

Wise Advice on Leadership (Part 2)

Selected Proverbs 7/12/09 a.m. CBC

ENGAGE: S. I. McMillen, in his book *None of These Diseases*, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, “Are you a leader?” Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, “No,” and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: “Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower.”

SET THE STAGE biblically: As we continue today are sermon series from Proverbs on living wisely we are looking at the area of leadership. Last week we noted that if we are going to be wise leaders we must heed God’s instructions in how we conduct ourselves. We highlighted three characteristics of wise leaders [from Prov 31:1-9]. Wise leaders remain morally pure. Wise leaders avoid over-indulgence. Wise leaders promote justice for all.

PREVIEW: Now today we’ll look at three additional characteristics of a wise leader, THEN we’ll consider leadership from the subject’s perspective. What insight and counsel does Solomon have for us who are under authority? How should we conduct ourselves in relation to those in authority over us? We’ll look at four qualities God wants that will tend to help your relationship with those in authority over you. Then finally, we’ll look at leadership from God’s perspective. We’ll see that seeing our leaders from God’s perspective increases our faith in God and recognition of his control of those in authority over us.

ANNOUNCE the passage: Our goal in this sermon series on Proverbs is to help you and me pursue and heed God’s wisdom in all areas of our lives. God’s wisdom pursued and heeded day after day brings success, joy, and the Lord’s favor (cf. Prov 8:32-35). For the Scripture reading this morning I’ll be reading part of a chapter of Proverbs that reminds us that wisdom is more valuable than anything this world offers (cf. Prov 8:1-21). Wisdom comes from God and is the foundation on which the earth and you and I (humanity) were created (8:22-31).. For the Scripture reading this morning, let’s read then about Lady Wisdom’s value and priority. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Prov 8:12-17, 32-36 [p. 565].

Trans: What actions help to produce wise leaders? What can help you be a better leader on the job, in the home, at school, or wherever God places you? Wise leaders not only pursue moral purity, avoid over-indulgence, and promote justice for all. A fourth characteristic of wise leaders is this:

Wise leaders recognize their need for God’s wisdom (Prov 8:14-16).

In Proverbs 8, “Lady Wisdom” promises leaders the knowledge they will need to rule well. Look with me at Prov 8:14-16 (NKJV): “Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength. 15 By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. 16 By me princes rule, and nobles, All the judges of the earth.” God wants you and me to recognize the value of His wisdom to provide direction for our lives, including our role as leaders—whether in the home, at work, in the church, and in any area within our community. ILL: Remember when Solomon,

began his reign “God appeared to Solomon and said to him, ‘Tell me what I should give you.’ 1:8 Solomon replied to God, ‘You demonstrated great loyalty to my father David and have made me king in his place. 1:9 Now, Lord God, may your promise to my father David be realized, for you have made me king over a great nation as numerous as the dust of the earth. 1:10 Now give me wisdom and discernment so I can effectively lead this nation. Otherwise no one is able to make judicial decisions for this great nation of yours.” (2 Chron 1:7-10 NET). [ILL: DENTIST w. boy who threatened to take off clothes, cf. Swindowll, Tawdy Oxcart, “Authority.”]

Trans: How do wise leaders conduct themselves? Wise leaders remain morally pure. Wise leaders avoid over-indulgence. Wise leaders promote justice for all. Wise leaders not only recognize their own need for God’s wisdom to govern the earth, wise leaders also surround themselves w. wise counselors.

Wise leaders surround themselves with many wise counselors (Prov 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 24:6).

To steer a wise course through life we need the counsel of others. This is true for all of us, including and especially leaders. From ancient times rulers surrounded themselves with counselors, a practice still in evidence today. The critical factor in obtaining and listening to counsel is whether or not the counselor is wise. If you surround yourself with unwise counselors, those who are wise in their own eyes, you court disaster.

[APPL TEENS]: For you that are teens this is why it is so important that you be careful that you don’t hang out with kids that are going to influence you to do what is wrong. God wants you to reach out to your peers and be a witness, but if you are being influenced to do things you shouldn’t then you better choose new friends.

Now when a ruler receives the counsel of a number of wise individuals, the “chances” of his making wise choices and decisions goes up. No one has all the answers, nor does any ruler. Proverbs makes clear that leaders are wise to have MANY counselors (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 24:6).

APPL: Advice is necessary for success, whether for a nation, a church, a business, or a home. How can you be a wise leader? Recognize your need of the input of others. Whether it’s on the job, in the home as a mother of a two-year old, or in any other position of leadership, you need the input of others. For you young mothers, God would encourage you to seek out a more experienced mother who is many years down the road, from whom you can glean help as a wife and mother.

For all of us, God warns: Without wise guidance ruin and disaster often occur. [SLIDE] “When there is no guidance a nation falls, but there is success in the abundance of counselors” (Prov 11:14 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] The active participation of many counselors helps to bring security to decisions that are made. The word “guidance” [תְּהַבִּילוֹת] (takhvulot) is derived from a root word [חָבַל] (khaval) that is used for “rope-pulling,” “steering” or “directing” a ship. [BDB 286 s.v.]. Derived from this Hebrew root word we also we get the words “sailor” (khovel), “mast” [חִבֵּל] (khibel), and “rope, cord” [כֶּהֶל] (khevel). So the picture of “guidance” in the OT is of a group of sailors directing a ship by pulling ropes on the mast (cf. BDB). It is used in a concrete sense of God directing the path of clouds (Job 37:12) and in a figurative sense of moral guidance (Prov 11:14; 20:18; 24:6).

****Guidance by wise counselors gives you the ability to steer a right course through life [cf. NET notes on Prov 11:14.] For you as a leader to steer a right course with your many responsibilities you need many wise counselors. So too, for the ship of state; the ship of state needs a crew of wise counselors a leader can rely upon to help him or her steer the ship.**

Now what happens when there are not enough skillful hands to man the ship? Plans fail. Plans made are incapable of generating the desired outcome when there is insufficient counsel.

[SLIDE] “Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with abundant advisers they are established” (Prov 15:22 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] The ship doesn’t reach its desired harbor without adequate counsel. Our plans are frustrated when there is insufficient counsel. Our plans are established and fulfilled when there is plenty of counsel. Don’t be afraid to ask others for help!

ILL: One of the qualities that made Abraham Lincoln a great president was his humility in asking some of those who had opposed him the most to take part in his cabinet because he knew the nation would be better off with them serving in his administration. [Cf. book, Team of Rivals]

National leaders are encouraged to seek counsel before declaring war. [SLIDE] “Plans are established by counsel, so make war with guidance” (Prov 20:18 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] Victory, strategy, and counsel are more important than mere military strength – many great armies have been destroyed because of their unwise leaders. [SLIDE] “A wise warrior is strong, and a man of knowledge makes his strength stronger; 24:6 for with guidance you wage your war, and with numerous advisers there is victory” (Prov 24:5-6 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] In a war the victory is credited not so much to the infantry as to the tactician who plans the attack. Brilliant strategy wins wars, even over apparently overwhelming odds. [SLIDE] “The wise person can scale the city of the mighty and bring down the stronghold in which they trust” (Prov 21:22 NET). [Blank Slide] Wisdom can potentially be more effective than physical strength.

REIT/TRANS: How do wise leaders conduct themselves? Wise leaders remain morally pure; avoid over-indulgence; promote justice for all; not only recognize their own need for God’s wisdom, they also surround themselves with many wise counselors. And:

Wise leaders build and maintain a good reputation by being truthful and honest (Prov 17:7; 29:4).

Build and maintain a good reputation by being truthful and honest. It takes time to build a good reputation. But, regardless of our background, this should be a goal for each of us. A good reputation should happen naturally if we are growing and maturing in our Christian lives as we should be. On the other hand, if we have a poor reputation we undoubtedly are demonstrating character traits that are not in harmony with Christian principles. In such cases our lifestyle is not in harmony with what people naturally expect from a mature Christian [cf. Getz. Measure of a Man, 38].

We live in a culture that often does not tend to show the respect and honor for the position of authority our leaders hold. Regardless of the character of our leaders this is wrong. At the same time, a wise leader will seek to build and maintain a good reputation by being truthful and honest. Too many of our politicians seem to have their personal interests in mind instead of those of the people they serve. What can leaders do to fulfill their responsibility well? One essential: Build and maintain a good reputation. Build and maintain a good reputation by being truthful and honest.

As a leader (whether in your home, at work or church, or anywhere else) be truthful. As unsuited as it is for a godless, immoral, overbearing person, like a Howard Stern, to spew out his filthy words, it's even worse for a leader, with a code of honor, to whom truthfulness is second nature, to lie. **SLIDE:** "Excessive speech is not becoming for a fool; how much less are lies for a ruler!" (Prov 17:7 NET) **[BLANK SLIDE]** Lying is totally inappropriate for a leader. Leaders should be people of integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness. A ruler or leader who tells lies is like a fool.

Wise leaders build and maintain a good reputation by being truthful. And wise leaders build and maintain a good reputation by being honest. A leader brings strength, security, and stability to those the leader oversees by being honest and upright in what he or she does. **SLIDE:** "A just king gives stability to his nation, but one who demands bribes destroys it" (Prov 29:4 NLT). **[BLANK SLIDE]** "The concept of 'spin rooms' and 'spin doctors' is everywhere in the political realm today. 'Spin' is the effort to embellish the truth, to push it right up to the edge dividing truth from non-truth, to exaggerate in an acceptable way. Instead of letting one's "Yes" be "Yes" and "No" be "No" (see Matt 5:37), leaders are adept at speaking all around the subject at hand without addressing it directly.

APPL: "When people see leaders willing to live dishonestly, they assume it is okay to do so as well. Parents lie about their children's ages to get them a cheaper plane ticket. Students cheat in universities. Individuals and businesses look the other way when reporting their income taxes. and all because, 'everybody is doing it.' Thankfully, everyone is not dishonest, lying, or cheating. But when a leader or ruler does those things, he gives permission, and therefore encouragement, for those he leads to do likewise." [Jeremiah, *Powerful Principles from Proverbs*, 23]

Reit/Trans: Wise leaders heed God's instruction in how they conduct themselves. Specifically, wise leaders remain morally pure, avoid over-indulgence., promote justice for all, recognize their need for God's wisdom, surround themselves with many wise counselors. And wise leaders build and maintain a good reputation by being truthful and honest. Now let's move from considering leadership from the leader's perspective, to considering leadership from the perspective of each of us, who are under leaders. How should we act with regard to our leaders? What responsibilities do we have as those under authority? What is the proper conduct to have before your leaders and authorities?

Be truthful with those in authority over you.

Good leaders delight in the person who is honest and upright. Tell the truth, rather than trying to impress a leader with flattery. Turn with me in your Bibles to Prov 16:13 (NKJV): "Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right." Good leaders delight in the person who speaks the truth, rather than trying to flatter them.

APPL: Now most of us say to ourselves, "I'll never be called to speak before the ruler of the land." Yet, the truth is, every year you and I do this at least once every year—on April 15th. We communicate in writing or in electronic format, validated by our signature, certain details about our financial status over the previous year. What is our responsibility? Our responsibility is to communicate honestly and righteously without grumbling.

ILL: Let's not be like the man who paid no taxes for many years because his salary was so low, who became very resentful the first year he had to pay income taxes. The first few years this individual even addressed his envelope on April 15th to the "Infernal Revenue Service" or the

“Eternal Revenue Service.” But soon this person realized he was not speaking righteously before the king. This man changed his attitude. It is our privilege as citizens to try to change the system through proper channels, but until it is changed we are to have “righteous lips” before the king. [Cf. D. Jeremiah, *Powerful Principles from Proverbs*, 23.]

Do you want to make a good impression on those in authority over you? Display honest intentions and be gracious in your response. Honest intentions and gracious words tend to bring you into favor with those in authority over you. **SLIDE: “The one who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious – the king will be his friend” (Prov 22:11 NET). [**BLANK SLIDE**] “Heart” represents a person’s intentions and choices that are made. So to be pure of heart is to have honest and clear intentions. Thus, if you have honest and clear intentions and are gracious and kind in what you say, you will tend to make a very positive impression on the one in authority over you.

Trans: How should we respond to those in authority over us? Be truthful. Second:

Be respectful of those in authority over you.

One of the lessons for those who took part in the Thailand Mission’s Trip last year was the respect the Thai people have for those in authority over them, especially the king and the royal family. In every town or city we entered there were pictures of the king or of a member of the royal family. The respect the Thai people have for their king is in line with the Bible’s command to “Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17).

APPL: It’s interesting the Bible does not tell us to only honor those in authority over us whom we like, or who holds the same positions as we do on moral issues. God commands us to honor those in authority over us. Too often we violate this principle because we do not like the individual who happens to hold office at a given time, or who is in a position of authority over us.

God commands: Be respectful of your leaders because of the position they hold. Did you realize that the same respect you show to God should be shown to our governing authorities? Turn with me in your Bibles to Prov 24:21 (NKJV): “My son, fear the Lord and the king” (Prov 24:21a NKJV). Here we are instructed to show respect not only to God, but also to the king, i.e., the governing authorities God has placed over us. Both in the OT and NT God makes it clear that the governing authorities that exist have been instituted and set up by God (cf. Rom 13:1).

Authorities derive their power from God and they are to function as His earthly representatives. Therefore just as we are to have great profound respect for the Lord, so also we should great respect for our governing authorities.

Further, God warns us not to associate with those who rebel against the governing authorities He has placed over us. Notice God’s warning here in Prov 24:21 (NKJV): “My son, fear the Lord and the king; Do not associate with those given to change.” [Why are we not to associate with rebels, those who do not respect authority? Judgment is sent on the rebels both by God and the king. Look at v. 22: “For their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?” Sudden destruction awaits those who rebel against their governing authorities.

APPL: So a reward for living in peace under God and the authority He places over you is that we escape the calamities that will fall on the rebellious. Honor the office, and therefore the one who holds the office.

ILL: Between a.d. 100–165, a church leader named Justin Martyr lived in the midst of great persecution of the church. Once he wrote a letter to those civil authorities over him, saying, “Everywhere, we, more readily than all [people], endeavor to pay to those appointed by you the taxes, both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by Jesus. We worship only God, but in other things we will gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers . . . , and praying that, with your kingly power, you may be found to possess also sound judgment.” This reverent, obedient response ought to be the attitude of every one of us, as Christians, toward those civil authorities God has placed over us. [Cf. Jeremiah, 24]

TRANS: How should we respond to those in authority over us? Be truthful. Be respectful. Third

Be calm and patient to have the most positive influence on those in authority over you.

To have the most positive influence on those in authority over you, be both calm and patient. Turn with me in your Bibles to Prov 25:15 (NKJV): “By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone.” Through patience those in authority over you can be persuaded. You have a much better chance of breaking down the stiff opposition of those in authority over you by using gentle speech rather than trying to make harsh demands. Bones, which represent here the hardest and most firm part of the body, are contrasted with the softness of the tongue. Gentle speech can break down any stiff opposition [cf. NET notes on Prov 25:15].

APPL: Exercise patience when you try to get things changed, or get things approved by those in authority over you. The wheels of government and of other authorities often turn slowly. By not being easily angered in a potentially hostile and pressure situation you have a greater likelihood of positively influencing those in authority over you.

ILL: Your husband comes home tired. He’s hungry. Meanwhile, you’ve had a rough day yourself. One of the children has been sick. The washer quit working. All your husband sees though is that supper is not ready, and he’s somewhat gruff as he asks, “Where’s supper?” How do you respond? Do you blow up and respond with anger and resentment? Or do you smile and say, “Honey, I’m glad you’re hungry because I’m going to need some help tonight getting everything ready. Jimmy’s been sick half the day. The washer quit working. and I’ve only just now gotten Jimmy and myself cleaned up after he vomited all over me and himself.” Your calm and patient demeanor in pressure situations will do much more to have a positive influence on those in authority over you, than it will to yell and rant about how insensitive and terrible your husband is for not recognizing what’s been going on all day.

God tells us, “Forbearance and patience are chief virtues to have in hand when approaching those in leadership over you.” Quiet, composed, thoughtful behavior, which remains calm even though injustice is experienced or threatened, tends in the end to secure a decision in one’s favor [cf. K & D, *Commentary on the OT*].

Trans: How should we respond to those in authority over us? Be truthful. Be respectful. Be calm and patient. Fourth:

Be self-controlled before those in authority over you.

Be humble and restrained in the presence of a prestigious host. As a guest to such a person, curb your appetite, that is, control yourself. Just because the host serves delicacies may not indicate

his or her esteem for you. Your host may simply be getting you in a good mood for his or her own selfish reasons. He or she may want something from you or be evaluating you. Look with me at Prov 23:1-3 (NKJV): “When you sit down to eat with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you; 2 and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For they are deceptive food.”

“The point is not to be seduced by a ruler’s ability to overwhelm you with gifts and privileges. Don’t be taken in; don’t be bought; don’t put yourself in the debt of the ruler, for then you will become his slave. I am reminded of the story in the Old Testament of Naboth, the Jezreelite, whose vineyard was coveted by the wicked king, Ahab (I Kings 21). Naboth stood his ground in the face of Ahab’s enticements and would not give in. Though his resistance to the king cost Naboth his life, he still maintained his integrity in the face of the king.

“Dealing with our governmental rulers can be discouraging for [us as believers] at times. But we must remember that, from God’s perspective, all rulers are under His control. What can seem like an out-of-control, even wicked, [administration] is still in its place in God’s providential plan.” [cf. D. Jeremiah]

Trans: These past two weeks we’ve considered six responsibilities of those in authority. We’ve seen: Wise leaders heed God’s instruction in how they conduct themselves. Specifically, wise leaders remain morally pure; avoid over-indulgence; promote justice for all; recognize their need for God’s wisdom; surround themselves with many wise counselors. And wise leaders build and maintain a good reputation by being truthful and honest.

We’ve also considered what our response is to be to those in authority over us. We are to be truthful, respectful, calm and patient, and self-controlled.

APPL: Now you say, “That’s all well and good, but you don’t know the supervisor I have at work? Or you don’t know what I have to put up with at home with my husband? Or you don’t know how terrible that government official I’m dealing with is? Can I really trust God with the leadership He has placed over me? As I read the daily news or watch the evening news it seems like the world’s rulers are free agents. It appears from my vantage point that those in authority over me act on their own, sometimes wisely and sometimes not.” What truth does God provide for you and me to help us keep trusting Him regardless of who may be in leadership over us? To help us respond properly to leaders and to keep trusting God it’s important that we see leaders from God’s perspective. So let’s look at leadership from God’s perspective. To help you respond rightly to those in authority over you remember:

God providentially controls those in authority over us.

God providentially controls those in authority over you. Over every authority in your life stands our Lord Himself. No ruler is supreme; the LORD rules. Turn with me in your Bibles to Prov 21:1 (NKJV): “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like the rivers of water [i.e., like the farmer’s irrigation ditches]; He turns it wherever He wishes [i.e., wherever they will do the most good]” (Prov 21:1 NKJV). Just as the farmer channels irrigation ditches where he wants them, where they will do the most good; so does the Lord with the king.

APPL: Do you see the reassurance God gives? The ability of those in authority over you to make decisions is ultimately in the hands of God. Thus, no ruler is supreme. Above that one in authority over you, stands God! God providentially controls those in authority over you. This

also means world events do not just “happen.” Every action put in place by one in authority is an action filtered through the plan of God. [ILL. Egypt over Israelites... prepared them to return to Promised Land...]

ILL [D. Jeremiah]: Leader’s don’t always realize this. A mighty king of the ancient world was strolling atop the city wall of Babylon when he was swept away by his own pride: [SLIDE] “Is this not the great Babylon that I have built for a royal residence by my own mighty strength and for my majestic honor?” (Daniel 4:30 NET). [Blank Slide] No sooner had this mighty king spoken these words than he was reduced to the mentality of an animal. As a means of humbling Nebuchadnezzar, God reduced him to grazing in the fields on grass for seven years. Where was his pride then? Where was his ability to boast of his mighty accomplishments while he grazed like an animal?

At the end of seven years Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses and he began to worship the Most High God, the God of Daniel, the prophet, who had predicted to the king exactly what was going to happen to him. Nebuchadnezzar’s trial was [SLIDE:] “...by the decree of the sentinels; this decision is by the pronouncement of the holy ones, so that those who are alive may understand that the Most High has authority over human kingdoms, and he bestows them on whomever he wishes. He establishes over them even the lowliest of human beings” (Daniel 4:17 NET). [Blank Slide]

APPL: Many times in history, including around the world today, the church has suffered at the hands of rulers, but God has always been in control. Just as God is in control of those in authority over you!

We work to elect the best people possible to office, then bow before the Lord and say, “Your will be done.” It is God’s sovereign control over all the affairs of earth that allows us to live in peace and without fear of those who rule. No human ruler can unseat the One who rules in our hearts.

APPL: Trust God as you submit to those whom God has placed over you. Those in authority over you can only do as much as God’s power and God’s plan has decided beforehand will happen (cf. Acts 4:27-28). God’s desire is that you and I be faithful to Him, boldly representing Him well.

CONCLUSION: As we consider the great responsibility of our leaders, the wisdom they need to lead and rule well, let’s remember to pray for those who lead our land politically, as well as for all those in authority over us. The apostle Paul considers this of first importance for us. [SLIDE:] “First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people, 2:2 even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 2:3 Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God our Savior, 2:4 since he wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:1-4 NET) [Blank Slide]

Secondly, by God’s grace let’s seek to respond appropriately to those in authority over us. Let’s be truthful. Let’s be respectful. Let’s be calm and patient in how we respond. And let’s be self-controlled.

Finally, let’s remember that God providentially controls those in authority over us. Let’s trust God to accomplish His will in and through those in authority over us.

[Bow for Prayer]... Are there changes you need to make in how you respond to those in authority over you?... Will you trust God? Are you being truthful to those in authority over you?

Are you being respectful? Are you being calm and patient in your response? Are you exercising self-control? Do you recognize God's in control over your authority?