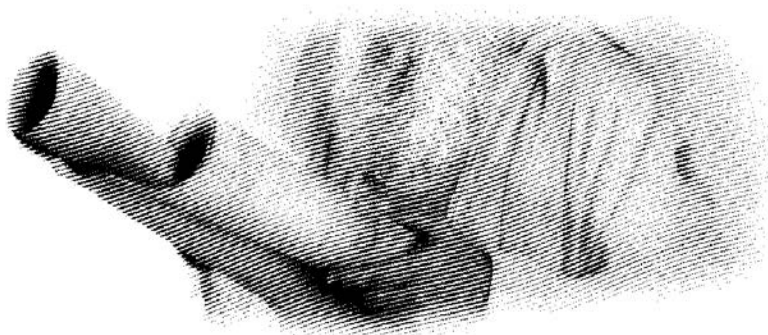


Words of Wisdom



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 20; 1 Corinthians 12:14–26; Jeremiah 9:23, 24; Proverbs 21; Matthew 25:35–40; Proverbs 22.

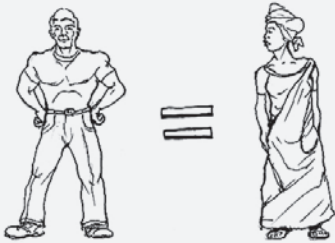
MEMORY VERSE: “Many claim to have love that never fails. But who can find a faithful man?” (Proverbs 20:6, NIV).

IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WE ALL ARE A PART OF OUR ENVIRONMENT. Family history plays a big part in shaping who we are. But the values we hold come to us from what is around us: for example, our home, our education, our culture. From babyhood we are influenced by what we see and hear.

Unfortunately, what we see and hear is not always what is best for us. The world around us is fallen in every way. So, it cannot help but influence us negatively. But we have been given the promise of the Holy Spirit. And we have God's Word, which points us to something higher and better than the world does.

This week we will look at different proverbs and the useful truths they show. These truths can help us overcome this fallen world and prepare us for a better one.

WE ARE ALL EQUAL (Proverbs 20:12)



We are all equal because we are all created by God.

DEFINITIONS

1. evolution—a theory that the differences between modern plants and animals are because of changes that happened by a natural process over a very long time.
2. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.
3. justification by faith—forgiveness and cleansing from sin and being made right with God.
4. comparing—to seem better or worse than something else; to be good or bad when measured against something else.

Read Proverbs 20:12. What does this teach us about the value of all humans?

The theory (unproved idea) of evolution¹ teaches that life is here on earth by accident—not planned. But the Bible teaches that all humans were created by God. (Read also Acts 17:26.) Thomas Jefferson once said that all humans were equal because they were “created” by God. It is in the Lord, and in Him alone, that we all are equal.

We all have the same Creator. But this does not mean we are all the same. Even identical (look-alike) twins are not the same. In Corinthians, Paul talks about our differences. He points out that they should not lead us to think we are better than others. Instead, our differences should help us see our need for one another. “The eye can’t [cannot] say to the hand, ‘I don’t [do not] need you!’ The head can’t [cannot] say to the feet, ‘I don’t [do not] need you’ ” (1 Corinthians 12:21, NIV).

Read Proverbs 20:9. What else makes us all equal?

Sin is another thing that makes us all equal. Why? Humans are all weak and will die someday. And all the money and power in the world will not change that. But the Bible says that this reference to human sin should not cause humans to feel hopeless. This is because Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection (return to life from the dead) have opened the way for anyone to have the promise of eternal life. And this life comes only through faith in Jesus—not by our works.

“Man cannot, by any of his good works, earn salvation. Salvation must be the result of grace.² It is received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is a free gift. Jesus’ gift of grace puts an end to the confusion and questions about what justification by faith³ really is. The matter is settled that the good works of fallen man can never earn eternal life for him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, page 20.

Do you ever find yourself feeling you are better (or worse) than other people? (You should not be comparing⁴ yourself to others anyway.) If so, what should the Cross tell you about all of us being equal?

THE TEST OF LIFE (Proverbs 20:6)

“Their works follow them,” says Revelation 14:13 (NKJV) about the reward of the righteous (holy). Only the future will show the real worth of a person. People may boast now of their wealth, their knowledge, or their physical ability. And maybe that is all true. But what does it all mean to God? So often the successes and actions of humans may seem important or impressive. But they really mean nothing. For example, look at some of the selfish actors or singers who are worshiped by fans. What we idolize (admire greatly) and worship often shows how fallen we are.

Read Proverbs 20:6 (read also Jeremiah 9:23, 24 and Mark 9:35). What do these verses tell us about what is of true worth to God?

It is not just one wonderful act of love or sacrifice that will show how meaningful our relationships are. Instead, it is the long and regular series of small actions that we do day by day, patiently and surely. For example, it is the daily meal served to your spouse, the loving care given to a sick parent, or the continued effort in your job. All these humble acts throughout life are the proof that your faith is real. Continuing faithfulness is more valuable than powerful but rare (not happening often) acts of love.

This principle (important rule) holds true for our relationship with God too. It is harder and more important to live for God than to die for Him. One reason may be that living takes more time than dying. The saint who lives for God is greater than the martyr⁵ who dies for Him. Anyone can claim to believe in God and to serve Him. But the question is: *Does their faith in God last?* After all, Jesus said, “ ‘But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved’ ” (Matthew 24:13, NIRV).

How, through patience, kindness, and a willingness to meet others’ needs, can you show to someone a small part of the character (goodness and love) of Christ? How willing are you to do this, no matter the cost to yourself?



The humble acts of life are proof your faith is real.

DEFINITIONS

5. martyr—a person who is killed or who suffers greatly for a religion, a good cause, or his or her faith.

WAITING FOR THE LORD (Proverbs 20:17)

Read Proverbs 20:17 and Proverbs 21:5. What useful lesson can we find in these verses?

The thief who steals bread gets it faster than the one who has to work for it. Salespeople who lie to sell their bad merchandise may become rich faster than the honest merchant. (Compare⁶ Proverbs 21:5 with Proverbs 21:6.) But Proverbs 20:17 says that the future will turn the sweetness into “gravel” (NKJV). And the quickly gotten wealth will become poverty (poorness). Chapter 20 gives a number of examples to show that this is true:

1. *The inheritance*⁷ (Proverbs 20:21). An inheritance received too quickly suggests that the parents are still alive. This follows the judgment against the one who curses his parents (Proverbs 20:20). The connection of these two proverbs is important. It is as if the son (or the daughter) curses the parents and also wishes them dead. The child may even have planned the death of the parents in order to get the inheritance. The future end of this action is sad. For example, the lamp he is enjoying will become “deep darkness” (Proverbs 20:20, NKJV). And his curse against his parents will turn against him. This is because he “will not be blessed at the end” (Proverbs 20:21, NKJV).

2. *Revenge*⁸ (Proverbs 20:22). This time the proverb speaks about the victim who may want revenge for an evil that has been done against him or her. The advice is just to “wait for the LORD” (NKJV). Only then you will be saved. This suggests that if you try to take revenge, you are taking a serious risk. Proverbs 25:21, 22 gives the same instruction. It gives the example of putting coals of fire on the enemy’s head. This is an Egyptian custom showing repentance⁹ and conversion.¹⁰ Proverbs 20:22 promises that if you avoid taking revenge, you will be saved by the Lord. Proverbs 25:21, 22 also adds that in this way you will save your enemy. So, you can overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

How can you learn to copy the character of Christ more closely when it comes to overcoming evil with good? Why is our own fallen nature so opposed to this idea? Why is death to self the only way to reach this goal?

DEFINITIONS

6. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

7. inheritance—the money or things received when a relative dies.

8. revenge—the act of trying to get even with a person for the wrong done to you.

9. repentance—feeling truly sorry for your sins and turning away from them with the help of the Holy Spirit.

10. conversion—a change for the better.

COMPASSION (MERCY) FOR THE POOR (Matthew 25:35–40)

A person's character (thoughts; feelings; actions) is measured by how willing he or she is to help the poor and the needy. It is not what you have that measures your character. Who you are to your neighbor is the measure of character. The Samaritan who saves his neighbor is closer to the kingdom of God than the spiritual priest (Luke 10:26–37). The book of Proverbs explains why it is important to show compassion (mercy).

For God's sake: The first reason to make showing compassion important in your life can be found in God Himself. He desires for us to show human compassion for the poor more than He desires our faithful religious work (Proverbs 19:17; Proverbs 21:13). Your sensitive feelings for the poor and your real actions for them will be more important to God than any of your religious acts. In fact, God is very much interested and involved in our kindness to others. For example, when we give to the poor, it is as if we are giving to God Himself (Matthew 25:35–40).

Read Matthew 25:35–40. What does this tell us about how Jesus considers Himself so closely connected with those in need? How should this truth influence how we relate to such people?

For the sake of the poor: The second reason lies within the poor person. God created him or her as much as He created the rich person (Proverbs 22:2). All humans are equal because God has created them all. So, this makes the poor as worthy of attention as the rich person. We should love our neighbors for who they are. They are humans made in the image (likeness) of God.

At the same time, think about how much good it does you to help those in need. Our basic natures are selfish. We like to look out for ourselves over and above others. But by giving of ourselves, we learn to die to self and to better reflect (show) Christ's character. So, what is more important to us than that?

In what ways do you get a greater sense of personal satisfaction from helping others in need than only doing things for yourself?



**When we give to the poor,
it is as if we are giving to
God Himself.**

EDUCATION (Proverbs 22:6)



Education can be compared to the work of “planting seed.”

The Hebrew word for “education” comes from a word that means “to build up” and “to begin.” All these meanings point to the Hebrew idea of education: when we “train up a child” (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV), we build up, we begin, and we lay the groundwork (foundation) for the future. Parents and educators are responsible for their children’s future. And it is also understood that they, too, are responsible for the future of the world. What we do with our children today will influence society for many years to come.

Read Proverbs 22:6. What does this say about the importance of educating children correctly?

It is important to notice that the Hebrew word for “educate” is the very word used for the “dedication” (the act of giving to God; the beginning of service to God) of the temple (1 Kings 8:63). Early education means to dedicate our children to God in the same way that the temple is dedicated for service to God. It has an influence on our salvation, even beyond our own life. “Parents are responsible for the great work of educating and training their children for the future and for eternity.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, page 38. Such education has eternal results. The apostle (leader and teacher) Paul seems to have had Proverbs 22:6 in mind when he praises Timothy for knowing “the Holy Scriptures [the Holy Bible] ever since you were a little child. They are able to teach you how to be saved by believing in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15, NIV).

Read Proverbs 22:8, 15. What principles do we find here?

Education also can be compared to the work of “planting seed.” The future of our society and of our children depends on what we have planted. If our seed was sin, then our education (“the rod”) will fail, and we will have a “harvest” of trouble (verse 8, NIV). If our seed touched the hearts of the children (verse 15), then the rod of our education will keep the children’s foolishness far away from them.

We so often teach others (especially children) by our example. Think about your example: What kind of example are you leaving? In what areas might your example be better?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Parents should be models [examples] of truthfulness, for this is the daily lesson to be taught to our children. Parents need to follow strictly high principles in all the affairs of life. This is true in the education and training of their children. . . . Parents are to never lie. They must never tell an untruth in words or in actions. If you want your child to be truthful, be truthful yourself.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, page 151.

“Many fathers and mothers seem to think that if they feed and clothe their little ones, and educate them according to the world’s rules, they have done their duty. They are too much busy with business or pleasure to make the education of their children the study of their lives. They do not try to train them so that they will use their talents for the honor of Jesus, their Savior. Solomon did not say, ‘Tell a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart [leave; forget] from it.’ Instead, he said, ‘*Train* up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it’ (Proverbs 22:6).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, page 38.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Think more deeply about the idea of Proverbs 22:6. Why must we be careful in how we understand this? Many parents have done a good job in bringing up their children. But as adults those children make wrong choices. Why must we never forget the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan) and the possibilities that free will gives us as we study the meaning of this verse?
- 2 Think again about the final question at the end of Wednesday’s study. What does it tell us about getting true satisfaction from helping others, even when we get nothing in return? What should this truth tell us about why so many people who have so much of the world’s riches are very unhappy?
- 3 We are not all equal in talents, education, or experience. But we are equal in the most important thing: we all need the Cross for salvation. What should this teach us about all humans being equal? More so, how should this truth influence how we treat all people?