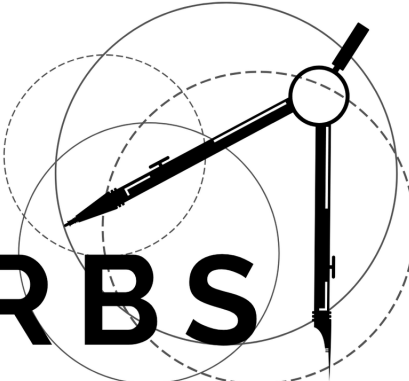




PROVERBS

SKILL IN THE ART OF LIVING

PART FIVE – “WISDOM & THE PURSUIT OF MORE”
By Pastor Ben Froese
Proverbs 22:22-23:11

Intro

Well, my wife Preeti gets to work a pretty cool job. She works in a bank.

The other night her and I were talking, and she told me about a recent interaction where a customer came in who had hundreds of thousands of dollars in his chequing account. And she says, hey, why don't you invest this somewhere... or at least put this in a savings account where you can collect some interest.

The man's reply: "Why would I do that? How much more do I need to live?"

Preeti tells me that in 10 years of working at the bank, this is the first time she has ever heard a customer say that.

Now, saving and investing, there is wisdom in that. There are good reasons for that.

A far more common thing she hears: sometimes she'll be helping a client who has millions in their portfolio and at the end of their interaction she asks, "Is there anything else I can help you with today?"... the response, and my wife actually gets this a lot..., "You can put some more money in my account, please."

It seems that for the vast majority of us, we never feel like we have enough. No matter how much we have, we always need a little more.

Introducing the Text

Today we're in the section of Proverbs known as the 'Thirty Sayings of the Wise,' and scholars note that much of this material contains some very similar ideas as an Egyptian text called the *Instruction of Amenemope*.

Quick side note: The reality that God, in His wisdom, inspired a text of Scripture that includes a bunch of stuff that is quite clearly not original to the people of Israel indicates that there is much wisdom to be found

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in other cultures. Much wisdom is to be found among those who have different worldviews than the Christian worldview. Back in Fall 2023 we did a sermon series called Thinking Christianly... check that out if you want to learn more about how that works.

Proverbs encourages us to notice and appreciate wisdom where it can be found, and that might mean discovering wisdom in unlikely places.

The first eleven-or-so of the 'Thirty Sayings' in Proverbs 22-23 is the section that most closely parallels the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*. It's also the section that has been called 'A Decalogue of Sayings About Wealth,'¹ because just about all of these sayings have something to do with wisdom and wealth.

These sayings are instructive for us in our approach to money, wealth and the pursuit of 'more.'

I. Do Not Wear Yourself Out

One commentator suggests that Saying 8 functions as the thematic focus of everything we discover in the first eleven sayings.² Here it is:

Saying 8

⁴Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
do not trust your own cleverness.

⁵Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone,
for they will surely sprout wings
and fly off to the sky like an eagle.

Proverbs 23:4-5

When it comes to our approach to money, wealth and possessions, it all ties back to our desires... to what we want... to what we make the most important thing in our lives - that is the thing that we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for.

In our world today, there's this strong narrative that basically says this:

'If you work really hard, you'll have a really good life.'

Said a little differently:

'If you'll do whatever it takes, you can have all
the things you want.'

But then you hear stories of people who made a lot of

money, people who've become uber-successful in the world's eyes... and yet their marriages have failed, their relationships with their children are strained and their physical health has deteriorated far more quickly than anyone would hope for.

Which forces us to ask:

Is it worth it?

Is money and wealth and having 'more' really that important?

Or does this narrative make a faulty assumption?

Maybe money isn't the most important thing.

⁴Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
do not trust your own cleverness.

Proverbs 23:4

That second line should probably be read as an elaboration on the first *do not*, rather than an entirely separate idea.

Other translations translate that second line, "...be smart enough to stop..." (CEB) or "...be discerning enough to desist..." (ESV).

Know when you need to stop running so hard after money, because it's killing you! That's wisdom.

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¹ Waltke, Bruce K. (15 Mar 2005). The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31. Eerdmans. p. 225

² Meinhold, as cited in *supra* at p. 239

III. Do Not Overextend Yourself

Saying 4

²⁶ Do not be one who shakes hands in pledge
or puts up security for debts;
²⁷ if you lack the means to pay,
your very bed will be snatched from under you.
Proverbs 22:26-27

Those of us who want ‘more’ – who feel like we need ‘more’ – in today’s world, what is it that we often do? Get ourselves into more debt!

And if we want that lowest interest rate, what do we need to do? Put up security for debts. Usually, in Canada today, that means putting up our home as collateral.

*²⁷if you lack the means to pay,
your very bed will be snatched from under you.*
Proverbs 22:27

The ancient wisdom of the Proverbs isn't really all that outdated at all.

That's not to say you shouldn't get a mortgage. Very few of us, especially young people, will ever the ability to purchase a home with cash.

And so, that mortgage, maybe that home equity line of credit, will for many of us be necessary in order for us to live life in this country today.

But I think we need to hear Saying 4 as a warning:

Guess what: If you overextend yourself too much, there will be consequences.

You reap what you sow. And that's part of how the LORD intervenes in judgement.

IV. Do Not Think TOO MUCH About Your Budget

Saying 9

⁶ Do not eat the food of a begrudging host,
do not crave his delicacies;
⁷ for he is the kind of person
who is always thinking about the cost.
“Eat and drink,” he says to you,
but his heart is not with you.
⁸ You will vomit up the little you have eaten
and will have wasted your compliments.

Proverbs 23:6-8

I want us to pay attention to this 'begrudging host' character.

Verse 7 says, “for he is the kind of person who is always thinking about the cost.”

In other words, deep in his heart he's not enjoying your company because he's thinking about money; and your presence in his home is costing him something.

This is the, 'I always think about money' but from the other side. Not the, 'I need more' but the, 'I need to be in control.'

In this instance, the hyper-budgeting approach places finances over relationships. Places security in wealth over security in connection with others.

Here's the part where we're all selling ourselves short if we adopt any of those approaches to wealth and finances. At the end of the day, someone else is in control. At the end of the day, all that we have is really a good gift from Him.

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Wealth and money and finances can easily be here today and gone tomorrow.

As Saying 8 puts it:

⁵ Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone,
for they will surely sprout wings
and fly off to the sky like an eagle.
Proverbs 23:5

Yes, here today but gone tomorrow.

So, what's a better way forward, then?

V. A Better Way Forward

There's only one 'positive' Saying in this whole section, and it's this one:

Saying 6

²⁹ Do you see someone skilled in their work?
They will serve before kings;
they will not serve before officials of low rank.
(Proverbs 22:29)

A few weeks ago we got to hear Frik – one of our guest speakers – do a great job of diving into this very Proverb. Frik helped us see as well what Scripture as a whole tells us about our work.

When it comes to acquiring wealth and making money, the right way to do that is found here:

Do your work skillfully. Do your work well.

Note that this Proverb doesn't exactly say skillful work is what leads to wealth. It says skillful work will lead one to serve before kings. To make a difference in the world. To do something meaningful and significant with their life.

The underlying message here, I think, is that the pursuit of 'more,' the pursuit of wealth, is actually not the most worthwhile pursuit.

Jesus picks up on this and says this in Matthew 6:

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

And then, verse 24, he says:

²⁴ No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Matthew 6:24

Who do you serve? What drives you? Is it God and His glory? Or is it money and stuff?

God has made us for a life of serving Him and others; and it's when we pursue that wholeheartedly that we experience the deepest joy.

Yeah, money is important. We'll need it to survive. Yes, we need to pay our bills; but money is not to be our ultimate.

How do we fight against that pull for more?

Here's a huge part of it: generosity.

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VI. You're Rich in Christ

My wife and I have this line that we like to say whenever we start thinking about those who have a lot more wealth and riches than we do. It's this:

We're rich in Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 8 we read this:

⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was rich, yet for your sake he
became poor, so that you through his poverty
might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9

What does Paul mean by 'rich' here?

He's not talking about having more stuff.

He's talking about a spiritual richness that comes from knowing Christ.

See, Christ owns everything... yet He comes and "makes himself nothing"... He enters our world, enters our impoverished condition, and through His sacrificial death and His subsequent resurrection, He makes a way for us to experience 'richness.'

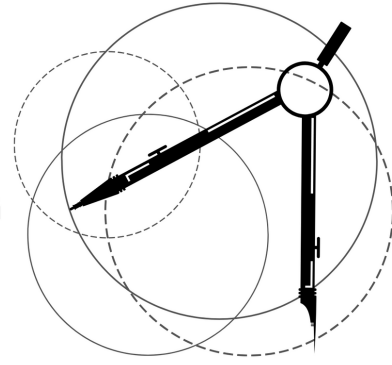
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Discussion



Reflection

Spend some time reading and reflecting on the 'sayings' in **Proverbs 22:22-23:11**

1. In this message, four different 'negative' approaches to the pursuit of money and wealth were addressed: (1) Do not wear yourself out, (2) Do not exploit others, (3) Do not overextend yourself, and (4) Do not think too much about your budget. Which of these do you struggle with the most? Why?
2. What are some of the 'warnings' that you hear for yourself in this text?
3. Can you think of any concrete actions you can take that would counteract the temptations and tendencies of your heart when it comes to money and wealth?
4. What role does giving currently play in your own life? Have you experienced your heart being changed through generosity?

Prayer

Take some time to share prayer requests and pray for each other. Pray that your group would come to know the Father's love more deeply and that your lives would be lived in a way that reflects the Father's character to the world around us (see Matthew 5:45).

APPENDIX: HOW TO USE PROVERBS

This summer, our hope as a church is to steep ourselves in the wisdom of Proverbs. But this book invites a different approach than most others. The Book of Proverbs isn't meant to be speed-read—it's a book to sit with, to meditate on, to 'chew the cud,' as the rabbis would say.

- Chapters 1–9 serve as the introduction. They give us the book's purpose, a guiding epigraph (1:7), and ten speeches from a father to a son about wisdom. This section works well with a 'chapter-a-day' reading rhythm.
- Chapters 10–30 contain collections of short, poetic couplets. These proverbs are often loosely connected but are mostly designed to stand alone—ideal for slow, focused meditation and memorization.

GENERAL GOALS FOR READING THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Go Slow	Stop when something grabs your attention. Sit with it. If it takes three years to get through the book, that's perfectly fine.
Memorize Individual Proverbs	These sayings are written poetically so we can remember and apply them. Like the phrase "fail to plan and you plan to fail"—it sticks because of the way it's worded.
Read in Multiple Translations/Versions	English versions vary in how they handle the poetry. When meditating on a proverb, read it in several translations. While the King James Version isn't always clearest elsewhere, it often preserves the poetic force of Proverbs well, thanks to its translators' classical training.
Be Biased Toward Action	Proverbs are meant to be lived. The goal of meditation is obedience. If all you do this summer is live out one proverb, that's a win.

STRATEGIES FOR INTERNALIZING PROVERBS

Rewrite Proverbs in a Journal.	Use a general journal or a dedicated wisdom notebook. Rewriting helps with memorization and makes the proverb more personally accessible. You might even blend a few translations into a version that sticks best for you.
Put Them in Front of Your Eyes	Use sticky notes or other visible reminders. Place proverbs on your fridge, your desk, your mirror—anywhere you'll see them often.
Practice Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)	Read: Slowly read a chapter or section of Proverbs several times. Look for a verse that 'leaps off the page.' Meditate: Reflect on that proverb. What is it saying? Have you seen this truth in your life? Why might God be highlighting it now? Pray: Talk to God about what you're noticing. Ask for wisdom and strength to live it out. Contemplate: Spend a few quiet moments in God's presence, letting the proverb stick to your soul.