



Study SERIES

Week One - AM: Marc Rader

Life HACKS: Pocket tips from Proverbs for better living

Proverbs are among the most intensely practical of all the biblical literature; they are designed to be used in our day-to-day life. They are, as the title of this series suggests, "pocket tips"; short statements of generalised truth to lead us toward better living.

Bible

Proverbs 15:12

Mockers resent correction, so they avoid the wise.

Sermon Outline

As we begin this new series, there are some important observations for us to make about the nature of Proverbs. Their brevity has some significant implications. First, they often use caricatures or stereotypes such as the fool, the sluggard, the wise, or, as in this verse, the mocker. Like all caricatures these characters have a particular feature exaggerated. For the mocker, it is their pride that is exaggerated. The mocker is so arrogant that they wouldn't consider needing advice, correction, or counsel. The second important implication of a proverb's brevity is that a proverb cannot say everything that can be said about the topic it is addressing. There are few areas of life where there are not two sides to a situation, and this is reflected in proverbs – both biblical ones and contemporary ones. For example, "Look before you leap" and "He who hesitates is lost". These are both true at different times and in different contexts. When we consider a proverb it is worth asking, "When is this true?"

Turning to Proverbs 15:12 we read, "Mockers resent correction, so they avoid the wise." The principle is pretty clear: the arrogant mocker actively avoids those who might correct or counsel them. In Proverbs, how you respond to correction or rebuke is an indicator of your progress to wisdom. Mockers despise and reject it, while the wise love it and accept it. However, is there another side to this? Are there times when it is wise to reject correction or advice? Not surprisingly, there are some contexts where we should not listen to the advice of others and that is when what they advise isn't wise. In Proverbs 1:10-19 the father urges his son not to listen to violent men, who seek to get rich quick at the expense of others. In 5:1-6 he makes a similar appeal against the adulterous woman. In both cases the implication is clear; those who advocate violence or sexual immorality, even though their words sound good, should not be listened to.

More importantly for our purposes, when do we listen to correction or gather advice? It seems to me that we do so when the outcome of what we are doing is important. This might be an investment, how we raise our kids, a project at work, or anything. If it is important to us about how something turns out, we are wise if we ask advice and seek correction. This is why we have mentors, coaches, and counsellors; those we trust and admire, in part because that also makes it easier to hear correction. And these people do not even have to be followers of Jesus. This is because wisdom is "built in" to the universe – it is how God made the moral world – and can be observed. All wisdom is truly God's wisdom. However, the book of Proverbs makes clear that the foundation of true wisdom is the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is a deep and profound respect for His ways that makes any other way seem foolish. The fear of the Lord, therefore, includes more than

what we can observe in the moral world (e.g., that humility and a degree of co-dependence in seeking advice will, generally speaking, lead to success), it includes the Law that was revealed to Israel (see Psalm 1:1-3).

The fear of the Lord raises in important application for us. If we seek advice and correction about things that are important to us, how important is our relationship with God through Christ? If our walk with God is important are we seeking advice and counsel from others about this? Or are we, in a subtle way, living as mockers? I know it can be easy to come to church and, apart from the sermon, not have a single conversation about spiritual things. Now, it isn't wrong to ask others about their family, their weekend, or their plans, but the point is whether we ever have these conversations. If we make our faith a purely private matter we are in danger of becoming mockers; the most hardened of fools. The path of wisdom at work, at school, in our families, is the same for our relationship with God.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective here is to engage in a conversation around a Biblical idea, and begin to consider its implications for our everyday lives. Take some time to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

1. Opening Discussion: Share with the group, times you have sought advice on a important issue? Why did you seek advice? Who did you go to? What was the outcome?
2. Take a couple of minutes in silence to reflect on Proverbs 15:12. Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart. In what areas of your life might you need to hear the wisdom of this proverb. Share your reflections with the group.
3. What makes receiving advice or correction difficult? How might we cultivate relationships that help us receive and apply advice and correction?
4. Do you ever seek advice on your relationship with God? If not, why might that be, and if so, how and with whom?
5. When might you use this proverb this week, and what might help you prepare to remember and use the proverbs we engage with over the course of this series?

Prayer

Take some time to pray for each other's responses to question 5, that this proverb might become a truly 'pocketed' tip for better living. Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into practices that will help you to be guided by the wisdom that we engage with over the course of this series.