

Bible Reading Schedule The Golden Thread

September 4 – Proverbs 1: 7; 9:10

According to the Bible the fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom, but what does that phrase mean? We get a sense of just how important the fear of the Lord is in Job 1:8:

Job 1:8 *the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."*

It is obvious that the term fear of the Lord is the summary of all that we are to do and to be. The fear of the Lord should define us as a people. The problem is most of us don't want a God we fear we want a God who loves us. We want a God who will love us no matter who we are and no matter what we do. But in these verses we see that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom.

Why is fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom and knowledge? Because your relationship with God completely determines what you know about the world and how you know it. Your relationship with God determines how you live your life. Your faith is the foundation for the way you think and live. That's why a proper view of God is the beginning of wisdom, because a proper view of God will inform every decision and every action we take with our lives.

Look at Proverbs 9:10 the fear of the Lord leads to knowledge of God. To understand how this is true we now have to turn our attention to the word fear. When we hear this phrase the very first thing that usually pops into our head is that we should be scared to death of God, and if God is holy and can't stand sin, and we are sinners there is a sense that we should be very afraid of God.

We should be scared to death of God, and in fact every time in the Bible when someone has a supernatural encounter with God it leaves them quaking in their boots, and they are never the same after that encounter. Don't let go of that thought, we should fear God because of what he

could do to us. But the phrase fear of the Lord means so much more than that.

Deuteronomy 10:12 *what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Notice in this verse that the fear of the Lord and loving the Lord go hand in hand. It doesn't say you can either fear him or you can love him. It says to do both, and in fact the more you fear him the more you love him.

Psalms 130:4 *But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.*

We understand why God's forgiveness would make us love him, but why on earth would the Psalmist say forgiveness makes us fear God? It seems like the more forgiven we are the less we should fear God. But the fear of the Lord isn't just being scared of him. The fear of the Lord is more than that. As you look at Scripture we see that the fear of the Lord is a life rearranging joyful awe and wonder of who God is and what God is doing.

So why does the Bible use the word fear to describe joy and wonder and awe of God? Well the first reason that comes to mind is that this joy is a very humbling joy, because it is a joy that comes out of fear. This fearful joy humbles you even as it fills you with joy, because it is completely unmerited. You know you don't deserve it.

September 5 – Proverbs 1: 7; 9:10

There is a second reason why the Bible uses the word fear to describe our relationship to God. Did you know that the things you fear losing the most are the things you love the most? If you want to know what you love, think about what you fear losing more than anything else. Is it money, is it reputation, is it rejection, is it the approval of others, is it your family? Whatever it is you fear losing the most, whatever it is that

keeps you awake at night is the thing you love more than anything else in your life.

By understanding your greatest fear you will see what your greatest love is. It is possible to believe in God, it is possible to obey God's law, it is possible to be inspired by God and still not have God as your fear—as the thing you love more than anything, as the one thing that is the passion of your heart and life—as the one thing that if you lost it would render your life meaningless.

Thinking this way puts the term fear of the Lord in a whole different light. The fear of the Lord isn't just a fear about what he might do to you if you make him mad, it a fear that you might lose the one thing, the only thing that can give your life meaning and purpose.

When you begin to think this way, when you love God so much that you fear losing him more than anything else it changes everything about the way you live your life. And God goes from being a concept to the passion of your life. The fear of the Lord causes you to know God in a whole different way.

With God as our fear there is nothing else that you are more afraid of losing and if that is the case then you will trust him unconditionally with no strings attached and you will live that out in your life.

Proverbs 19:23 *The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.*

How do you get to the place in your life when you can trust God like that? It is by discovering the grace of God.

We can look at the cross and know God because at the cross we see God's holiness and God's love. We can look at the cross and know that we can trust God completely because he has given us Jesus. We can look at the cross and discover God's grace. The fear of the Lord is all right there at the cross. Wisdom says to give up your life and follow Christ.

The choice we have is that we can reject Christ and be afraid of God, or we can have our lives rearranged by the cross and know that joyful awe and wonder of who God is and what God is doing in our lives. Instead of being afraid of God we can truly know the joyful awe inspiring fear of the Lord.

September 6 – Proverbs 4: 11 – 27

The Bible teaches us that there is a path of life that leads upward to light and life and an eternity with God, and then there is another path that leads downward to darkness and death and eternal punishment. These two paths go in opposite directions, you can't be on both at the same time, and the question we need to constantly be asking ourselves is "Are we on the right path?" Are we doing the right things?

The passage we just read helps to evaluate our lives to see if the path we are on is the right one that will lead us to where we want to go. Verses 11-12 and 18 deal with the path of wisdom, which is described as a path that leads to increasing light and is so straight that we can walk or run on it without ever stumbling. But in verses 14-19 there is another path mentioned. It is the path of the wicked and verse 19 tells us that the path of the wicked leads down to deep darkness.

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*

In fact, 1000 years after Proverbs was written Jesus would elaborate on Proverbs 14:12 with these words.

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

Deep down inside none of us wants to go the way that leads to destruction, we all want to go on the road that leads to life, but the problem is that the wrong way looks so much easier and so much more appealing because the gate is wide and the road is broad, and there are

a lot of fellow travelers on that road to keep us company. Our natural inclination is to take the easy way—the wide gate, the broad road—the way that everybody is going, so it is really easy for us to head down the wrong path and not even know it.

In fact Isaiah 53:6 makes it clear that we have all been headed down the wrong path.

Isaiah 53:6 *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*

We have wandered away from the path of wisdom, the path that God has laid out for each of us to walk—the path that leads to light, and if something doesn't change for us we are clearly headed for that deep darkness verse 19 talks about. The way we end up going down the wrong path is the same way we go down the right path. It is one small step at a time. Your character and the path you take is determined by all of the seemingly little choices you make and the little things you do each day.

September 7 – Proverbs 4: 11 – 27

In verses 14-19 the path that leads to destruction is laid out very clearly and what I want you to notice is that in verse 14 it starts with a choice—a decision to go down the wrong path. A lot of times if we look carefully it is not one big wrong choice we make but a whole series of little choices and seemingly innocent desires that set us off down the wrong path. At the beginning of the pathway you have choices. The Bible says don't set foot on the path of the wicked, you can choose not to go there. In fact, verse 15 tells us to avoid that path don't even take one step on it.

The reason why is what happens when you do choose that path. The path of the wicked soon begins to consume you. Look at verse 16 "they cannot sleep until they do evil" and then verse 17 "they are robbed of slumber until they make someone fall." Once you start down the path of the wicked whatever sin it is that has a hold of you that won't let you go. It becomes an obsession, it becomes an addiction.

The truth is that all of us struggle with an addiction to ourselves, and that is really what these verses are talking about. Our desire to serve ourselves, our desire to get ahead in life, our desire to be liked and approved of, our desire to fit in are all symptoms of our self-centeredness, and they are all things that can consume us and lead us into darkness. Hell is all about self. Hell will be filled with people who chose only to live for themselves. But living for yourself will also turn this life into a living hell, as it leads you down the path to the ultimate hell where everyone is consumed by themselves and consumed by a fire that never dies.

The key to transforming your life and changing the path of your life is to have the loves of your heart transformed and reordered.

“the key to life change is not acts of the will, but the loves of the heart.”

St. Augustine

You see our hearts are always trying to attach themselves to something. Our hearts are looking for things to love and connect with and the only way to truly change our lives is to change our hearts. If you want a different heart you need a different love. If you really want to break that addiction to yourself go to the cross and see someone who loves you even more than you love yourself.

September 8 – Proverbs 3: 1 – 12

Wisdom isn't just knowing a lot of things, it is knowing what to do with what you know, so that when you come to those times in your life when the rules don't apply, you can still make a good and wise decision. In today's reading we see that true wisdom resides outside of ourselves.

Look at verse 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not into your own understanding.

If we are going to walk in wisdom we first have to realize that we need a source of wisdom that is from outside of ourselves. As we go through

life there is only one who sits high above all, sees everything and knows how to get us from the beginning to the end of our lives and that is God.

Psalm 139:16 *All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

So often we ignore God and trust ourselves because we think we know what is best for us, but as we saw yesterday that only leads us to deep darkness.

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*

This passage shows us two things that have to be a part of our everyday lives if we are truly going to be wise. Look at verse 3, "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart."

To really understand what this verse means we have to understand that love and faithfulness are two words that are always used together to describe God's relationship to his people. The love and faithfulness that are being referred to in this verse are God's love and God's faithfulness to us.

1 John 4:19 *We love because he first loved us.*

We are only capable of loving because we have been loved by God. The cross proves God's love and faithfulness to us. God loved us so much that he sent his one only son to die on the cross and pay the debt for our sins. God was so faithful to keep his promises that he allowed his son to be sacrificed for us. You want proof that God is loving and faithful then look to the cross, and not just once but over and over again every single day, and you will be reminded of how loving and faithful God is.

Before we can even begin to love and be faithful we have to know and understand God's love and faithfulness to us. The very first step in

living wisely is that we have to experience that love, and to write it in large letters on the tablets of our hearts.

September 9 – Proverbs 3: 1 – 12

The path to wisdom starts by remembering God's love and faithfulness to us. When we remember God's love and faithfulness it makes us better able to get through the hard times in our lives, and the hard times in our lives are the other place where we learn to walk in wisdom. Look at verses 11 and 12.

To be wise we have to know discipline and suffering. To be wise we have to know trouble in our lives. There is a sense in which this step down the path ties all of the other steps together.

When is it that we take the longest looks at ourselves and at our lives? When is it that we realize our limitations and realize that we have to rely on God? When is it that we best understand God's love and faithfulness? It is in all the times when we are going through trouble in our lives. To really know wisdom we have to know trouble.

James 1: 2 – 5 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

You don't become wise by avoiding the struggles and troubles in your life, you become wise by transforming the struggles of your life into a deeper knowledge of yourself and of God, by asking God for wisdom in the midst of your troubles.

The problem is sometimes when we are down deep in the valley of suffering we can't see the path in front of us. We want to but it just doesn't seem like there is any way out. It seems like the suffering is pointless and nothing good will come of it.

But it is in those very moments of struggle that we should cry out to Jesus, because Jesus knew trouble more than any of us ever will. He has already walked the path.

Lots of people throughout history have died terrible painful, lonely deaths, but no one has ever had been forsaken by God like Jesus was as he hung there on the cross.

To the casual observer the cross just seems pointless. But without the cross we would have nothing. We would have no hope, and we would have no wisdom. The cross shows us our limitations, and it shows us God's love and faithfulness.

1 Corinthians 1:18 *I know very well how foolish the message of the cross sounds to those who are on the road to destruction. But we who are being saved recognize this message as the very power of God.*

For some the message of the cross is nothing but foolishness, but for those who believe it is the wisdom of God. If you want wisdom go to the cross every day and you will find it.

September 10 – Proverbs 10:15-16; 11:1, 4, 24, 26; 13:21, 23; 30:8-9

Today's readings from throughout the Book of Proverbs deal with the subject of how we are to handle our wealth (or lack of it, as the case might be). In dealing with our money we need wisdom that goes beyond the rules, and in order to have that kind of wisdom we have to understand the power of money over our lives.

The first thing we need to understand is that money is a good thing. Money isn't the problem. Our hearts are the problem. The Book of Proverbs and the Bible as a whole take a very positive view of prosperity and the creation of wealth, and if God has blessed you with prosperity you shouldn't feel guilty about it for one minute. If you go back to the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1:28 we see that when God created humanity he gave us very direct instructions he said we were to fill the earth and subdue it.

Genesis 1:28 *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

God created us to rule over his creation. God's intent for us all along was that we would work and gather all of the resources of the earth to build the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Now notice it's not to build our personal kingdoms—it is to build his kingdom.

Now understanding that we can see why these verses in Proverbs place such a high value on hard work, because it's what we were created to do.

Proverbs 10:4-5 *Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. ⁵ He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.*

The book of Proverbs commends hard work. It is what God put us here on earth to do. It commends honestly gathering as much wealth as you can. It commends working hard to accumulate as much as you can in the opportunity that you have.