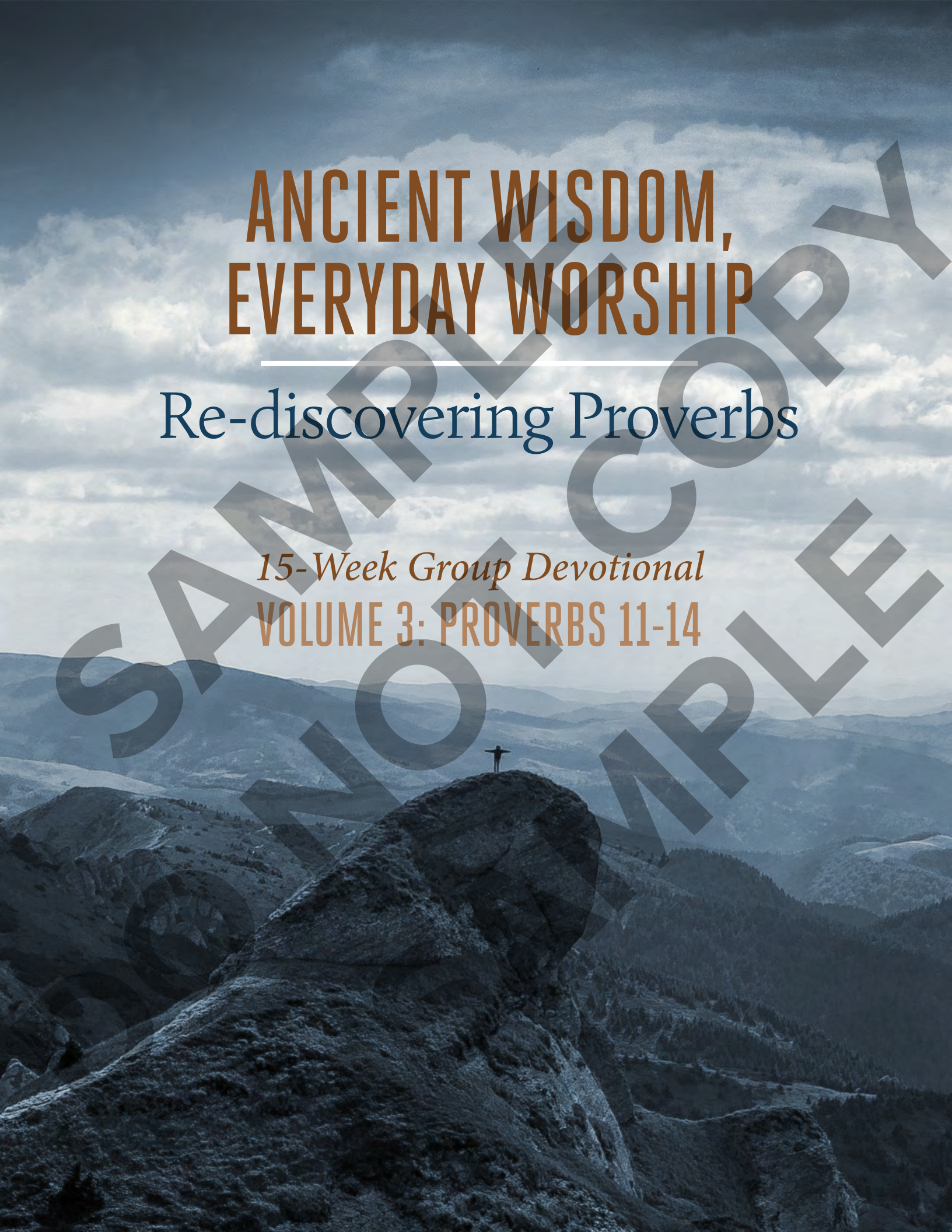


ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP

Re-discovering Proverbs

15-Week Group Devotional
VOLUME 3: PROVERBS 11-14



ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 1 - PROVERBS 10: 1-16

VOL. 3

A WORD ABOUT WORK

Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. (PROVERBS 10: 4)

With chapter 10 of the Book of Proverbs, we begin to see a large portion of what scholars call “antithetic parallelism.” These parallelisms are contrasts in lifestyle, actions or thought, the second line (or contrast) usually beginning with the word, “but.” At first glance, they can seem simplistic and repetitive, but if history tells us anything, it's that dismissing the truth of these next few chapters can be disastrous.

The first section of this chapter has a lot to say about our work ethic, and it begins, in verse 1, with *A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.* My wife and I have 4 children, and because their age ranges span 8 years, they're in various stages of discovering and working out their life's calling. As parents, we're facing the daunting task of balancing direction and advice with freedom to pursue their dreams while finding their own way. Let me tell you, it's tough! We pray constantly that the foundations we've tried to lay will be a positive influence on the big choices they are or will be making.

Our desire is that they find fulfilling, satisfying work that ignites their passion and honors God. We've encouraged them to seek out a career doing what they love. Then they'll work hard. Then they'll get opportunities. Then a paycheck will follow.

We're convinced that in seeking only a paycheck, real satisfaction never arrives. Real fulfillment is never achieved. Real passion is never ignited.

But when we spend our lives doing what we were made to do, it can feel like we never really “work” a day of our existence. There will be challenges and obstacles, yes. But the payoff is incredible.

And “retirement?” It never enters our mind. What wiser advice could we ever give our families?

DISCUSS

Do you feel like you're living out God's calling for your life; what you were created to do?

If not, what's stopping you?

A WORD ABOUT WORDS

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.
(PROVERBS 10: 19)

My words have power. So do yours. Power to give life or to destroy. I need to watch what I say. So do you. Then, our walk must match our talk. And when we say or do wrong, let's be quick to confess it, and eager to rectify it.

There's an old proverb (it's not in the Bible; I looked) that says, "Better to keep one's mouth closed and be thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt." We chuckle at this, but there's a lot of truth in it, isn't there? How many times have we spoken in haste without fully thinking through the implications? Let the guilty say "Amen!"

"But I was just being honest!"

"I'm at the age where I can speak my mind."

That's not in the Bible, either; I looked.

In fact, quite the opposite is true. While we *are* told to speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:15), it's the "in love" part that usually snags us. That's because *our words have power*. And because we often tend to be slow learners, we often need to be reminded ... again and again ... and again.

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked. (vs. 11)

Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks judgement. (vs. 13)

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value. (vs. 20)

The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgement. (vs. 21)

How will you use your power today?

DISCUSS

Do your words tend to edify or tear down those you live with?
Do your words encourage or alienate those you do ministry with?

AND NOW A WORD ABOUT ACTIONS

A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.
(PROVERBS 10:23)

My pastor has said on more than one occasion, “Ideas have consequences.” I think he’s quoting Dostoevsky, but I’m not sure. I’m not as smart or well-read as either of them. But it’s true: *For as he thinks within himself, so he is.* (Proverbs 23: 7 NASV) And later on in Proverbs, we’re told: *As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man.* (Proverbs 27: 19)

The things we think about – the ideas we generate – have consequences.

We act according to what is in our hearts. We respond to the world around us as an outgrowth of the world within us. Our inward priorities are on display in the ordering of our lives. Our actions speak louder than our words.

That last line has the ring of a cliché, doesn’t it? But clichés are clichés because there’s an element of universal truth to them. They’re something we all can identify with; something that we all can embrace or something that we’ve all fallen victim to.

We all have a heart problem. Some appear to be more evident than others, but it’s an affliction that assails everyone who’s ever drawn a breath ... save One. His heart reflected that of His Father’s: kind, gentle, loving, abounding in mercy and full of compassion. No “What’s in it for me?” No vain conceit and no “But how will I look?”

Go back and read again Philippians 2: 1 – 11, and you’ll see it – a Father’s heart passed on to His Son. Oh, to be a man or woman after God’s own heart.

DISCUSS

In the past week, what actions have been an overflow of what’s in your heart?

When was the last time you had a “heart check-up?”

ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 4 - PROVERBS 11:1–11

VOL. 3

WHAT GOES AROUND...

The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. (PROVERBS 11:1)

It seems that what I sow, I'll reap. If I'm trustworthy with a confidence, I'll find friends I can trust. If I give generously, I'll have more than enough. It's apparent that there's just something about right living that pleases God.

As we begin looking into Proverbs 11, the significance of verse 1 could be accidentally skipped over. In the original language, the term “dishonest scales” is literally “balances of deceit.” And “accurate weights” is more properly rendered “perfect stones.” Here's what the Bible Knowledge Commentary has to say about that:

To increase their profits many merchants used two sets of stone weights when weighing merchandise. Lighter stones were placed on the scales when selling (so that a lesser quantity was sold for the stated price), and heavier ones were used when buying (so that more was obtained for the same price). With the absence of coinage, scales were used in most daily transactions.

Here's the catch, and one of the main points of Proverbs 11: by including “the LORD,” commercial matters were (and are) now placed in the spiritual realm. There is no sacred and secular distinction; no gap between our “religious” life and our “everyday” life.

And shouldn't the same be true of our relationship with and worship of God? Not strictly set aside for a particular day in a particular place. But every day, in every circumstance; in every place.

DISCUSS

Do you make a distinction in your sacred and secular life?

How might including God in every transaction, every decision, every relationship affect your world?

LET'S GET MESSY

Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes the harvest. (PROVERBS 14:4)

Today's theme verse, verse 4, might seem odd or hard to relate to in our cultured urban or suburban lifestyles. My dad used to quote this verse a lot and then he always added his own paraphrase, which went something like "An orderly office is appealing, but the resulting income can be lacking." I guess that's sort of akin to "A clean desk is a sign of a sick mind," but that's an entirely different devotional thought!

I think it comes down to investments. Not financial investments, necessarily, but investments of thought, time, emotion and, yes, labor. Relationships or ministry endeavors that are worth pursuing are worth an investment. And investments can be costly. The strength of an ox brings an abundant harvest, but feeding and cleaning up after that ox can be messy.

If you've ever had a pet, or especially an income-producing animal, then you know that their care and feeding can be messy. The same is true if you're raising a teenager, but again, that's a different devotional thought!

So, who are you investing in? What endeavor are you pouring yourself into? For what or whom are you willing to get messy? Can you make that sacrifice, that investment, for the sake of the end result? Better still, who has invested in you? Who got messy because of the potential they saw in you?

Thank God they did that. No, really. Right now... stop... and thank God.

DISCUSS

What "investments" occupy most of your time, attention and labor?

Just how "messy" are you willing to get?

ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 14 - PROVERBS 14:11–27

VOL. 3

OF FAITH AND FEAR

He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.
(PROVERBS 14:26)

“Legacy” is such a great word. It's so rich in meaning and nuance, and I even love the way it sounds when it's spoken. Even its synonyms have the same characteristics – words like *heritage*, *birthright* and *inheritance*.

That seems to be the underlying concept of today's theme verse – “legacy.” To be sure, our children must make their faith their own; it doesn't come to them through some sort of spiritual DNA. But what a blessing for them to be born and raised in a heritage of faith; a legacy of belief. There's security for them in seeing this faith, this belief *lived out*. As the old hymn goes, “How I've proved Him o'er and o'er.”

And once again we see that it all begins with that “fear of the Lord” we've noted before. In that regard, it's easy to see how verses 26 and 27 are closely linked. The fear of the Lord provides a secure fortress and a fountain of life.

In ancient times, fortresses were elevated so that enemies could be spotted, and fortified so that enemies could be repelled. In the middle east, where the Bible was written, fountains were valuable commodities because of the arid, desert-like qualities of the region. Both fortresses and fountains were vital in preserving and sustaining life. Because of the atmosphere, climate and surroundings, both were needed for protection and survival.

If we apply that to the spiritual realm, it sounds a lot like today, doesn't it?

DISCUSS

Where do you honestly find your deepest sense of security?

What are you doing to pass along your legacy of faith?

THE BITTER STING OF ENVY

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. (PROVERBS 14:30)

Here's a tough one. Who among us hasn't felt, at one time or another, the bitter sting of envy? Who hasn't sensed this most unattractive quality eat away at our spirit, sap us of energy, and deplete our attitude of thanksgiving?

Of course, we all recognize that envy isn't based so much on what someone else has, but on what *we don't have*! Just as criticism is, in essence, a revealing of the criticizer, envy reveals much about *our* heart, *our* spirit, *our* thankfulness.

So, here's a wake-up call for all of us: there will always be someone more talented than you and me; there will always be someone more successful in their occupation than you and me; there will always be someone just more "together" than you and me. But here's the test – Can we be grateful for others' gifting? Can we be thankful for God's blessing in their life?

Remember Asaph? He's the guy who wrote Psalm 73, and when he looked around him and noticed the apparent affluence of the ungodly, he stated plainly, "I envied the arrogant." After surveying and describing their seemingly perfect life, Asaph finally came to his senses and ended his Ode to Envy with these words: *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Envy of others' prosperity is based on ignorance of our own blessing.

DISCUSS

Is envy a struggle for you?

How would taking stock of God's blessing on your life counter this bone-rotting emotion?

Has envy ever hindered your ministry?