To Andy Stanley  
My friend, my pastor, and the wisest person I know  

*Walk with the wise and become wise.*  
**Proverbs 13:20**
Acknowledgments

Thank you, Rita, for asking me, “Is this the wise thing to do?”

Thank you, Rebekah, Rachel, Bethany, and Anna Grace, for being daughters who seek to make wise choices.

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Wisdom is what every God-fearing person wants. The Lord has put in the heart of His disciples a desire to live with His perspective. Indeed, a heart of wisdom continues to grow as a follower of Jesus seeks to know Him and understand His Word. Hunting for wisdom is a process of humble learning that lasts a lifetime. The wise never arrive in their acquisition of God’s knowledge, wisdom, and principles for living. Students continue seeking wisdom.

When I was 31 years old, a friend described to me his wisdom journey. I listened intently because his life was worth emulating. He was the spiritual leader of his family, a respected businessman, and a student of the Scriptures. Astonishingly, for ten years he daily read a chapter in Proverbs based on the day of the month. For example, on May 3 he read Proverbs 3 and meditated on its meaning for his life.

I felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to accept that same challenge, so from age 31 to age 41, each day I read the chapter in Proverbs that corresponded with the day of the month. The lessons I learned mirrored my life experiences so often, it was uncanny. Everything I gleaned, from the wise management of money to avoiding sexual temptation, transformed my behavior. Ideas about parenting, marriage, and relationships motivated me to serve others selflessly.

When we apply the principles of Proverbs to our lives, we are changed. If we humbly and consistently follow these extremely practical teachings, we grow in Christ’s character. Once the Holy Spirit illumines our mind to understand the enormous benefit of living out the Lord’s principles, we become responsible to embed them in our
behavior. Knowledge without application results in lifeless pseudo spirituality.

So we struggle together to be consistent with honest speech, kind attitudes, humble service, and sharing the truth in love. Like an athlete in training, we work hard at developing godly habits. The process is painful and frustrating at times, but we stay the course of character development for Christ’s sake. Proverbs applied produce the fruit of faith.

I am grateful that Solomon, the instrument God’s Spirit used to pen these inspired and inerrant words, was a work in progress himself. He did not always practice what he preached, and he suffered because of his foolish decisions. But he was wise to come back to the baseline of belief in the ways of the Lord as the best course for living. You and I will stumble along the way, and our actions will be inconsistent, but we are wise to regularly recalibrate for Christ.

Are you looking to love the Lord and people with authenticity? Do you want to be a leader worth following, a father who is admired, a mother who is appreciated, a child who is pleasant, a disciple of Jesus who is growing in grace? If so, then seek to know God’s heart on how to live life, which He beautifully lays out in the principles of Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs is not like a magic wand that we use to make every difficult situation simply disappear, but it is a guide that shapes our thoughts, prayers, and experiences. Follow Jesus as He reveals His ways in these wise and ancient words that have proven true for more than 3000 years. Wisdom has a track record of bolstering our trust in God, love for God, and fear of God. Be wise!
Keep Learning

Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.
Proverbs 1:5

Wise men and women are lifelong learners. The knowledge and understanding that served us well last year will not be sufficient for following years. The lessons we are learning today are preparing us for tomorrow. Wise and discerning people listen and learn. They listen to people around them and learn what to do and what not to do.

Another person’s tragedy can warn us of decisions to avoid. When you see a family destroyed by debt, you learn the discipline of saving. On the other hand, another person’s triumph can teach us to embrace good choices. The sacrifice of a mom who stays home to serve her family increases the probability of children with character. Listen to her life and learn how to teach little ones to love Jesus. Always keep learning.

Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning (Proverbs 9:9).

Your counsel increases in value as you grow in wisdom and discernment. Lazy learners tend to be ignored. Others desire to learn from an educated life, so seek out a mentor who models learning. Meet weekly with this person, and invite him or her to challenge your assumptions and question your answers more than answer your questions. Oral
learning through the exchange of ideas unlocks and applies wisdom. You are positioned to learn in an audience of one with graying hair.

Above all, learn by submission to God and His Word. A humble life can be trusted with God’s wisdom and the Holy Spirit’s discernment. As you live a life of compassion and mercy, your knowledge will be converted to wisdom. Keep learning, and the Lord will lift you to new levels of influence. Stop learning, and you will sink into irrelevance. Learning expands your kingdom effectiveness and deepens your character.

The LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6).

What lesson do I need to learn today so I can better serve the Lord and others tomorrow?

Related Readings
Deuteronomy 5:1; 31:13; Job 34:2-4; Psalm 119:73; Hebrews 5:8
Listen to Your Parents

Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.

Proverbs 1:8

Parents are God’s provision for protection and learning. Therefore, as we listen to them, we can learn from God. We learn lessons on living frugally, being honest, and working hard. We also learn what not to do, such as eating poorly, not exercising, and not forgiving. Parents teach and children learn regardless of whether either recognizes the educational exchange. This learning process is meant to help each generation improve.

Parental honor is the cornerstone of any family that is forging their faith in Christ. Without learning from your parents’ mistakes and building on their successes, you are destined to dysfunction. You honor your parents when you listen to them, learn from them, and obey them. You honor God as you honor your mom and dad, so value your parents because of their position rather than their performance.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

This high honor and esteem of parents helps entire nations of families to focus on what makes a lasting legacy. Once a society sequesters
the elderly in isolation as a burden and offers euthanasia as an option, the beginning of the end of that foolish culture has arrived. As we serve our parents, we will see Jesus. They can provide perspective only experience affords.

Take the time to look past the rough exterior of your dad and determine to draw out his nuggets of wisdom. Help your mom process her fears and forgive her shortcomings, and you will see the beauty of her advice. Parents are not perfect, but even in their imperfection they invite honor and attention. Listen to your parents and learn from them, and you will learn from the Lord. Parents are a gift from God, so receive them by faith and steward the relationship in humility and love.

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You know the commandments: “You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother” (Luke 18:20).

Into what area of my life will I invite my parents’ advice and feedback in an honorable way?

Related Readings
Genesis 49:2; Exodus 18:24; Proverbs 23:22; 1 Timothy 5:4
Stand Alone

My son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into evil, they are swift to shed blood.

Proverbs 1:15-16

Stand against the shameful ways of sinful men and women, even if you have to stand alone. If no one else speaks up, your Savior stands with you in your seclusion. It is more convenient to compromise your convictions, but find strength in what God says and obey it. If you have to stand alone for a season, your perseverance in doing what is right will eventually prod others to follow your example.

Avoid the bar and unseemly clubs on business trips, and others will find the courage to join you. At college, pray instead of party, study instead of steal, serve instead of acting silly, and be faithful instead of foolish. Young adults are longing for reliable friends and communities of trust, learning, and accountability. Stand alone and see God work wonders.

If I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me (John 8:16).

To step into a seductive snare of sin is foolish. When you see it coming, do not go there, or you will be like a silly bird whose curiosity leads it into a trap. The pain that results from not standing alone in the truth...
is reason enough to remain in the character of Christ. However, there are other benefits. You stand alone so your compelling story of courage inspires your children now and as they grow older. You stand alone so you can look your spouse in the eyes and honestly say you value him or her much more than any other. You stand alone so the people you serve grow in confidence that you have their very best interest in mind. Most importantly, you stand alone by the grace of God in humility and faith.

Don’t become proud of standing alone, or you will fall—suddenly and severely. Rather, stand alone by staying on your knees in desperate dependence on God. Give Him the glory, and He will give you the gumption to go it alone when necessary.

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The one whose walk is blameless,
who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from their heart…

Whoever does these things will never be shaken (Psalm 15:2,5).

Where do I need to stand alone as an encouragement to those who may be holding back for fear of what others might think or do?

**Related Readings**

The Knowledge of God

If you look for [wisdom] as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 2:4-5

The knowledge of God is obtained by the wisdom of God, and the wisdom of God is found in the Word of God. Jesus is the Word, so when we see Him, we see not only our Savior but also our God. Jesus became flesh and walked among us so He could, among other things, teach us the knowledge of God. So read the four Gospels. You will observe the knowledge of God lived out in your Lord.

You will learn obedience by understanding and applying His teachings. Obtaining the knowledge of God and integrating it into your life are not passive exercises. Transformation occurs through passionate prayer as you earnestly seek to understand Jesus’s words and actions. Knowledge of God is food that satisfies the soul. It is a divine diet of grace and truth.

Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation (1 Peter 2:2 NASB).

You read and receive the Word of God so you can be transformed by the knowledge of God. Wisdom is the way to knowing God. It is
discovered through toil and trust, industry and intimacy, hard work and heaven’s illumination. Just as if you were mining the precious metals of silver and gold, you will find the knowledge of God in the discipline and determination of digging out truth that may be covered over by the rubble of unbelief.

You rise up early so you can meditate in the mine shaft with your Master Jesus, and He shows you the way. As you humbly receive the knowledge of God, let others benefit from the richness of your discovery. Invest wisdom in others for the sake of God’s kingdom. You can begin by being a spiritual leader at work and home.

On the second day the heads of fathers’ households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law (Nehemiah 8:13 NASB).

How can I use my knowledge of God to bless and encourage others?

**Related Readings**
Job 28:12,20,23; John 1:1-14; 2 Peter 1:5
The Marriage Covenant

Wisdom will save you also from the adulteress woman, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.

Proverbs 2:16-17

Marriage is a covenant before God, not to be messed with by man. Christian marriage is not a secular ceremony but a Christ-centered commitment “until death do us part.” However, there are tempters, both men and women, who try to take away the trust between husbands and wives. Their lives are unhappy, so they scheme for artificial satisfaction at the expense of other people’s marriages.

Sin is not passive but active, so be on prayerful alert not to listen to its allure. Pay attention and do not place yourself in compromising circumstances. Marriage is a sacred obligation. God is not only a witness but also the One who instituted the ordinance, so stay true to Him and to your true love.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral (Hebrews 13:4).

Husbands and wives are accountable to each other under the authority of Almighty God. This is why wayward men and women suffer consequences when they disrespect the marriage vows. Disobedience to an
oath before God can damage and destroy relationships, reputations, financial security, emotional stability, and physical health. Husbands and wives who take their commitment to Christ and each other seriously are not seduced into sex outside their marriage.

How do you maintain this high standard? By God’s grace you romance each other as you did when you were dating. You share your heart and affections only with your true love, the husband or bride of your youth. You determine not to be alone with anyone of the opposite sex, as this can feed temptation. You celebrate and uphold marriage as a solemn covenant before the Lord, family, friends, and each other.

Thus says the Lord God, “As I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head” (Ezekiel 17:19 NASB).

How can I honor my spouse by respecting our marriage as a covenant before God?

**Related Readings**
Numbers 5:12-22; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:27-32