

Apples for Teachers: A Daily Devotional from the Book of Proverbs

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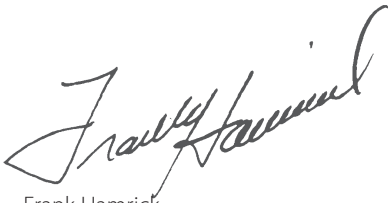
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Preface

This book contains thoughts from the book of Proverbs that are an outgrowth of my personal devotional life. My goal in writing this was really quite simple—to communicate a philosophy of Christian education that is more concerned with the heart than with the head. Academics are important, but the real key to Christian education is reaching the hearts of your students and giving them a passion for God.

Hopefully these thoughts will minister to your soul and be “an ornament of grace and chains about thy neck” (Prov. 1:9) to enhance your ministry. My prayer is that this book will be a daily reminder to you about what’s truly important.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Frank Hamrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "F" and "H".

Frank Hamrick

Rocky Mount, North Carolina

Apple 1

PROVERBS 1:1

"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel."

Pithy Proverbs

The wisest human who ever lived spoke in proverbs. Solomon understood that terse, pithy statements stick. We are often too verbose, and thus, less memorable. As teachers, our desire should be to make what we say memorable. This was Solomon's concern. He took profound truth and reduced it to easily understood phrases. He used comparisons, similes, and word pictures ("apples of gold in pictures of silver"). Why? He wanted youth not just to hear, but also to understand, apply, and remember. The wise teacher of our day does the same.

Good teachers do not drone. They are not like a saw that rasps against the grain eight hours a day. Rather, they are like jackhammers, impacting kids with exciting, memorable bursts. Choose which of the following is easier to remember and understand:

"Good enough is never good enough."

"Kids, don't be mediocre. You always need to do your very best."

Learn to be pithy, precise, and picturesque in your teaching. Wise teachers do! Ask God to give you the creativity to make your subjects understandable, practical, and memorable today.

Final thought: Use your words to grab your students' attention and focus it on God.

Knowledge Versus Wisdom

Teachers impart knowledge. Good teachers impart wisdom. It is good for our students to know $2+2=4$. It is better that our students know that behind the strict mathematical code is a God of order, organization, detail, and exactness.

The purpose of Proverbs is to teach wisdom. What is wisdom? Some have said it is the practical application of knowledge, but I don't think that definition goes far enough.

James 3:15–17 describes two kinds of wisdom: earthly wisdom and wisdom from above. Earthly wisdom may be the practical application of knowledge, but people go to hell if they only have earthly wisdom. A builder may use mathematical measurements to build a house wisely, but that doesn't mean he is wise.

Heavenly wisdom is more than the practice of knowledge. This wisdom is "from above." That is, it finds its home in the Godhead. Colossians tells us that in Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). In Colossians 1:9–10 Paul prays that we would be filled "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding...in the knowledge of God."

True wisdom is teaching our students to know and love the Lord. The wise teacher consciously reveals God in every discipline: in mathematical formulas, in historical events, in geographical features, in all the sciences, and, yes, in language.

When our students see the *Lord* in our teaching, rather than the *facts* of our teaching, we impart wisdom.

Final thought: Are we just teachers, or are we wise teachers?

Apple 3

PROVERBS 1:3

“To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity.”

Great Goals 1

Here are four great personal goals for a wise teacher: wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity. Today we will discuss the first goal.

We must not merely instruct in wisdom, we must ourselves *receive* the instruction of wisdom. *Receive* is the translation of a Hebrew word that means “to accept, to believe, to commit to.” The concept of possession is inherent in the meaning of this word. Thus, a wise teacher must be personally saturated with wisdom. Wise teachers are literally dripping with the knowledge of God in their daily lives. Wise teachers are totally committed to knowing, loving, and enjoying the Lord. Is this your goal? Do you daily seek fellowship with Him? Does your heart pant for God (Ps. 42:1)?

Proverbs 1:2–4 describes the wise teacher. A wise teacher knows the Lord (experiential fellowship, v. 2) and is possessed by this knowledge (v. 3). Like Paul, he counts all things but loss “for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Ask God to give you a thirst for Him that can only be satisfied (as David puts it) when “I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches” (Ps. 63:5–6). When this is your quest, your pursuit, and the longing of your soul, your students will soon take note. Be a receptive (possessed) teacher today.

Final thought: The wise teacher knows God and desires to share that relationship with her students.

Great Goals 2

Here are the four goals of wise teachers: to be possessed by wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity. Today we look at the second of these goals.

We must be possessed by justice. *Justice* is the Hebrew word most often translated “righteousness,” and most often refers not only to the quality of righteousness but also to right living. Experiential knowledge of God leads to righteous living.

Teachers sometimes mistakenly demand righteousness from their students. True biblical righteousness, however, comes from the inside. As we know and love Him, our lives ooze with His righteousness. Personal, intimate fellowship with the Lord produces an inner pressure that forces righteous living into our lives. The same is true of our students.

Your mission today is to instill this passion for God that works out righteousness in your students. Righteousness is not mandated or molded—it is pressed out from within! Be on guard against externally molding your students to do right. Rather, ask God to help you exude such a love for Him that your students are caught up in that same love. You will soon see the “oozing” of righteousness in their lives.

Final thought: Remember that true righteousness must always grow from the inside out.

Apple 5

PROVERBS 1:3

"To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity."

Great Goals 3 & 4

Previously we have discussed two of the four goals of a Christian teacher for her own life. Today we see the final two goals: to be possessed by judgment and equity.

Godly teachers are possessed by good judgment. The Hebrew here refers to decision-making. Its biblical usage is especially applied to leaders. Wise teachers make wise decisions. But where do they get that wisdom? When our knowledge of and love for the Lord possesses our souls, we make wise decisions. Salvation alone does not guarantee wise choices. Only knowledge of Him guarantees such.

But we must also be possessed by equity. The Hebrew word is an interesting one. It simply means "ease, level, smooth." It gradually came to stand for the easy-going spirit of a person that causes her to be at peace with those around her. *Level* carries the concept of honesty and trustworthiness. These two ideas convey equity. The teacher, through developing a passionate love for and knowledge of the Lord, is at peace with her class and fellow teachers. One who enjoys God enjoys her students. One who is at peace with God is at peace with her students. Do your students love to be around you? Do they seek you out at ballgames or in the mall?

Final thought: Ask God to give you peace with your students and to destroy any adversarial spirit you may have.

"To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion."

Goals for Teaching

What should be the teacher's goal for his own teaching? The objective is "to give subtlety...knowledge and discretion." Note the progression of verbs in Proverbs 1:2–4. First, we must have an intimate knowledge (experiential knowledge) of the Lord (true wisdom). Second, we must understand the implications of that wisdom. Third, we must be possessed by that wisdom. Finally, we must give that same wisdom to our students.

Until we fully grasp True Wisdom, we have nothing to give our students. We can dispense academic information, but until we are saturated with Him, we cannot transfer wisdom.

Give is a translation of the Hebrew word meaning "to practice, teach, or share." We can only share what we have experienced. True teaching is far more than dispensing information. A teacher is a sharer of his own experiences. Jesus shared His life and His heart with his disciples. They became learners of Him.

Notice the subjects of this sharing. The word "simple" means those who through lack of experience do not yet fully comprehend or understand. We often accuse youth of ungodliness, when in reality they only lack maturity. We sometimes misinterpret immaturity as rebellion. It takes patience to share with the inexperienced and the immature. This kind of patience only comes when verses 2–3 are true in our lives. Do you have the patience and the honesty to share your heart and experiences (failures and triumphs) in your daily walk? This alone will give "subtlety to the inexperienced" and "knowledge and discretion" to the young.

Final thought: Share today one failure and one triumph in your walk with the Lord with your students.

Apple 7

PROVERBS 1:5

"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels."

Producing Helmsmen

This verse points us to the kind of students our schools must produce. Let's work backwards in this verse. The ultimate goal of a Christian school (and teacher) is to produce students who "attain unto wise counsels." Literally, the phrase *wise counsels* can be translated "helmsman" (one who steers a ship). Thus, our schools are naval academies producing young men and women capable of steering their own lives and the lives of others. Are our graduates equipped to steer their lives in a godly direction on an ungodly sea? Are our seniors steering the lower classmen in a godly direction?

Back up one phrase to "a man of understanding." Helmsmen understand. They perceive the wisdom of God. They love Him and experience fellowship with Him daily. Is this true of the seniors in your school? What about your class? Are you consciously teaching them how to counsel themselves so they can counsel others biblically?

Backing up again we see that wise people "increase learning." These students have learned not just facts or academic information but the *knowledge* described in verse 7 ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"). Where did they learn it? From teachers who made this their singular goal.

Finally, notice where this begins: "A wise man will hear..." If your students would become helmsmen, you must get their attention. You must direct their minds from academia to theology. You must bring them face-to-startling-face with the majesty and glory of God in such a way that they are jolted from apathy and drawn to His multi-faceted beauty! That is your mission. Will you accept it?

Final thought: As a godly teacher, you should be developing students who will impact others for Christ.