. Each time he comes back, the tree finds a way to give more of itself so that it can help. By the end of the story there is only a stump left—and even then the tree offers to give more of itself. In this story, it is clear that the tree is bearing the “fruit” of generosity, insight, wisdom, humility, and self-giving love.

In Matthew 7:16-20, Jesus teaches his disciples that you can tell a tree by its fruit. A good tree bears good fruit, he says, and a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Like the tree in Silverstein’s story, we can become sources of life for others when we bear the fruit of righteousness. When we are in right relationship with God through

his Holy Spirit, we are deeply rooted and connected to the source of life, and we bear the fruit that reflects that life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we bear this fruit, we possess a wisdom that is able to save the lives of others. We become a resource in which people find life, because through us they find Jesus.

Faithful Father, help me to bear the fruit of righteousness. Grant me more of your Spirit so that I might show others the kind of fruit that points to you. Amen.

SEEKING COUNSEL

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.
—Proverbs 12:15

As children, we learn to ask for help if there's something we aren't sure about. We raise a hand in the classroom; we bring questions to adults who might have answers for us. We want to learn things, so we ask for help, information, and advice as we need it.

For many of us, this tends to change as we grow older. We start believing that being independent and figuring things out on our own is most important. We become less inclined to ask for help or advice because we don't want to seem weak.

Oftentimes our own experience or expertise may be enough. And not all advice is good advice, as many of us learn along the way.

But our verse from Proverbs today gives a helpful reminder that it is foolish to become wise in our own eyes, to be-

lieve that we always know what's best, or to assume that our way is always right.

Asking for advice or for help does not make us weak. It expands our ability to discern complicated situations. Often someone who is wiser or more experienced can see or understand the situation better than we can. And sometimes God puts people in our lives specifically for that reason.

Jesus himself was not afraid to ask for advice or wisdom—particularly in prayer to his Father in heaven. Will we follow his example?

Father, keep me from thinking I always know what is best. Give me the humility to ask you for wisdom and to seek advice from others who are wiser than I am. Amen.

OVERLOOKING INSULTS

Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.
—Proverbs 12:16

I've often thought that the old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is a bit ambitious. Harsh words, name-calling, and insults certainly *do* hurt, especially when they come from people we thought we could trust. It never feels good to be insulted, even by a stranger.

So our instinct is often to stand up for ourselves and to push back on an insult. People shouldn't treat us that way, we think—and in most cases they probably shouldn't.

But this Proverb points us in the opposite direction. Why? Why would it be foolish to react with annoyance right away, and prudent to overlook an insult? Wouldn't that just enable people to keep hurting us and others?

Let's be clear: It is important that inappropriate and hurtful behavior is properly addressed.

But this does not mean that the way to react is to fire back with the same kind of behavior.

Remember Jesus, whom the prophets foretold would be "despised and rejected. . . . Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem" (Isaiah 53:3).

Jesus was able to overlook hundreds—maybe even thousands—of insults, jeers, and rejections because he knew who he was, what he was called to do, and how much the Father loved him.

Can we do the same?

Father, help me to live in your love and to remember who I am in you, no matter what people say. Help me to find strength in you. Amen.

THE POWER OF KINDNESS

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.

—Proverbs 12:25

Today there seems to be so much restlessness in people's hearts and lives. People everywhere are stressed. Anxious. Quick to speak out their opinions. Finances are in question. Organizations are getting more complaints and anger from people than ever before.

When we catch up on the daily news, it can be overwhelming to see how many issues and problems there are in the world. There are so many things that can cause anxiety.

All of these difficulties and worries weigh down the heart. We may not always realize their impact, but the more we dwell on our anxieties, the less free we feel.

When Jesus spoke about the worries of life, he assured his followers that their Father in heaven knew all about their needs and would take care of

them. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," Jesus said, "and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matthew 6:33-34). These kind words apply to us as well. They offer us the freedom to live by trusting God with our future so that we don't get weighed down by anxiety.

Is there a fear or anxiety that you might need to surrender to God today? When we surrender our worries to him, we become more able to share his love and kindness with others, which can truly move mountains for someone who is weighed down by anxiety.

Loving God, free me from anxiety so that I can show the kindness and love of Jesus to others around me. Amen.

RIGHTEOUS SAVINGS

An unplowed field produces food for the poor, but injustice sweeps it away.
—Proverbs 13:23

In ancient Israel, the people were commanded to leave a share of the crops in their fields for the poor. Anything that was left over from harvesting was to be left for people who were less fortunate—foreigners, widows, and the fatherless (see Deuteronomy 24:19). This practice enters into the story of Ruth as well (see Ruth 2).

The Israelites were commanded by God to follow rules like these so that justice would be a normal part of their daily living. They were called to steward their wealth in a way that always left room for helping people who were disadvantaged and who were therefore often poor and needy.

Not many of us “live off the land” these days, but we can still find ways to save portions of our income and give material goods to people who are less fortunate. Maybe this

could mean setting aside a portion of your groceries for a local food bank, or offering an empty room in your house to a child in need of care. The opportunities are many!

How might you apply this principle to your own life and express kindness to people who are struggling today?

Gracious God, you have given us the greatest treasure in Jesus, but we often fail to offer our earthly treasures to you in return. Grant us a heart of kindness and justice to help people who are less fortunate than we are. Amen.

THE RIGHT WAY

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.
—Proverbs 14:12

Many of us have had moments when we have looked back on a past decision and wondered, "How did I ever think that was a good idea?" Yet at the time, that decision or choice probably seemed right to us.

There's a reason why people say, "Hindsight is 20/20." This means you can often see a situation more clearly (as with 20/20 vision) after it has passed and you have had time to learn from some of the choices you have made. Our own ability to see clearly in the present moment is limited. And what appears to be a right decision or right thinking in the moment can sometimes do more harm than good.

Jesus warned his disciples that following him would not be easy or even look like a good idea at times. He spoke about the costs of being his disciple, but he also promised that

his way leads to life. He said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

In other words, there can be many ways that appear to be right (even religiously) and seem more attractive than the way of Jesus, but they will bring misery and destruction in the end.

Is there a road in your life that might be taking you away from Jesus? What can you do about that?

Lord and Savior, by the power of your Spirit, give me discernment and wisdom to know the way to follow you faithfully. Amen.

MASKING GRIEF

Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief.
—Proverbs 14:13

In my personal Bible at home, I often mark up verses that I want to be able to find later. I highlight and underline, make notations in the margins, and write cross-references to other passages.

Next to Proverbs 14:13 I have drawn a little star to note that this passage is special.

“Even in laughter the heart may ache.” Have you ever had the experience of putting on a smile for others, and yet inside you had a deep well of emotions and grief? At social events you might even genuinely have a good time, but later, when you’re alone again, the grief and tears can all come flooding back.

This proverb reminds me that we never know what someone might be going through, no matter how cheerful they may seem. Humans are very good

at masking their emotions. But we can learn from the example set by Jesus.

He wept on his way to the tomb of a dear friend (John 11:35). He was overwhelmed with grief and sorrow as he prepared to die for us (Matthew 26:38).

Jesus’ acquaintance with grief gave him insight and empathy for others who were grieving.

God is able to use us too in our times of brokenness to show others the love and care of Jesus.

God of all comfort, only you know the deep aches we have in our hearts. Help us to be attuned to the griefs and hurts of others and to show your love and care, as Jesus would. Amen.

PEACE AND ENVY

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

—Proverbs 14:30

It's interesting that peace is contrasted with envy in this proverb. We usually think of peace as the opposite of war, strife, disunity, or conflict. Why would the writer contrast peace with envy?

Envy means being deeply resentful toward someone because they have something that you dearly want. Maybe it's wealth, a fine car, good looks, popularity, power, or some other advantage or privilege that you don't have. Envy drives people to obsess over their great longing, sometimes even to the point of harming the person who has what they want, or destroying what the person has so that they can't have it.

A person who is consumed with envy has no peace in their heart. Their inner turmoil can affect their health and well-being so much that,

as the proverb says, it "rots the bones."

As James 3:16-17 puts it, "Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is . . . peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit. . . ."

Full life is found in Jesus alone, who gives us "a heart at peace"—a heart that is content, at rest, and satisfied with whatever good things God has given us to steward and care for.

Loving God, grant me a heart of peace that keeps me from longing for what I don't have. Help me to serve you with the generous gifts you have given me. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

KNOWING WISDOM

Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning, and even among fools she lets herself be known.
—Proverbs 14:33

In this proverb Wisdom is characterized as someone who “reposes” or comes to rest in the hearts of people who are discerning.

Don’t we all desire that Wisdom would come and rest in our hearts—that truth, grace, and goodness would take up residence within us and bring us peace?

The beautiful reality of faith in Jesus Christ is that this has actually happened. Wisdom *has* come to live and reign in our hearts through God’s Holy Spirit.

Paul asked the Corinthians, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NRSV). The Holy Spirit lives within us, and it’s the Spirit who reveals all truth and wisdom to us, because his primary task is to help us live like Jesus. What a privilege!

But let’s not become conceited about that. Proverbs 14:33 also notes that Wisdom lets herself be known “even among fools.” In other words, Wisdom wants to be known by *everyone*.

Jesus’ desire too is that *every* heart should know him, that *all people* should know his saving grace and his compassion.

How might you allow the Spirit of Wisdom to shine through you today? How might you allow others to see Jesus through you?

Compassionate God, teach me to have a heart of wisdom—one that yearns to know you more and longs for others to know you as well. May your Spirit come and rest within me. Amen.

STIRRING UP GENTLENESS

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
—Proverbs 15:1

Think about a time when someone made you angry. Maybe they cut you off in traffic. Perhaps they made a rude comment on social media. Or maybe someone made you feel stupid, and you were embarrassed in front of your peers. In any of these situations, it's easy to fire back a defensive response.

But if we act out in anger, we will only make the situation worse. Our sinful nature wants to get back at the person who has offended us, but that is not the peaceful approach Scripture calls us to.

Our proverb for today points us to the way of Jesus, who told his disciples, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). This is one of the few times Jesus actually listed attri-

butes of himself. He is gentle and humble in heart.

As Jesus also showed, there is a place for anger in situations where God is being mocked or injustice is being allowed (see Mark 11:15-17), but those moments are few and far between. And as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:26, "In your anger do not sin" (see also Psalm 4:4). That's the way Jesus operates.

The next time someone makes you angry, how might you respond with a gentle spirit?

Lord, grant me humility and a gentle spirit so that I can show your love and wisdom to the people around me. Purge anger from me so that I can be like you. Amen.

OUR GREATEST PRIORITY

Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD, and humility comes before honor.
—Proverbs 15:33

Let's close our reflections for this month by focusing again on wisdom. Here—about half-way through Proverbs—is a verse that summarizes much of what the book aims to teach.

“Wisdom’s instruction is to fear the LORD.” At the end of the day, who or what consumes most of your thinking? Who or what are you in awe of? What would you say is the most important thing in your life?

We do well to check in with ourselves regularly and ask these questions. Because if something takes priority over the Lord in our lives, then we will find that everything else tumbles into disarray.

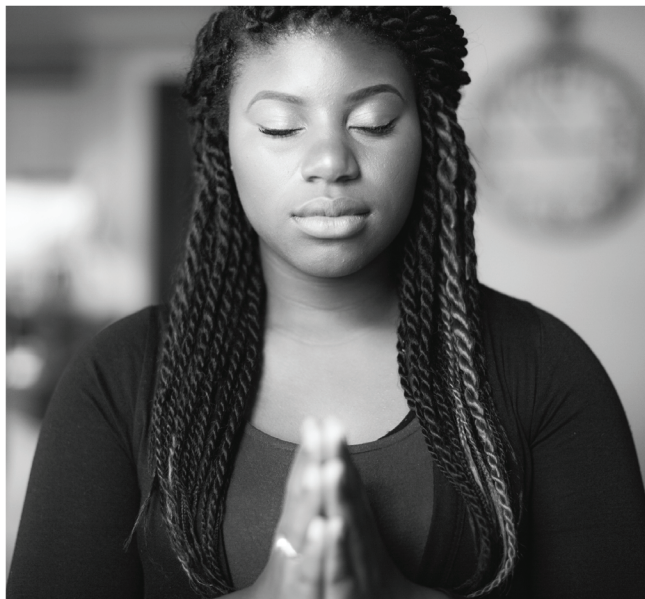
Wisdom says that when the Lord is our greatest priority, everything else falls into proper alignment. When the Lord is our focus, we take on a posture of humility and wor-

ship rather than seeking to gain honor for ourselves. If reputation, financial success, being liked by everyone, or getting what we want is our greatest priority, then we will lack humility and won't be able to mirror Jesus. We might speak about him, but we won't live like him.

So here is the crucial question: What is your greatest priority? Or what do you want your greatest priority to be?

Wise and awesome God, you are so patient with us, even though we often fail to put you first. By your Spirit, grant us deeper wisdom so that we can serve you more faithfully. Amen.

Prayer doesn't have to be complicated.
It's an intimate conversation between
you and God.



“How Do I Pray?”
a guidebook with six ways to
reinvigorate your prayer life.

It's yours free at
ReFrameMinistries.org/ways-to-pray.

CANADA



POSTES

POST

CANADA



Postage paid

Port payé

Personalized
Mail

Courrier
personnalisé

1946358

RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED
PORT DE RETOUR GARANTI

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

3475 Mainway
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9
P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

905-336-2920

info@todaydevotional.com

www.todaydevotional.com

facebook.com/todaydevotional

Periodicals postage paid at
Grand Rapids, Mich., and at
additional mailing offices.

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407
800-626-3060
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional
