



1st Quarter 2015 – Proverbs Lesson 13 Women and Wine

SATURDAY

Memory text from Proverbs 31:2-4 MSG says,

“Oh, son of mine, what can you be thinking of! Child whom I bore! The son I dedicated to God! Don’t dissipate your virility on fortune-hunting women, promiscuous women who shipwreck leaders. Leaders can’t afford to make fools of themselves, gulping wine and swilling beer, Lest, hung over, they don’t know right from wrong, and the people who depend on them are hurt.”

Do we see any of this happening today...any leaders making fools of themselves? Are wine and/or women generally a factor?

Saturday’s lesson points out the shift that takes place over the course of the book of Proverbs. It starts out with the teachings of a father and ends up here in chapter 31 with the teachings of a mother...and Solomon’s mother warns her son against the two most serious threats to the king: wine and women. Any thoughts on why these particular teachings came from Solomon’s mother? What sort of special insight might she and his father have into this specific situation?

This association of wine and women was deliberate, because both could be very powerful influences on men in positions of power. And although finding a virtuous woman could be beneficial, there were really no upsides to the influence of alcohol.

The father’s introductory advice was concerned with the spiritual acquisition of wisdom...and now the mother’s concluding chapters are concerned with applying wisdom in real life...because the spiritual principles taught by the father means nothing if the mother’s practical advice is not followed. How many have found this to be true in their own lives and in their own quest for knowledge? This is the “Experiential” arm of our integrative evidence based approach. This is the difference between knowing *about* something or how to do something...and actually doing it. So this week, we are going to dive deeper into the practical advice given by Solomon’s mom.

SUNDAY

A Toast “To Life”?

In many cultures, drinking alcohol is associated with all aspects of living a good life...living *the* good life. Think about the advertisements you see during an average football game telecast...or the



print ads you might see in a single Sports Illustrated magazine. What is the consistent theme and what do you see consistently depicted?

- Beautiful people, usually attractive and attracted couples
- Fun – party atmosphere, good friends, good food, good times
- Wealth, affluent lifestyles
- Celebration, your team always wins

We toast at weddings, at birthdays, on New Years, to celebrate...anything – wishing each other a long, healthy life, when, as the quarterly says, “ironically, each toast/glass may very well work to negatively impact health and shorten life.” Of course, this is always disguised in beautifully designed bottles, slick marketing campaigns, clever commercials and songs, and even some “scientific” findings that help comfort drinkers in thinking that alcohol is in any way good for them.

Solomon warned of these deceptions previously back in Prov 23:30-35 MSG:

“Who keeps getting beat up for no reason at all? Whose eyes are bleary and bloodshot? It’s those who spend the night with a bottle, for whom drinking is serious business. Don’t judge wine by its label, or its bouquet, or its full-bodied flavor. Judge it rather by the hangover it leaves you with—the splitting headache, the queasy stomach. Do you really prefer seeing double, with your speech all slurred, Reeling and seasick, drunk as a sailor? “They hit me,” you’ll say, “but it didn’t hurt; they beat on me, but I didn’t feel a thing. When I’m sober enough to manage it, bring me another drink!”

The warning is reiterated in verses 4-5 that we read in Saturdays lesson, and is directed specifically to kings and those in leadership, but are there any applications to each of us as followers of Christ?

One of the founders of the Adventist church had this to say on the subject:

“Intemperate persons should not by vote of the people be placed in positions of trust. Their influence corrupts others, and grave responsibilities are involved. With brain and nerve narcotized by tobacco and stimulus they make a law of their nature, and when the immediate influence is gone there is a collapse. Frequently human life is hanging in the balance; on the decision of those in these positions of trust depends life and liberty, or bondage and despair. How necessary that all who take part in these transactions should be those who are proved, those of self-culture, those of honesty and truth, of staunch integrity, who will spurn a bribe, who will not allow their judgment or convictions of right to be swerved by partiality or prejudice. Only men and women of strict temperance and integrity should be admitted to our legislative halls and chosen to preside in our courts of justice. Property, reputation, and even



life itself are insecure when left to the judgment of those who are intemperate and immoral. How many innocent persons have been condemned to death, how many more have been robbed of all their earthly possessions, by the injustice of drinking jurors, lawyers, witnesses, and even judges! – BLJ 177 (To Be Like Jesus)

While the effects of alcohol are bad enough for “common folks”, for a king or someone in power or a leadership role, the results can be disastrous. What is at stake is the capacity to discern between right and wrong through clear, undistorted judgment. A drunk king or judge or dictator, etc. may “forget the law”, may not correctly distinguish what is right or wrong...and may subsequently issue distorted judgments – declaring the guilty to be innocent and the innocent guilty. Isn’t this what happened to Aaron’s sons? Remember they were Israelite priests...they got drunk and had trouble performing the sacrificial ceremony correctly. Mrs. White says:

“When indulging their appetite for wine and while under its exciting stimulus, their reason was clouded, and they could not discern the difference between the sacred and the common. Contrary to God’s express direction, they dishonored Him by offering common instead of sacred fire. **[God visited them with His wrath; fire went forth from His presence and destroyed them.]**”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 295.

Can anyone recall any other biblical examples in which alcohol or drunkenness brought terrible, long-lasting results?

- Noah and his sons [Gen. 9:18–27]
- Lot and his daughters [Gen. 19:30–38]).

And don’t assume this can happen only if the leader is physically drunk at decision-making time. A little research into the physiological effects of alcohol reveals that it clouds the areas of the brain where moral thinking is done. Heavy drinking reduces brain cell production in the hippocampus, the part of the limbic system that governs self-control (ironically the self-control required to stop drinking), memory, and emotional response...however, after a 1 week period of abstinence, new cell production begins again. The point is, if you destroy enough brain cells with alcohol use...your judgment can be impaired even when you’re sober.

The prohibition of wine drinking and alcohol consumption has to do with basic wisdom, science, physiology – all three prongs of the integrative evidence based approach are covered, and as such, should apply to every human being. Doesn’t this sound a lot like natural law concepts?



The pink box at the bottom of Sunday's lesson asks: "Who hasn't seen the devastating effects of alcohol in so many lives?" I gathered some Google statistics on alcohol use/abuse, many that I am sure we could validate just by a show of hands in this room, but here's what I found:

- Alcohol is the number one drug problem in America.
- Americans spend \$197 million each day on alcohol.
- In the United States, nearly 14 million adults, or every one in 13 adults, abuse alcohol or have an alcoholism problem...but since an alcoholic's spouse, children, and family suffer due to the alcoholic's condition, there are an estimated 40 – 50 million people affected by alcoholism.
- Several million more partake in risky alcohol consumption that could potentially lead to abuse, and over three million American teenagers aged 14 to 17 have an alcohol problem.
- Compared to adult drinkers who start drinking around age 21, youth who begin drinking before the age of 15 are twice as likely to abuse alcohol and four times more likely to develop dependence on the drug.
- Approximately 53 percent of Americans have one or more close relatives who have an alcohol dependency problem.
- 43 percent of American adults have been exposed to the problem of alcoholism in the family, either as something they grew up with or something they experienced with a spouse or a partner.
- Today, it is estimated that 6.6 million children under the age of 18 live with a parent who struggles with alcoholism.

Not included in the above statistics are alcohol's "other victims" - those affected by alcohol though they are not alcoholics and may not even drink at all. Consider that alcohol is a contributing factor in the following:

- 73% of all felonies
- 73% of child beating cases
- 41% of rape cases
- 81% of wife battering cases
- 72% of stabbings
- 83% of homicides
- In the United States, a person is killed in an alcohol-related car accident every 30 minutes.

Mrs. White said this...not just about alcohol's other victims...but about just our ability to influence others:

"The influence of an ill-regulated family is widespread, and disastrous to all society. It accumulates in a tide of evil that affects families, communities, and governments. It is



impossible for any of us to live in such a way that we shall not cast an influence in the world. No member of the family can enclose himself within himself, where other members of the family shall not feel his influence and spirit. The very expression of the countenance has an influence for good or evil. His spirit, his words, his actions, his attitude toward others, are unmistakable. If he is living in selfishness, he surrounds his soul with a malarious atmosphere; while if he is filled with the love of Christ, he will manifest courtesy, kindness, tender regard for the feelings of others and will communicate to his associates, by his acts of love, a tender, grateful, happy feeling. It will be made manifest that he is living for Jesus and daily learning lessons at His feet, receiving His light and His peace. He will be able to say to the Lord, ‘Thy gentleness hath made me great.’ ”—The Adventist Home, pp. 33, 34.

MONDAY

A Toast to Death

Monday’s lesson in the quarterly looks at Prov 31:6-7, and attempts to define what Solomon’s mother means when she writes,

“Let beer be for those who are perishing, wine for those who are in anguish! Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.”

In the MSG, the text reads:

“Use wine and beer only as sedatives, to kill the pain and dull the ache of the terminally ill, for whom life is a living death.”

And isn’t this the exact reason why many folks drink?! To forget and escape their poverty, their misery, and other facets of their condition that they can’t cope with. The quarterly appears to reject those interpretations by pointing out that elsewhere in Proverbs, the use of the expression “who is perishing” repeatedly refers to “the wicked”, and this may be the intended reference here as well...supported by the seeming foolishness of giving something inherently unhealthy to someone who is already in poor health or dying, not to mention the reasons for not giving a depressant to someone who is already depressed.

Did everyone read the powerful quote from Mrs. White at the bottom of Monday’s lesson? “Satan gathered the fallen angels together to devise some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One proposition after another was made, till finally Satan himself thought of a plan. He would take the fruit of the vine, also wheat, and other things given by God as food, and would convert them into poisons, which would ruin man’s physical, mental, and moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control. Under the influence of liquor, men would be led to commit crimes



of all kinds. Through perverted appetite the world would be made corrupt. By leading men to drink alcohol, Satan would cause them to descend lower and lower in the scale.”—Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 12. Based on the statistics we just reviewed, it is easy to see why Satan chose this method of harming the human family.

TUESDAY

A Virtuous Woman

Let’s have someone read the familiar description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31...someone please read verses 10-31 of chapter 31.

Did anyone else here think the perfect “virtuous woman” described in Prov 31 only referred to amazingly ideal married females? I always kinda thought it did! But, as the quarterly suggests, there are many indications that the author may be writing about broader concepts here. There are many prior passages in Proverbs that give us good reason to think that the “virtuous woman” may represent wisdom itself...wisdom personified. The quarterly states that chapter 31 pictures wisdom “not as some lofty and unreachable ideal, but as a very practical and approachable woman who could become our life companion.” So no one else has ever read this description and seen a “lofty and unreachable ideal”? I guess I’m the only one then.

But to shift the paradigm to see true, practical wisdom being described here makes the concept a little easier to digest and absorb. The lesson also points out that this last teaching about wisdom is delivered through a beautiful acrostic poem (definition: An acrostic poem is a type of poetry where the first, last or other letters in a line spell out a particular word or phrase), where each verse begins with a Hebrew letter following the alphabetic order, similar to the book of Lamentations and many of the Psalms. Anyone else have to look that one up?

So let’s take a look at the Proverbs 8 passage on wisdom...and compare it with the virtuous woman we have described here in Proverbs 31, and see if we can find any similarities:

- Precious and worth finding - Prov 31:10 / 8:35
- Worth more than rubies - Prov 31:10 / 8:10-11, 18-19
- Provides food - Prov 31:14 / 8:19
- Strong - Prov 31:17, 25 / 8:14
- Wise - Prov 31:26 / 8:1
- Praised - Prov 31:28 / 8:34
- Tons of strong correlations between the two concepts it seems.



Amassing information and acquiring knowledge is easier than ever in this “information age”...but does this necessarily equate to *wisdom*? We have mentioned in this class that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit...but wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad. There is very little evidence to suggest that this abundance of information has not made this generation any wiser than previous ones. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We have guided missiles...and misguided men.”

WEDNESDAY

She Works

This virtuous woman seen in Proverbs 31 is not lazy...she is very active and works hard in many areas. This industrious quality is mentioned throughout the book of Proverbs when contrasting the wise versus the foolish. Proverbs 6:6-11 reads:

“You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two. Nobody has to tell it what to do. All summer it stores up food; at harvest it stockpiles provisions. So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing? How long before you get out of bed? A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, poverty your permanent houseguest!”

Contrast that description of a lazy fool with our virtuous woman, who bargain hunts, knits, sews, travels, organizes her home, feeds her family, saves her money, buys and sells property, plants a garden, helps the poor, designs and sells clothes – and verse 11 says that she does all this work with her hands *willingly*.

The lesson makes an interesting observation that this very spiritual person is never depicted praying or meditating, but rather is shown as an efficient and productive woman, like Martha in the gospels. To be spiritual does not mean that we should be idle, all under the pretext that we are too concerned with highly important religious issues, and thus have no time to take care of “trivial” matters – remember the parable of the talents in Luke 16?

Also, has it ever struck anyone else how odd this entire description is of a *woman* in Biblical times? Women were merely property in those days...just above a slave on the social ladder...and if they weren't married – single, divorced, widowed didn't matter...they needed to be attached to a man, or if they were married but couldn't have children, they were basically nothing...value-less. Even married women had no rights, could not own property, they could not vote, there was no equal rights amendment, no equal pay act. But that's the opposite of what is described here. This woman sounds like she rocks! She is working it – literally – day and night. She has many responsibilities and she gives them her constant attention.



I am not sure this is exactly how we and society are teaching girls to measure and value their worth today. I mean what sort of role models and standards are they being given? They are taught that their looks...their bodies...their outward appearance are paramount – such shallow and superficial markers...such vain and empty measures. And the magazine images inundating them are complete photoshop fantasy! I am encouraged to see an increasing number of these fallacies being exposed by the publishing of unretouched photos, but it's going to take a whole lot more to change the unhealthy feelings of inadequacy caused by the unattainable pictures of perfection. Oh, that we could develop a meaningful way to teach the concepts of this chapter...that charm can mislead, and that beauty soon fades...but this woman's true beauty is found in her character and how those facets of character are made manifest in her life and works. Throughout the entire book, readers have been warned of ungodly, "strange" women whose seductive powers cause ruin. This final portrait is in contrast to those women, describing a feminine role model of wisdom and godly values. This amazing, talented, industrious, successful women who develops a virtuous character, and who really knows God – that's what matters...she is to be praised.

This character that we are developing while here on earth...is the one we will take with us into all eternity. I work in the technology/computer field, so I really like Tim's hardware/software analogy when describing what happens with our character. If you are not familiar with the analogy, he describes our physical body as the hardware – so the physical computer/laptop, the electronics, the components. In case you are unaware, our hardware is deteriorating and degrading...literally breaking down while we are here on this earth. In contrast, our characters, our personalities, the essence of who we are...are being formed, and developed, and cultivated...hopefully perfected during our time on this earth. All the while we are alive and that character development is taking place, our character software is being constantly "backed up" on heavenly servers... the fact that we know have servers and software in the "cloud" just makes the analogy even better. We could use the current example in the news about Mrs. Clinton's email server, but that's probably a whole nother class. Anyway, when we die and are buried our hardware is in the ground, but our character software remains on the heavenly servers...just as it was. And when we get new hardware at the resurrection, it gets downloaded onto that new, immortal hardware just as it was...for all eternity! So, can you see how critically important it is to develop a character that is fit for eternity while we are here? It was to be Adam and Eve's main purpose...it was one of the perfectly accomplished goals of Christ's time here on this earth...so how much more important must it be for us in this life?

"A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to all eternity."—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 81.



The lesson makes another important point regarding our work and effort: they can only really be tested by time. Only the future will testify to the quality of our deeds. To work wisely is to work with the future in mind, not just for an immediate reward...perhaps never more true than when raising children?

THURSDAY

She Cares

The lessons asks what other important characteristics are seen in this women in verses 26-31?

- She speaks with wisdom and gives faithful instruction
- Orders the affairs of her household and is never idle
- Her children arise and call her blessed
- Her husband praises her and the whole city honors her

She is known for her wisdom and her kindness...and they are related. The quarterly argues that kindness is another form of wisdom, especially when we understand that wisdom isn't just *what* we know but *what* we say and do and *how* we say and do. Take a look at the 3rd paragraph in Thursday's lesson...it says, "Notice, too, the phrase the 'law of kindness.' That is, kindness is not just some fleeting attribute that escapes from her mouth now and then. It is a law, a principle of her very existence. How powerful it would be if the 'law of kindness' were to guide all that came out of our mouths." It sounds suspiciously like the author has stumbled upon some natural law concepts here when referencing the law of kindness.

Ellen White said this on the subject:

"Kindness and love and courtesy are the marks of the Christian.... In our association with each other let it be ever remembered that there are chapters in the experience of others that are sealed from mortal eyes; there are sad histories that are written in the books of heaven but are sacredly guarded from prying eyes. There stand registered long, hard battles with trying circumstances, arising in the very homes, that day by day sap the courage, the faith, the confidence, until the very manhood seems to fall to ruins. But Jesus knows it all, and He never forgets. To such, words of kindness and of affection are welcome as the smile of angels; a strong, helpful grasp of the hand of a true friend is worth more than gold and silver. The true, honest expression of a sister, or brother, or friend, given in genuine simplicity, has power to open the door of hearts which need the fragrance of Christlike words and the simple, delicate touch of the spirit of Christ's love. – {ML 178.4 (My Life Today)}



Dwell more on the idea that although we have a lot of knowledge for our time, we don't necessarily have more wisdom. In what ways can knowledge without wisdom be even more dangerous than a lack of knowledge without wisdom? What are some recent examples we can see of just how damaging knowledge without wisdom can be?

The book of Proverbs is filled with practical wisdom. This should tell us that our religion, even with all its lofty theology and spiritual dimensions, has a very practical side to it, as well. How can we make sure that we don't neglect the practical aspects of faith as we seek to fulfill its theological and spiritual dimensions?
