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Living Wisely

Proverbs 9:6

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Do you recognize this saying?

*“In advance of committing yourself to a course of action, consider your circumstances and options.”*

How about now - **“Look before you leap.”**

Here’s another: *“There are certain corrective measures for minor problems that, when taken early on in a course of action, forestall major problems from arising.”* **“A stitch in time saves nine.”**

The great writer Cervantes said, *“A proverb is a short sentence founded upon long experience containing a truth.”* I was very happy my father could speak at the Men’s Ministry breakfast yesterday morning. He spoke about the confidence that comes to a person who has a relationship with and relies upon God. I’ve learned a lot from my dad including a family proverb that began with my grandfather that my sisters and I heard from the time we were little, *“Do good and forget it.”* We heard that all the time and it meant we were to do good because it was the right thing to do and not for any other reason or reward or expectation. It is such a part of my family DNA that on my grandparents gravestone in Maine all it says on the front is “SCALISE – Do good and forget it.” After hearing this for 20 plus years my oldest sister met and got engaged to a man from Italy named Sal. One night at dinner the family proverb was brought up for some reason and Sal immediately said, “Sure that’s an old Italian saying, but it’s only half of it. The saying is, ‘Do good and forget it, do bad and never forget it,’ and it means you are to do good but if someone does something bad to you, you never forget.” Our family had never heard that, but we were touched by the fact that my grandfather had only passed on the Christian half of the proverb.

Most of us are familiar with at least some proverbs; they are usually brief, imagistic and memorable like Proverbs 26:11, *“As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.”* Or another of my favorites Proverbs 26:14, *“As a door turns on its hinges, so does a lazy person in bed.”*

Proverbs is one of the most practical and easiest to understand books in the Bible. Proverbs challenges us to pursue God and wisdom in each area of our life. According to Proverbs, **the wise person** seeks knowledge, wisdom, truth and insight and applies what is learned to life’s situations and circumstances. The wise are known

for their love for God, self control, well chosen words and deeds, and their generous concern for and service to others.

**The fool** in Proverbs has no desire to learn, no desire to change, and no desire for a relationship with God. Fools tend to create problems and to make situations worse rather than better. They are lacking in ethics and or integrity.

All proverbs are grounded in experience, but it is far wiser to learn from the experience of others, both positively and negatively, than to have to learn and personally experience everything oneself.

Among the many topics touched upon in Proverbs is our attitude toward wealth, possessions, and giving. Listen to a few more proverbs:

Proverbs 3:9-10; 11:24-26, 28; 28:6 (TNIV)

*“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. People curse those who hoard grain, but they pray God’s blessing on those who are willing to sell. Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf. Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.”*

When we looked at Solomon back in September, I mentioned how **Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life. Wisdom is skill in the art of living with each aspect of our life under God’s guidance and direction that includes our possessions, time and money.**

How would we feel if we were in worship and the following took place? The offering was being given one Sunday morning, when the great preacher John Broadus came down and stood in the aisle beside one of the ushers. Broadus moved beside the usher as he went from pew to pew; watching every bill that was given by his parishioners. Some of them were angered at this action. Some were confused and ashamed. Others were amazed. All were surprised. After the offering was completed, Broadus went to the pulpit to begin his sermon, based on the story of the widow who placed the very tiny amount she had into the offering as Jesus watched the people give their offerings. Broadus concluded his sermon by saying, “If you take to heart that I have seen your offerings this day and know just what sacrifice you have made - and what sacrifice you have not made – remember that your Savior goes up and down these

aisles with every usher ever Sunday and sees every cent contributed by his people. He knows more than what we give; he sees through to the heart. He also knows exactly what remains in our wallet or purse – the amount we keep for ourselves.”

“There are two ways in which a Christian may view money:

“How much of my money shall I use for God?

“How much of God's money shall I use for myself?” - W. Graham Scroggie

Those who follow Jesus are expected to live wisely and faithfully before God in all aspects of our life. We need to give of our money, time, and spiritual gifts **for our own spiritual development, not because the church needs to receive.** That is why one should not substitute giving of one kind for another, because we deny ourselves the joy and the spiritual growth which comes from giving of ourselves and our resources in different ways. My dad was just amazed by the amount of volunteer hours given by the people of this church, the varieties of volunteer service that you all do, and the amount of money that is contributed and given away. When you pick up your stewardship mailing today, I sincerely hope you will take the time to read not only the letter but even more importantly the enclosed document, “Brewster Baptist Church – A Very Giving Church.” It is just incredible all that God is doing through the combined efforts of the people of this church as we seek to love and serve the Lord together.

Instead of treating people like members of a social club who need to pay dues, we believe in treating people like followers of Jesus Christ who want to give unselfishly as an act of discipleship; an act of trust, an act of obedience, an act of love, a wise act of gratitude which grows the soul. The church that fails to speak about the cost of discipleship in every aspect of one's life including our handling of money, is neglecting to care for the souls of its members

Jesus says in Matthew 23 that we should pay attention to the weightier issues of justice, mercy, and faith without neglecting smaller matters like tithing. To Jesus tithing was a smaller matter, a given. Jesus says the tithe is important to the worship of God and so it is for us as well. Giving helps us live wisely and more simply by keeping material things in their proper place. Paul wrote,

*“Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.*

*For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. ”*

On Tuesday afternoon I received a phone call from my mom to tell me that Sean who had been one of my closest friends when I was 10-13 years old had died suddenly on Sunday morning. He was 40 years old. On Friday I drove up to Brookline to take part in his funeral. Over the years Sean and I fell out of touch because once we hit high school we began making different decisions about who we hung out with and the things we would do. He was a good friend that I shared many great times with and he always had a great sense of humor and loved to laugh. As I was sitting in my friend Joe's car as we waited for the funeral procession to leave the church for the cemetery, I told Joe I read a news item that described a funeral procession that was crossing a busy city intersection just as an armored truck pulled up from a side street. Not realizing the procession was a funeral, the driver of the armored car joined it. An onlooker, impressed by the spectacle of the armored truck at the center of the funeral procession, said to a friend,

*“What do you know; you can take it with you.”*

Whether we are rich or poor, as followers of Jesus it is important for us to be capable of having money and possessions without being possessed or corrupted by them. If we have money or an abundance of things we need not love them, trust them or serve them. Whatever our financial situation we are to use money and possessions in ways that honor God and encourage others. Money is not merely a means of exchange. Money is like a god - it offers security, can induce guilt, gives freedom and power, it entices us and seems all powerful.

Like a god, money is out to gain our allegiance and our devotion.

When we let go of money, we let go of part of ourselves and part of our security, which is scary and which is precisely why we need to do it.

Giving frees us from the tyranny of money. That is why we encourage people to tithe, to give at least 10% of what God has blessed them with to the Lord's work. I read about a small church that was in its financial stewardship time of the year when a man needed surgery. The pastor promised a member of her flock that she would be in the recovery room when he came out of the anesthesia following surgery. She was. As the man awakened through the foggy shroud of medication, he looked wildly about and said, *“Where am I, and who are you?”* The pastor took his hand and said, *“Everything's all*

*right. I'm your pastor." "Oh, yes," said the patient, with a deep sigh, "just put me down for the same thing as last year."*

Think of the people in the Bible like Abraham, Job, David, Nicodemus, the women who provided for Jesus and the apostles so they could carry on their ministry - all of them were well off financially. In Acts we learn of Barnabas and others who sold land and gave the proceeds to the apostles for the ministry of the church. There are countless others through the centuries who regardless of how much or how little they had, have provided prayers, encouragement, service, hospitality, food, lodging, and other resources so the message about Jesus could be shared. All these people trusted God and used money, time, position, and power wisely and to the glory of God and for the good of others and by doing so they grew closer to God. Ultimately how we handle our money and our life hinges on who we think will provide for us and where we place our trust. When, *"In God We Trust,"* becomes not just a saying but a defining truth of our lives, then we will increasingly learn to make wise choices in life, including how we handle our money that has In God We Trust on it.

When it came to living wisely, "Nothing was a private affair with Jesus. Sex, marriage, anger. There is nothing which was private with him. So Jesus, knowing that we human beings are really concerned about material possessions, and about money and what it can buy, Jesus said, "Don't put so much time and energy into accumulating material possessions which are going to rust and wear out. Money is not the source of happiness. Instead, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Lay up for yourselves spiritual treasures which will last forever." --Edward Markquart

That's why a great preacher once said. **"The real measure of our wealth is how much we'd be worth if we lost all our money."** - J. H. Jowett

Randy Alcorn in the book *Money, Possession, and Eternity* wrote, *"Let me assume the role of "eternal financial counselor" and offer this advice: choose your investments carefully; compare their rates of interest; consider their ultimate trustworthiness; and especially compare how they will be working for you a few million years from now."*

A pastor from the United States was in northern Canada on a speaking engagement. He wanted to write a letter to his wife, but he didn't have any stamps. So, he walked down to the post office to buy some. When he put his money on the counter at the post office window, the clerk wouldn't take it. *"That is U.S. money,"* the postal clerk said. *"We only take Canadian money."* The traveler couldn't buy even a single

postage stamp with the \$100 in his pocket. He had not exchanged his money at the border, and now it was useless to him.

Jesus says that a time comes for all of us to move to a new country beyond this earth when we die. The only way we can take our money with us is before we leave to exchange it for something worthwhile that is accepted currency where we're headed. That is a very wise thing to do.

“Lay aside immaturity and live and walk in the way of insight.” Proverbs 9:6 (NRSV)

### **Call to Worship – The Beginning of Wisdom**

One: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

All: The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

One: Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

All: Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding.

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight.

Proverbs 1:7; 2:6; 3:7; 3:13; 4:7 (NRSV)

### **Before Congregational Prayer: Being Kind to the Poor**

One: Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.

All: Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

One: If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink.

All: Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.

Proverbs 14:21, 22:9; 25:21; 3:27, 19:17 (NRSV)