

CHOOSE WISELY! PROVERBS 22:1-16

By Pastor John Carlini, M. Mn.

M.I. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LIFE DEPENDS ON OUR CONSISTENTLY MAKING WISE CHOICES.

I. CHOOSE THE LIVING GOD

FAITH IS DEFINED AS THE ACTIONS WE TAKE BASED ON WHAT WE BELIEVE

- A. CREATOR (V. 2)
- B. OBSERVER (V. 12)
- C. JUDGE (Vs. 4, 11, 14)

II. CHOOSE TRUE WEALTH

IN ORDER TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES, WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT IS VALUABLE AND WHAT IS NOT

- A. SOME BASIC FACTS (Vs. 2 & 7)
- B. LASTING VALUE
 - i. A SOLID REPUTATION (V. 1)
 - ii. AN ABUNDANT LIFE (V. 4)
 - iii. A BLESSED LIFE (V. 9)
- C. FOOLS' GOLD
 - i. POWER (V. 8)
 - ii. MONEY AND INFLUENCE (V. 16)

III. CHOOSE THE RIGHT WAY

IN THE END, WE MUST MAKE A CHOICE TO FOLLOW GOD

- A. THE FORK IN THE ROAD (Vs. 3 & 5)
- B. WORDS
 - i. GOOD WORDS (Vs. 11 & 12)
 - ii. BAD WORDS (Vs. 10, 12, 13, 14)
- C. THE RIGHT WAY (Vs. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12)
- D. THE WRONG WAY (Vs. 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16)
- E. OUR CHOICE (Vs. 6 & 15)

CHOOSE WISELY! PROVERBS 22:1-16

By Pastor John Carlini, M. Mn.

Today's passage closes the second part of the book of Proverbs. We can see that it is a nice summary of this section that started back in chapter 10. King Solomon has given us much good advice on how to live an abundant life filled with peace, joy, and contentment. However, I think that he has also emphasized the need for each of us to make personal choices. Wise choices lead to full lives. Foolish choices lead to unhappy lives.

As I was preparing this message, my mind kept going back to a scene from the Indiana Jones movie, *The Last Crusade*. In this movie, there is a noble archaeologist and a greedy self-absorbed archaeologist. They are in pursuit of the Holy Grail, the cup from which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper. Both archaeologists find themselves in an inner sanctuary where a medieval knight is guarding a table full of cups. Since the evil archaeologist has the upper hand, and lusts after the power of the grail, he goes first. He chooses a gaudy gold cup, fills it with water, and drinks. It was the wrong cup. He starts to age before our eyes, dies, and disintegrates within seconds. The old knight says, "He chose poorly." Indiana Jones, knowing that Jesus was a simple carpenter, picks a very simple cup. He drinks from it and the knight says, "You have chosen wisely." Indiana Jones gives the cup of water to his father who is healed immediately.

I think this illustrates nicely what Solomon wants us to understand. Choosing wisely leads to life. Choosing foolishly leads to death. Wise choices bring joy to life. Foolish choices bring misery to life.

The problem that most of us face is that we make foolish, shortsighted choices and some of us don't even know that we have choices at all.

Let me give you an example of what I mean, first, by being unaware that you have a choice and secondly, making a poor choice once you are aware that you have a choice. I have a lot of pastor friends who are often overly dramatic, once when I had an extra airline ticket which had been upgraded to first class; that I gave to a friend, so my friend and I flew to California in first class. If you have ever flown first class, you know that they start to serve you drinks right away. A cute young flight attendant asked the businessman sitting across from us what he wanted to drink. He said, "I'll have a gin and tonic."

When the attendant came to us and asked my friend what he wanted to drink, dramatically he said, "Why ... I would rather commit adultery than drink alcohol!"

Immediately the businessman handed his drink back to the flight attendant and said, "Miss, I didn't know we had a choice."

Poor choices all the way around! Needless to say, I don't travel with my friend any more, and obviously the businessman would have made a poor choice as well.

For the last 12 chapters, Solomon has given us some very good advice and very sound principles for living fulfilling lives. But it all boils down to this main idea: **GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LIFE DEPENDS ON OUR CONSISTENTLY MAKING WISE CHOICES.** We may think this sounds easy, but let me remind us that the man who wrote these Proverbs ended his life in misery and shame. Solomon, arguably the wisest king in all of history, made a series of foolish choices towards the end of his life and will be remembered as much for his foolishness, as for his wisdom. I want to hammer this home: We are called on every moment to make wise choices. Choices that bring us closer to God are wise. Choices that bring us closer to the lusts of the world are foolish. We are encouraged to choose wisely. Some choices as obvious as pride, sexual intrigue and immorality brought Solomon to a tragic end. Hopefully, you and I can avoid disaster in our lives by making consistently wise choices.

I would encourage you to keep your outlines and texts in front of you, if you don't have an outline, just raise your hand and an usher will get you one. As we study through this morning's text, you will see several themes woven together. These themes seem to summarize what Solomon has been instructing in the past 12 chapters. And the underlying assumption is that we must make a choice in each one of these areas.

I. CHOOSE THE LIVING GOD

FAITH IS DEFINED AS THE ACTIONS WE TAKE BASED ON WHAT WE BELIEVE

The first theme has to do with choosing the living God. In other words, the most fundamental choice we have to make in life is whether or not we are going to place our faith in Jesus Christ. Here is the thing about Biblical faith: **FAITH IS DEFINED AS THE ACTIONS WE TAKE BASED ON WHAT WE BELIEVE.** Did you catch that? Faith is not a mental process. Faith is an action. It is the way we choose to act based on what we believe and, for us our faith is centered on who God is.

A. CREATOR (V. 2)

In verse 2, we are reminded that God is the creator. I will comment about the economics of the verse later, but for now, I want to emphasize that all of us owe our existence to God; we are not of our own making. There is no such thing as self-made people. Everyone and everything in the universe was created by God. So we must make a fundamental choice. Will we worship the One True and Living God ... the creator of all that is ... or will we worship some created thing? Will we worship ourselves ... or will we worship God?

B. OBSERVER (V. 12)

God is not only the creator as verse 12 reminds us; He is an observer of all that goes on. God did not just create the universe wind it up like a clock, and leave, God continues to be intimately concerned with His creation. He is present everywhere at all times. The theologians call

this omnipresence. He knows everything, even our thoughts, He is omniscient, and He is able to do anything. He is omnipotent. God hears every word that comes out of our mouths, He knows every thought we entertain and He sees everything we do. He is intimately connected to you and me.

C. JUDGE (Vs. 4, 11, 14)

Since God has created us and continues to observe us, He is certain to judge us as well. Verses 4, 11, and 14 emphasize this point. The way to God's heart is humility. God has no use for the proud, stubborn, or arrogant. If we humbly place ourselves in God's hands, we will find wealth, honor, and life; I'll explain those in the next section. But people who are humble will find a joyful and abundant life.

Look at verse 11 because this ties in with humility. God loves people with pure hearts. There are so many people, who do things with the wrong motives, but people, who live simply, to please God, are usually very content with life and their speech almost always demonstrates the grace they feel inside. If we find ourselves always criticizing people or talking negatively, then the chances are that we have not really experienced God's grace in our lives, and usually that has to do with pride and arrogance. So people who are kind and gracious with their speech, are usually those who are humble and pure in heart.

Verse 14 reminds us that the proud, the arrogant, the stubborn, and the wicked, insist on doing and saying what they want. But, make no mistake, God will judge. In this verse God uses sexually immoral people to bring others down, but the same holds true for any rebellion against God. God can use addictions, alcohol, drugs, and lusts of any kind to judge us and bring us down.

Here is some very practical advice based on the summary of this section of Proverbs: The Bible says that we are saved by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean that we simply accept intellectually the fact that Jesus is God, and died for our sins. That means that we acknowledge that Jesus is the Creator, the Observer and the Judge. That means that we humbly

acknowledge that He is the King and we demonstrate that confession by choosing to live life according to the way He has designed it as described in the Bible. That means we learn to be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, since God is very aware of our position in life. That means we choose to live lives that are physically, spiritually, and emotionally pure. That means that we love God and love one another. Saving faith is a conscious choice to serve the One True and Living God: **FAITH IS DEFINED AS THE ACTIONS WE TAKE BASED ON WHAT WE BELIEVE.** The next time you are about to be sexually impure, the next time you nurse a grudge, the next time you want to say something unkind or stupid ... let's ask ourselves if we really believe in Jesus Christ.

II. CHOOSE TRUE WEALTH **IN ORDER TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES, WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT IS VALUABLE AND WHAT IS NOT**

Based on our faith in Jesus Christ, the next decision we have to make is to define and choose true wealth: **IN ORDER TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES, WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT IS VALUABLE AND WHAT IS NOT.** You see, many of us are never content and satisfied in life because we consistently chase after the wrong things. We have been confused by the world. We think being rich is truly desirable. We think success, fame, popularity, and power are valuable. We think being young, beautiful, and desirable is important. We think that our ability to attract a man or woman is important. I'm pretty sure that I have read through the Bible and have never come across these things being listed as valuable. And that's our problem, we have come to value what the world values and we don't care what God values.

A. SOME BASIC FACTS (Vs. 2 & 7)

First, let's deal with some basic facts in verse 2 and verse 7. The poet makes no value judgments on being rich or poor. The fact in verse 7 is this: Rich people tend to have worldly power over the poor. Money buys power and in general, the rich rule over the poor. Along with

that, goes the second truth; since the rich have all the money, the poor must borrow money from the rich and end up indebted to them.

And the second observation is this: God created both the rich and the poor. Neither have an advantage over the other, God created them both; God will judge them both. Those who are rich will be judged on how they used their money and lived their lives. The poor likewise will be judged on how they used their money and lived their lives.

The basic fact is this: God has created us. He has provided us with a specific lifestyle. We will all be judged on how we live. Part of living life successfully will depend on knowing what is valuable and what is not. For example, if we think that having money is important, then we will spend our lives trying to get money and hold on to it. It will never occur to us that God wants us to give it away. On the other hand, if we think being poor in itself is righteous we will never have enough motivation to work hard and earn money. We must know what is valuable to God and then pursue it.

B. LASTING VALUE
i. A SOLID REPUTATION (V. 1)

First, let's look through this passage and find some things of lasting value. Having a good name is considered to be valuable according to verse 1; keep in mind this all takes place in the context of the wisdom school and a godly community. Finding favor with both God and people is more valuable than being rich. This is not finding favor by being a hypocrite, because God can see through that. Being humble, honest, genuine, generous, wise and being empathic are qualities that God values. So being an asset to the community of faith is extremely valuable and desirable. How many of you single men and women look for that in a potential mate? I have heard many of you say, "He is a good dresser. She is really hot. He has a great body. She has a great personality." But I don't think I have ever heard anyone say, "He really makes a difference in this church. Our

church would really be missing something if she had to move.” Having a good solid reputation and being an asset to the church family are very valuable things to have.

B. LASTING VALUE
ii. AN ABUNDANT LIFE (V. 4)

Verse 4 reminds us that living an abundant life has lasting value. This verse tells us that when we submit ourselves humbly before God, we will receive wealth, honor and life. God will provide for all our needs. Again, we cannot let Hollywood define what wealth is for us, we need to learn to be content with whatever God has given us. I will never live in a Hollywood mansion, but I don't need one. I may never drive a big, beautiful car, but I don't need one. I don't need fancy clothes or jewelry. God will provide for us, and we need to be wise as to how we handle our money. If we humble ourselves, the Bible says that God will lift us up. If we are seeking to climb to the top, we will never find satisfaction there. If God places us, we will find honor, satisfaction, and happiness wherever we are. When God is with us, life is fulfilling and we are guaranteed to live with Jesus in eternity.

I have heard people say, “I could be happy if I could just win the lottery; that would solve my problems and make me happy.” Research says those statements are false. Here is the truth: If we cannot be happy with where we are in life and with how God is providing for us ... then no amount of money, power, success, or fame can make us happy.

B. LASTING VALUE
iii. A BLESSED LIFE (V. 9)

True wealth is described as living a blessed life in verse 9. I think there are two basic ways we face life, we either think we are entitled to receive all sorts of good things ... or ... we embrace the fact that anything we have is a direct result of God's blessing. People who live according to the blessing principle realize that we are not entitled to a thing. It doesn't matter how smart I am. It doesn't matter how hard I work. It doesn't matter how good I think I am. I don't deserve a thing.

The Bible clearly states that the only thing I am entitled to is an eternity in Hell. Here is where humility again comes into play. If humility is based on an honest assessment, then I must admit that I am nothing and I deserve nothing. I came into this world with nothing, and I will leave it with nothing. I am entitled to nothing. If we adopt this attitude, then we will truly be grateful for everything we get or have. We will feel as if God is constantly blessing us. Here is the difference: People, who think they are entitled, spend their lives chasing after worldly things. They are never satisfied and they are never thankful because they have come to think they deserve everything they have.

On the other hand, people who are blessed are contented and thankful for everything. They are satisfied with life because they realize that God is constantly giving them special gifts, in fact, every breath we take is a gift from God. These people feel so blessed by God, they are very generous with their money and are ready to share it with those in need. A sign of a blessed life is a person living his or her life as a blessing to others.

People who accept everything as a gift from God, people who are truly thankful for everything, people who are content with life, people who live graciously before God and others, have found what is truly valuable in life, they have found the abundant life that Jesus promised. If you are happy and content, then the chances are you know what is valuable in life. If you are angry, never happy, and always grumbling, then the chances are that you have this attitude of entitlement.

If we find ourselves angry and discontented, then the chances are that we are chasing after fools' gold. I don't think it is much of a secret. The world values power, money, and influence.

- C. FOOLS' GOLD
 - i. POWER (V. 8)

Verse 8 describes the destructive nature of the lust for power. People do anything they need to do to climb the corporate ladder or get ahead at work. Even in church, people will gossip, spread

false stories, or not cooperate with others, so they will fail. People will use sex to gain power over others. People will use popularity to gain power over others. Whenever we forget that people are not to control our feelings and emotions, then we will fall prey to the lust for power. Wanting to be served, rather than serving, leads us to a lust for power. Think about this! Many of us enjoy being worshipped. We wouldn't come out and say it, but we really do.

The only way to avoid getting caught up in the lust for power, is to be humble enough to know that only God is in control and only God is to be worshipped. This week a friend was telling me about a group of pastors who had unlimited power over their congregations. They had control of large amounts of money, and they were committing all sorts of sexual sins. Immediately I thought, "I don't know how pure I could remain with all that power and money." The next time we lust for power let us think about this. God never created us to have dominion and rule over one another. He created us to have dominion and rule over the earth and the animals. Power will destroy even the best of us. King David, Solomon's father, while on the run from his enemies lived a godly, humble life. When he came to power and lived comfortably in his palace, we find him committing adultery and murdering the woman's husband. Let us not chase after power because it will destroy us.

- C. FOOLS' GOLD
 - ii. MONEY AND INFLUENCE (V. 16)

Next, verse 16 reminds us that lusting after money and influence will ruin us as well. I think that we as Christians have to be very careful as to what we have come to accept in society. We have not only endorsed a free market economy, we have embraced social and economic Darwinism. We think as long as we don't go out and rob somebody, then all the money we make is legitimate and belongs to us. Rarely do we take the time to address the problems of institutional racism. Rarely do we take time to research our mutual funds to see if any are making money off

the misery of the poor. We believe that everybody ends up with what they deserve. That is certainly not true and it is most certainly not biblical. I really don't care what society does, but I do care what we as Christians do. We must be concerned for social and economic justice. How we obtain our money is important to God. We must never exploit the poor to make money, and more importantly, how we spend our money is important to God. Now I am not here to give you rules and regulations but I do want us to think. If you are rich, then perhaps God is calling you to give way beyond the 10% tithe. How many poor people are you feeding? How many people in this church could use some financial assistance? Perhaps you could be financing some of our people to go to seminary. Remember 10% is nothing. All of our money and possessions belong to God.

On the other hand, I have advised poor people to pay their bills and feed their families before tithing. I tell them that it is honoring to God to feed their families and pay their bills. However, to use their money to buy alcohol or drugs, to use their money to get the latest Nike gym shoe, to use their money to party or buy the latest fashions, is to misuse God's money as well.

Our money belongs to God. Trying to buy happiness is chasing after fools' gold. We are responsible to one another. Rich or poor, we are to care for one another. God may tolerate the mistreatment of the poor in society for a time, but He will not tolerate the mistreatment of the poor in His church. If we want to call ourselves Christians, then our attitude towards money is a good indication of, whether or not, we have saving faith.

Along those same lines, we are not to seek influence. Look at the second half of verse 16. We know all about clout in local politics. In fact, Chicago is famous for getting things done politically by clout. With clout, all sorts of doors open, without clout, nothing gets done. Again, I accept that in the world. However, the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the New Testament writers make it very clear that this kind of thing should never come to pass in the church. There should be no cliques, no favoritism, and certainly no special treatment to the rich or influential. I

have been a pastor for over 25 years and I have made it an intentional policy of mine to never know how much people give. I have no desire to know how much any of you give. I want to minister to all of you equally regardless of what anyone gives. All of you, who know me, know that I am not impressed by money. I'm sure I have offended many people who give a lot of money. Some have made a point of telling me how much money they give and I have replied, "Keep your money and see if God provides for us." The world values money, influence, and power. That's just fools' gold in the church, God doesn't value any of that.

God values humility, love, grace, generosity, and mercy. That is what is valuable to God. How about us, what do we value? **IN ORDER TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES, WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT IS VALUABLE AND WHAT IS NOT.** If we don't, we may waste a lot of time and energy chasing after the wrong things.

III. CHOOSE THE RIGHT WAY **IN THE END, WE MUST MAKE A CHOICE TO FOLLOW GOD**

We have had to make a choice as to who we will call Lord, we have had to make a choice as to what is truly valuable and finally, we must choose the right way. This has been the consistent message throughout Proverbs. We can learn and know all the right stuff. But in the end we must make an intentional decision to choose the right way: **IN THE END WE MUST MAKE A CHOICE TO FOLLOW GOD.** Application is the goal for everything we learn in Bible study. Jesus said that if we hear His words and put them into practice, we become like the wise man who built his house on the rock. When we do this, we will be able to weather the storms of life. James said that we must not only be hearers of the Word, we must be doers of the Word. Christianity is not keeping a bunch of rules and regulations; Christianity is a moment by moment choice to do God's will because we love Him.

A. THE FORK IN THE ROAD (Vs. 3 & 5)

Living by faith means making choices that say to Jesus, “I love you.” A thousand times a day, we come to a fork in the road. I know there are those of you who feel many decisions in life are neutral. However, I think we are usually faced with two basic alternatives; either we will make a choice to intentionally obey God, or we will not. I think the Hebrew wisdom writers saw life as a series of choices. If we follow God, and choose wisely, we will find peace, joy, and contentment in life. On the other hand, if we follow our own lusts or worldly desires, we will find emptiness, chaos, and unhappiness. We will never be satisfied but always hunger for more. Our lusts will eat up our time, energy, money, and resources. We will be left for dead.

B. WORDS

i. GOOD WORDS (Vs. 11 & 12)

In making these choices, we will be confronted with the words that come out of our mouths because they indicate what’s going on inside our souls. Verses 11-12 describe the source and the results of good words. Gracious words, healing words, words that build others up come from a pure heart that is overflowing with the love of God. They have the power to bring life and healing into people’s lives. And remember, the LORD sees and hears everything. When we use our full hearts and gracious mouths to speak blessings to others, God is pleased and continues to bless us. So let us keep in mind that we are to allow God the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and we are to allow Him to speak from our mouths words of blessings.

B. WORDS

ii. BAD WORDS (Vs. 10, 12, 13, 14)

Versus 10-14 remind us that bad words can destroy others. The mocker uses his mouth to cut others down and to lead people away from God. Some people are argumentative, they like to fight and cause divisions. They are judgmental and always like to point out the faults of others. We should make a choice to get rid of them. I know in my own life, I limit my time with negative people, and I almost never really listen to what they say.

Why? Look at verse 14. When you start to listen to and hang around with negative people, they will end up leading you down the path of division, unhappiness, and discontent. Stay away from people who are bitter, who are angry, who are negative, who are judgmental, and who are immoral. Their hearts are filled with the bitterness of sin. Their hearts are not overflowing with the love of God they are overflowing with the hatred of sin.

Look who else is in that category, lazy people. Look what comes out of the lazy man's mouth. He can't go to work or go to church because "There is a lion in the street." He can't go to work or to church or to school because there is a lion in the street waiting to eat him. The point of this is that we are often too lazy to make wise choices. We know we should get out of this bad relationship. We know we should quit looking at pornography. We know we should become sexually and mentally pure. We know we should quit looking at certain movies or quit listening to certain kinds of music. We know we should be forgiving someone. But we just cannot get around to it, because there is a lion in the street waiting to kill us. It sounds funny, but many of us are making all sorts of excuses for not pursuing holiness. I'm wondering, what is your excuse?

C. THE RIGHT WAY (Vs. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12)

There is a right way to choose. Verses 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 12 all talk about the right way. They talk about a path we must follow. I will let you read them on your own, but the general idea is this: The abundant life that Jesus promises can only be found by staying on the path of holiness. If you find yourself wandering from the path, get back on it.

D. THE WRONG WAY (Vs. 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16)

Because the wrong way seems to be the easy path to follow it is easy to choose. This path is described in verses 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16. Making the wrong choices carries some stiff consequences from a miserable, chaotic life to physical death, to an eternity in hell.

E. OUR CHOICE (Vs. 6 & 15)

The bottom line to all of this is that we have to make our choice. Verses 6 and 15 remind us that as we read the Proverbs, we must put ourselves in the shoes of the child and the fool and ask, “How do I find the right path, get on the right path, stay on the right path, or get back on the right path?”

Here is where humility goes a long way to helping us enjoy life. First of all, we must find good godly mentors and teachers who will teach us God’s Word. We must be disciplined and learn how to put these principles into practice. As parents we must put our children on the right path.

And, when we face hard times in life, we must patiently endure them and allow God to drive the foolishness from our hearts through discipline.

We are all the children of Proverbs. We are all the fools of Proverbs. We must allow God to put us on the path for life, and thank Him for disciplining us to keep us on the path for life.

But humility is the key. No matter what happens in life: **IN THE END, WE MUST MAKE A CHOICE TO FOLLOW GOD.**

It is all about learning to consistently make wise choices moment by moment in life. It’s not about making one grand decision. It is all about making a lifetime of intentionally good choices. **GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LIFE DEPENDS ON OUR CONSISTENTLY MAKING WISE CHOICES.** It is simple, yet most of us put off making the wise choices we know we should be making. There are many reasons why we don’t get on the right track and start making right choices.

Listen to the words of Jesus,

“Jesus replied with this illustration: “A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When all was ready, he sent his servant around to notify the guests that it was time for them to come. But they all began making excuses. One said he had just bought a field and wanted to inspect it, so he asked to be excused. Another said he had just bought five pair of oxen and wanted to try them out. Another had just been married, so he said he couldn’t come.”

“The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was angry and said, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the city and invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.’ After the servant had done this, he reported, ‘there is still room for more.’ So his master said, ‘Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. For none of those I invited first will get even the smallest taste of what I had prepared for them.’” (Luke 14:16-24 NLT)

What’s holding you back this morning from making the wise choices in life? Are you too busy? Are you too preoccupied chasing after the things of this world? Are you enjoying the sin you are all caught up in ... and unwilling to let it go? Whatever is standing between you and making wise choices, get rid of it, because as we have said before, the wisest man in the world ... the one who wrote these Proverbs died a most foolish and pathetic man because he followed lust instead of righteousness. Please ... choose wisely!