

### **SLIDE 1. Life Hacks. Part 3**

*A Study of the Book of Proverbs*

Sunday July 16, 2023

Recently, I was able to sit down for an extended chat with a fellow Lead Pastor in the Langley area. I walked out of his office *2.5 hours later* - with a bag of cherries from Wagner Hills Farm.

And a whole lot more.

He has had a hard stretch of leading – the past year-and-a-half.

He told his leadership team – that if the average week of a pastor includes some kind of crisis or melt-down per week, or some kind of major problem to solve – that the past year-and-a-half – for him – had averaged 10 X that amount!

He was discouraged and tired. But hopeful. He had learned a lot. So, I listened – a lot.

Which was o.k. – because I was asking the questions.

He's a really good thinker - with a pastor's heart.

So, we talked about the state of our Conference – the Mennonite Brethren of B.C. – to set the context for what he had taught, hosted, led, and learned in his church – with his leaders - over the last year-and-a-half.

I learned a lot about him – like his high value for honest and vulnerable conversation.

But I also learned a lot about leadership and ministry and teaching – at the same time.

He talked about what his church had processed in the last year-and-a-half – as a church-wide teaching and in small group follow-up.

He talked about what he thought they did well. And he talked about what he thought they didn't do very well. He shared his wisdom with me. Wisdom – hard-earned.

Over the next 2 Sundays – I'd like us to imagine that we are sitting down with someone like this for a chat.

Specifically, I'd like us to imagine that we are sitting down with King Solomon – Israel's fountainhead of wisdom – and the overall chronicler of the BOOK OF PROVERBS.

I'll let him be represented by this really big copy of the bible – opened to the BOOK OF PROVERBS – as if he was speaking to us from it.

Chps. 10-29 (as we've said before) are a compilation of rapid-fire one and two-liners – often set in contrasting pairs – often talking about probabilities – and often – just making observations about life and limb.

Here's what I'd like to do this morning: I'd like to tip-toe through chps. 10-16 to highlight and talk about verses / wisdom that stood out to me – in the same way that some stood out for you - one verse per chapter.

**SLIDE 2.** As a reminder: chps. 10-16 were our readings for this week in our collective devotional: the **30-Day Challenge – A Walk Through Proverbs** – as is found in the *YouVersion* Bible App.

Next Sunday – I plan to do the same with chps. 17-23.

Then, we'll wrap up our "Walk Through Proverbs" on Sunday July 30 with a quick look at what the other authors involved in the BOOK OF PROVERBS (Agur and Lemuel) had to say in chps. 30 and 31.

Sound like a plan?! Let's go...

**SLIDE 3.** Chp. 10: *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise* (v. 19).

I – can talk – a lot. And – it's not just occupational.

I can talk too much when I'm feeling nervous. And I can talk too fast when I'm feeling defensive. I can talk too loudly when I'm feeling excited. And I can talk too forcefully when I feel strongly about something. I can talk too comical when I want to be liked.

It's easy to see where sin might camp out at my mouth.

But we need to speak, right? There are things we need to say – to think out loud, to process our feelings, to correct others who are hurting themselves and others, to encourage our friends and families in the good things that they think and say and do, to affirm them for who they are, and to appreciate them for what they do for us.

I don't think King Solomon – here - is advocating a vow of silence to keep us from sinning. I think the point is that a wise person knows when to stop talking.

In fact, we might say – when in doubt – it's probably better to not speak than to say something we might regret later.

Not easy though, is it? It's why some – as the quip goes – go everywhere twice – the second time to apologize.

We even have an English idiom to express how difficult and painful it can be to hold our tongues – we "bite our tongues" to hold them back.

What does the apostle James say? *Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger* (Jas. 1:19).

How? Pause and pray and parse what you'd say.

**SLIDE 4.** Chp. 11: *One man freely gives, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty* (v. 24).

Again – not a guarantee or a promise – but a probability.

An observable probability. You know – I know – people who act generously – who give what they can when they can how they can – and yet also have what they need.

I have a friend, Algerome Newsome. He's like this. Born and bred in New Orleans, Louisiana, he currently serves as the District Supervisor for the Salvation Army in Atlanta.

One of my favorite southern expressions of his when he is feeling a little bit anxious is: "I was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in room full of rocking chairs!"

He is a man born to little, grew up poor, took refuge in the church, became a man of faith - who now lives a life of generosity – even to recently opening his home (with his wife, Teresa) to a woman at their local shelter who was fleeing her abusive partner.

He gives because He knows he can't outgive God (Mal. 3:11).

He believes that *God will meet all his needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus* (Phil. 4:19).

And you know – I know – people who act miserly. They feel like they never have enough, so they withhold from giving out of what they have. They never have money, and they let you pay the bill. They live from a mentality of scarcity – not abundance.

Their lives are small. They don't make friends – and they hurt themselves in the long run. They might have a decent bank account balance – but they are relationship poor.

**SLIDE 5.** Chp. 12: *An anxious heart weighs a man **down**, but a kind word cheers him **up*** (v. 25).

This feels more like an observation than it does a life hack, doesn't it? But – I think - there is a hack in there!

Solomon points out – here – that worry is no small burden. It weighs on our hearts, and it can lead us to despair or to feeling depressed.

The antidote/the hack? A kind word. To ourselves or to others.

A kind word buoys the heart. It lifts the heart. It doesn't necessarily solve anything – but it gives someone with an anxious heart (maybe even ourselves) a break from feeling anxious. It lifts them UP from being DOWN – even if for a short time.

Speak kind words to yourself when you're feeling anxious.

**SLIDE 6.** Maybe words you have memorized from the Word of God...

*God makes his people strong. God gives his people peace (Ps. 29:11).  
God met me more than halfway; he freed me from my anxious thoughts (Ps. 33:44).  
The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? (Ps. 118:6).*  
Or paraphrases: God makes me strong. God gives me peace. God meets me in my anxiety. God is with me.

Share these words (or words like them) with others. They are kind - and they are true.

And tell them what you love about them, tell them that this feeling will pass (in 30 secs. – a minute), tell them that you are with them (that they are not alone), that God is for them not against them, tell them about a joyous time together, tell them that you are praying for them – pray with them.

And maybe – bring them some ice cream :)

**SLIDE 7.** Chp. 13: *He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin (v. 3).*

In case we missed the first point :)

**SLIDE 8.** Chp. 14: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death (v. 12).*

And no – this is not a biblical reference to men who don't use maps to get where they're going! This is a caution against trusting our thinking over and above the thoughts and wisdom of God.

We might remember - here - Prov. 3:5 – which says something of the same: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

*There is a way that seems right to a man...*

“The way ‘that seems right to a man’ may offer lots of options and require few sacrifices.

These easy choices, though, should make us take a second look and to ask - Is my solution attractive because it allows me to just - coast? Because it doesn't ask me to make any real change?

Because it is a path of least resistance? The best choices often require hard work and self-sacrifice.” *Life Application Study Bible, NIV*

There is no EASY BUTTON.

This verse points out the need for self-examination.

Because – some choices – in the end – lead to death.

And by death – I think what might be in mind here are all the micro-deaths we experience when we choose anything apart from God’s will (distancing us from Him) – but I think it might also imply – physical death (final separation from God) as the logical last consequence for those who persistently choose their way over God’s way.

**SLIDE 9.** Chp. 15: *Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred* (v. 17).

I think I may have found my new life verse :)

As some of you know – I have an emotional allergy to a handful of vegetables – not least of which is mushrooms – whose recipe substitute – for taste and texture – in case you’re wondering – are elastic bands!

With apologies to my vegetarian friends, it seems even the Scriptures hint at vegetables being less awesome than a good slab of meat.

But, of course, I am missing the point...

In the *YouVersion* devotional – the point made there was – “less is more.”

The point here is that it is better for a couple to live in harmony with a few possessions and simple meals than it is to be surrounded by iconic Herman Miller furniture and to eat expensive cuts of loin while hating each other’s guts.

Better to eat bread and drink water with those we love than to gobble down a steak dinner at the Keg with people we despise.

Or – for me – better to enjoy a mushroom loaded lasagna with Jackie than an Outback Special – steak, Caesar salad, and baked potato with sour cream, chives, and bacon – with someone who I wouldn’t enjoy.

Less is more indeed.

**SLIDE 10.** Chp. 16:9: *In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps* (v. 9).

A person can make plans, but God is the One who ultimately decides what will happen. Remember: God is in control. And God is good.

NT writers Paul and James reinforce this idea...

*"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"* (Ro. 9:20-21).

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on a business and make money. Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (Jas. 4"13-15).*

If it's the Lord's will...

It's as C.S. Lewis says in his book, *The Problem of Pain* – this is not OUR life – as if it were ours for us to invite God into it. God invites us into his story – not the other way around.

Nothing we intend can override the will of God.

And that's good – because God is good.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't make plans.

It just means we should hold them loosely.

It means we should make plans that align with God's will – like lumps of clay to a potter. It means we should make plans in humility – because we don't know what tomorrow will bring, or even how long we will live.

Along these lines – the apostle Paul encouraged the church at Ephesus to - *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called* (Eph. 4:10), don't walk as unbelievers do, *in the futility of their minds* (Eph. 4:17) – *walk in love* (Eph. 5:2), *walk as children of light* (Eph. 5:8) and *walk wisely* (Eph. 5:15).

All of which is to say – *walk by the Spirit* (Gal. 5:16).

So – we have tip-toed through 7 chapters of the BOOK OF PROVERBS – ranging wide in topics - from "hold your tongue" to "be generous" to "use kind words" to "guard your lips" to "lean on God" to "less is more" to "make plans in humility."

Which of these rises to the level of the 3<sup>rd</sup> life hack in our LIFE HACKS series.

Well – for me – it's this: Pause and pray and parse what you'd say.

Maybe because I needed to be reminded of this more than the others.

**SLIDE 11.** For those keeping score then...

LIFE HACK #1: Wisdom begins with knowing God.

LIFE HACK #2: Learn from your critics.

LIFE HACK #3: Pause and pray and parse what you'd say.