

# Fools and Flocks

## Today In Your Reading...

We covered 138 proverbs spanning multiple topics, such as friendship, foolishness, character, political observations, and parental advice. Here are some of my favorites:

“A person without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls” (25:28).

“Don’t praise yourself; let others do it” (27:2).

“As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend” (27:17).

“When there is moral rot within a nation, its government topples easily. But with wise and knowledgeable leaders, there is stability” (28:2).

“Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor” (29:23).

I’d like to focus on two proverbs that I think are weighty for us today. First, “When arguing with fools, don’t answer their foolish arguments, or you will become as foolish as they are. When arguing with fools, be sure to answer their foolish arguments, or they will become wise in their own estimation” (26:4, 5). These two verses appear to be contradictory; one says don’t answer a fool while the other says do answer a fool. What does this mean? The second half of each verse provides the meaning.

First, instead of fool, we might use the term “skeptic,” or someone who is opinionated and likes to talk a lot, though he might not know what he is saying. People like this tend to frustrate us, which is why Solomon warns us not to be foolish in our response, meaning not to be rude, get angry, or speak harshly. **The way that we respond in situations like these is just as important as the words we say.**

However, Solomon follows up with the truth that we cannot remain silent. We must say something, otherwise the foolish person believes his views to be right. Knowing what to say and how to say it requires wisdom and skill. **It is important to challenge faulty thinking while not burning any bridges or losing friends.**

A second insightful proverb is this one, “Know the state of your flocks and put your heart into caring for your herds... for your sheep will provide wool for clothing and your goats will be sold for the price of a field...” (27:23-27). While Solomon may have been exhorting farmers and shepherds, he might as well have been advising those in leadership positions.

Perhaps the best advice I can give to any leader, no matter what his position — boss, parent, pastor, teacher — is to **know the condition of your flock**. In other words, work hard at knowing and caring for the people for which you are responsible. It will pay off in the end. Not only will your “herd” be happier and healthier, they will reward you with kindness and care.

## Daily Reflection

How would you evaluate your responsiveness to proud, opinionated people who speak their mind? How good are you at challenging faulty thinking without burning bridges?

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Who are the “sheep” the Lord has put in your care? Do you know the condition of your flock? Dealing with sheep can get messy, but there is no more effective way to lead than to be up close and personal. **You cannot effectively lead your sheep and keep your distance.**

# More Precious Than Rubies

July 3 — *Proverbs 30, 31*

## Today In Your Reading...

We finished the book of *Proverbs*, ending with the most famous chapter — *Proverbs 31*. Since Solomon devoted a good portion of his work to warning his son about the immoral woman, it is fitting that *Proverbs* should end with the kind of woman that is worthy of praise. In the style of Agur, who wrote *Proverbs 30*, here are three things — no four — that summarize her life.

First, **she is diligent**, meaning that she is the opposite of idle or lazy. “She is energetic and strong, a hard worker” (v.17). A diligent woman is industrious and productive; she makes the most of her time. “She does not have to bear the consequences of laziness” (v.27).

Second, **she is wise**. She makes good decisions. She is discerning and instructive; she gives good counsel. She plans her days, and she is frugal with her money and thrifty with her resources. “She watches for bargains” (v.18). She is careful with her words (v.26), and she has a good name with others. “Let her deeds publicly declare her praise” (v.31).

Third, **she is compassionate**. She sees, cares about, and meets the needs of others, starting with her family. “She also extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy” (v.20). She is kind and considerate.

Finally, and most importantly, **she fears the Lord**. While the other character qualities are admirable, *fear of the Lord is foundational to the rest*. When one possesses the other qualities, she is a good woman, but when she fears the Lord, she is a godly woman; and *godliness is the catalyst for compelling the rest*.

A fear of the Lord is also the distinguishing quality between a godly woman and the modern radical feminist who disdains God and His Word.

Did you notice that the godly woman is married to a man? The radical feminist despises marriage and endorses lesbianism. The godly woman seeks to “greatly enrich her husband”; she wants to “help him all her life” (v.12). The godly woman promotes family and produces children, while the radical feminist promotes singleness and abortion on demand. The godly woman is humble; she lets others praise her (v.28), while feminism is built on arrogance and selfishness. If a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised, then **what should we do with women who revile and rebel against God?**

## Daily Reflection

I have been blessed to have two *Proverbs 31* women in my life — my wife and my mother. What about you? Who are the godly women in your life? How have they inspired you?

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If you are a woman, are you seeking to glorify the Lord or glorify yourself? Are you seeking to do His will or your own? What would others say?

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You must be careful not to put the woman of *Proverbs 31* on a pedestal. She is not the standard. *Christ is the standard*. Don't strive to be like her in all her qualities and miss the most important aspect, *a relationship with the Lord*. Strive to know and love Him first, then these qualities, the fruit of His Spirit, will result.

# Why So Sad?

July 4 — *Psalms 42-46*

Day 185 — 180 Days to Go

## Today In Your Reading...

We enjoyed five psalms, all written by descendants of Korah, who were Temple guards, musicians, and, obviously, songwriters. A thread seemed to tie all five of the psalms together, a struggle between depression and faith.

The struggle began in *Psalms 42* with a desperate longing for the presence and peace of God, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for You, O God..." but, the author's "heart is breaking and, day and night, he only has "tears for food" (v.1, 3, 4). However, his faith weighs in and he suddenly knows that all is well. **"Why am I discouraged?"** he asked. **"Why so sad? I will put my hope in God!** I will praise Him again — my savior and my God" (v.5).

For the rest of the song, the psalmist wavers between being discouraged (v.6) and asking God why He had forsaken him (v.9) to reminding himself of God's love and watch-care (v.8). "Why am I so discouraged?" he ends again. "Why so sad? I will put my hope in God" (v.11).

The same refrain carried over into *Psalms 43*. "Why have you tossed me aside," he asked. "Why must I wander around in darkness?" (v.2). But, once again, faith won out, and the psalmist ends with, "Why am I discouraged? Why so sad? I will put my hope in God" (v.5).

In *Psalms 44*, the writer penned, "I do not trust in my bow; I do not count on my sword to save me. It is You who gives us victory..." (v.6, 7). Then, finally, in *Psalms 46*, faith triumphed. **"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.** So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge" (v.1-3).

## Daily Reflection

Can you relate to the psalmist's struggle here? Have you ever experienced this epic battle between doubt and hope, fear and faith? Explain.

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Why do you suppose we struggle exhibiting faith and hope during times of trials and tribulations?

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What is the solution to beating back discouragement or temporary depression?

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Consider what the psalmist did. **He reminded himself of the things God had done for him.** He encouraged himself by recounting all of God's blessings; and he lifted his spirits by praising God's nature and character. Perhaps that is why the Lord said, "Be silent and know that I am God" (46:10).

"The Lord Almighty is here among us. The God of Israel is our fortress. Come, see the glorious works of the Lord" (46:7, 8). Why are you discouraged? Why so sad? **Put your hope in God!**

# The City of God

## Today In Your Reading...

We looked at six psalms. While the selection may have seemed random, there was a bow that bound them together — *the Great King and His city of Jerusalem*. Though the psalmists were extolling the earthly city, they were, in a way, describing the heavenly city. Consider these passages:

“Shout to God with joyful praise! For the Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth... **He reigns above the nations sitting on His holy throne**... For all the kings of the earth belong to God. He is highly honored everywhere” (*Psalm 47:2, 7-9*).

“How great is the Lord, and how much we should praise Him in **the City of our God** which is on His holy mountain. It is magnificent in elevation. The whole earth rejoices to see it! **Mount Zion, the holy mountain, is the city of the great King**” (*Psalm 48:1, 2*).

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty. I long to enter the courts of the Lord... How happy are those who live in your house, always singing your praises... A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else” (*Psalm 84:1, 2, 4, 10*).

“**On the holy mountain stands the city founded by the Lord**. He loves the city of Jerusalem more than any other in Israel. O city of God, what glorious things are said of you! At all the festivals, the people will sing, ‘The source of my life is in Jerusalem’” (*Psalm 87:1, 2, 7*).

The New Testament describes heaven in a multitude of terms, including the Holy City, the City of God, Mount Zion, and the New Jerusalem. The writer of *Hebrews* wrote, “We have no lasting city, so we seek the city to come” (*13:14*). We will one day march to Zion, our new home.

But who gets to ascend that holy hill? Who will get to inherit the streets of gold? **Tickets cannot be earned, traded for, or purchased.**

“No one can redeem himself from death. No one can ever pay enough to live forever and never see the grave... For when we die, we carry nothing with us. Our wealth will not follow us” in the after life (*Psalm 49:6-9*).

However, *those who have surrendered their lives to Christ*, who boast in nothing that they have acquired and nothing that they have done but who only boast in the blood of Jesus Christ to save them from their sins, they are the ones who will see the City of God. “As for me,” the psalmist said, “God will redeem my life. He will snatch me from the power of death” (*49:15*).

## Daily Reflection

What about you? Will you see the City of God, Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem? How do you know? If the Lord were to stop you at the gates and ask you, “Why should I let you into My heaven?” What will be your answer?

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Because of Christ, you have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you” (*1 Peter 1:4*). Praise the Lord that your best days are ahead of you, joining the throngs of other Christ-followers in the City of God!

# Our Place of Safety

July 6 — *Psalms 1, 2, 10, 33, 71, 91*

## Today In Your Reading...

I really enjoyed today's passages. These six psalms are some of my favorites, and the theme that unifies them is *the perseverance of the righteous in light of the pervasiveness of the wicked*. The springboard is *Psalms 1*. Think on these verses again:

"Oh the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or stand around with sinners or join in with scoffers, but they delight in doing everything the Lord wants. **They are like trees planted among the riverbank**, bearing fruit each season without fail; their leaves never wither, and in all they do, they prosper. But this is not true of the wicked. They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place with the godly. For the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction."

The theme continues in *Psalms 2* and *10*. "The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the Lord and against His Anointed One. **But the One who rules in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them**. These wicked people are too proud to seek God. They think that God is dead; yet they succeed in everything they do. They do not see the punishment awaiting them" (2:2, 4; 10:4, 5).

How is it in a world so evil and corrupt and bent against the things of God that we, His people, can rest at night? How is it that we can be so calm and confident knowing the wickedness and wrongdoing that surrounds us? **Our poise and perseverance are rooted in the person, plan, and protection of God**. Of these things the writer reminds us in *Psalms 33, 71, and 91*.

"The Lord shatters the plans of the nations and thwarts all their schemes. *But the Lord's plans*

*stand firm forever; His intentions can never be shaken...* The Lord watches over those who fear Him... We depend on the Lord alone to save us. Only He can help us, protecting us like a shield" (33:10, 11, 18, 20).

**"O Lord, You are my refuge... You are my rock and my fortress. You alone are my hope...** Your righteousness reaches to the highest heavens. You have done such wonderful things. Who can compare with You, O God? I will praise You because You are faithful to your promises" (71:1, 3, 5, 19, 22).

"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I will declare, 'He alone is my refuge, my place of safety. He is my God and I am trusting in Him...' **If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, then no evil will conquer you**. The Lord says, 'I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in My name' (91:1, 2, 9, 14).

## Daily Reflection

What an awesome God you serve! In the midst of unsettling times, unnerving news, and unending disappointments, *you can live an unwavering life*, because the God, in whom you trust, is faithful and true.

What is it about this world or your life that concerns you most? How can your knowledge and faith in God help you rest in spite of them?

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# The Thrill of Our Hearts

## Today In Your Reading...

We covered another set of six psalms, all having to do with praising God for who He is and what He's done. I was so encouraged that I read them over and over. *The might and majesty of the Lord are a constant source of joy and hope for me.* I can relate to the psalmist when he wrote, **"You thrill me, Lord, with all you have done for me!"** (92:4). Consider again some of these magnificent descriptions:

"O Lord, what great miracles you do, and how deep are Your thoughts! You are just! You are my rock! There is nothing but *goodness* in You" (92:5, 15).

"The Lord is king! He is robed in majesty and armed with strength. Your throne has been established from time immemorial. You Yourself are from the everlasting past. The mighty oceans have roared like thunder, but the Lord is mightier than these! Your royal decrees cannot be changed. The nature of Your reign, O Lord, is *holiness* forever" (93:1-3, 5).

**"The Lord is a great God, the great King above all gods.** He owns the depths of the earth; even the mightiest mountains are His. The sea belongs to Him, for He made it. His hands formed the dry land too. Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for He is our God. We are the people He watches over, the sheep under His care" (95:3-7).

"Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise! He is to be revered above all the gods. The gods of other nations are merely idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty surround Him; strength and beauty are His... **Give to the Lord the glory that He deserves**" (96:4-6, 8).

"The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice... Those who worship idols are disgraced, all who brag about their worthless gods, for every god must bow to Him. For You, O Lord, are *most high* over all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods" (97:1, 7, 9).

## Daily Reflection

When we refer to something or someone as a "thrill" today, we are summarizing an emotional sensation, a tingling or shivering that we have experienced; but, the origin of the word "thrill" is much deeper, much more significant than that. To thrill means to drill, to pierce, or to penetrate to the core, as with something sharp.

The knowledge of who God is and what He's done for us is not simply meant to wow us or make us feel good somehow; rather **the reality of our God bores a hole to our heart and fulfills a need only He can meet.** He is not a thrill to us like a rollercoaster ride, a touching story, or a cold wind. He is *the* thrill of our souls, and the thought of Him, though hard for us to imagine at times, delights us deeply in a way that nothing else and no one else can.

How would you describe this thrill when you think of God? What about Him thrills you most?

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When David tried to describe this thrill, he said, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is too great for me to understand" (*Psalms* 139:6).

**Oh what a thrill our God is!**

# The Practice of Praise

## Today In Your Reading...

We looked at five amazing psalms, all of them, in one way or another, praising the Lord for His wonderful deeds. Consider the many ways that the psalmist encourages us to celebrate God:

“**Sing a new song** to the Lord, for He has done wonderful deeds” (98:1).

“**Shout to the Lord**, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy!” (98:4).

“...**Make a joyful symphony** before the Lord, the King!” (98:6).

“**Exalt the Lord our God!** Bow low before His feet, for He is holy!” (99:5).

“**Shout with joy** to the Lord, O earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before Him singing with joy. Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us and we are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. **Enter His gates with thanksgiving**; go into His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His unfailing love continues forever and His faithfulness continues to each generation” (100:1-5).

“**Praise the Lord**, I tell myself. O Lord my God, how great You are! You are robed with honor and majesty... I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. I will praise my God to my last breath! May He be pleased by all these thoughts about Him, for I rejoice in the Lord... As for me — I will praise the Lord!” (104:1, 33-35).

## Daily Reflection

Noah Webster defined praise in this way, “to commend, to applaud, to express personal worth, to extol in words, to magnify, to glorify on account of perfections or excellent works, to express gratitude, to do honor to, and to display

the excellence of.” **Praise is a natural response for who God is and what He’s done.**

You have so many reasons to praise the Lord. Taking Webster’s lead, list some things you would like to praise God for in these categories:

Things to commend or applaud about God...

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To glorify His perfections and excellent works...

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To express gratitude or do honor to...

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As the psalmist said, there are many different ways to praise God. What are some of your favorite ways to praise Him?

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