

Proverbs 2: 1 -10

After reading this text from Proverbs 2, I couldn't help but ask myself if I could remember a time in my educational career when I was as diligent and focused as the student was encouraged to be in verses 3 and 4.

My mind immediately went back to a time when I was in second grade. I was so focused on one particular project that it was downright scary. The task was simple: On paper, start from zero and keep counting until the teacher told me to stop.

At the end of the week, the student who counted the highest would be awarded a giant sucker. She proceeded to hold up the sucker and it was as large as dinner plate. Right then and there I knew it had to be mine. So, I began counting, writing down numbers furiously on my paper – and so did others – which made me write even faster. My parents learned early on that I had a bit of a competitive streak in me.

So, for an entire week, whenever there was a break in our lessons, or when I was riding home on the school bus, I would be counting. I'd even come in from recess early so I could be the first one back to the classroom to start counting – and I loved recess! This is how obsessed – I mean focused I was.

By the end of the week, my counting papers were so tattered, torn and crumpled, they looked like the Dead Sea Scrolls, but I didn't care. I was going to win that plate-sized sucker if that was the only thing I accomplished during my entire academic career. I'm not sure I ever again attained that level of focus and discipline.

The Bible says that it is this combination of desire and discipline that is needed to seek God and His wisdom.

The Bible says that if we call out for it, cry aloud for understanding, look for it and search for it, then we will gain understanding.

To me these verbs imply that there must be mental, emotional, and even physical expenditure of energy in our pursuit of wisdom and the source of all wisdom, God himself. As the old saying goes, nothing worth anything comes easily.

God is a generous God who loves to give freely to his children, but he also wants to see that we are serious about receiving his gifts. I am reminded of why Jesus' favorite teaching method is the parable. Parables give the serious seeker of truth an opportunity to have an "aha" moment – that moment when the light goes on after one has invested some time and energy into understanding the meaning of Jesus' story.

These are the truths we never forget - the ones that reveal themselves even though they are sometimes hidden in the story of our everyday lives. When we invest time and energy learning them, they become part of us. And it's so important that God becomes part of us – no I take that back. It's so important that we become part of God and embrace who God wants us to be, and in order to do this we make a commitment to learning God's Word.

In Psalm 119, we read of God's servant who states over and over again – no less than 8 times – that he vows to *"meditate on God's precepts and consider God's ways."*

v. 27 *"I will meditate on your wonders."*

v. 78 *"I will meditate on your precepts."*

v. 97 *"Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long."*

v. 148 *"My eyes stay open through the watches of the night that I may meditate on your promises."* – Now this is commitment. Sacrificing sleep in order to study God's Word.

During my college career I remember spending many hours trying to keep my eyes open through the wee hours of the night in hopes that I would memorize enough material to earn a passing grade in whatever class I was studying, but I

wouldn't call that sacrifice. I was just trying to catch up from the lost time I had had squandered earlier in the week!

But why?

Why would someone go through the pain, inconvenience and sacrifice of studying God's Word?

Because the psalmist is convinced that God's law can and will sustain him, preserve his life and rescue him?

Yes, but even more than this. The psalmist understands that God's words are a reflection of God himself. In other words, to love God's word is to love God himself. To ignore God's words is to ignore God.

v.135 *"Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees."*

For many, the idea of the written word being something that can save a life is preposterous notion. We're such skeptical and pragmatic people. Life rafts save people. Helmets, seatbelts, and maybe even doctors save people, but precepts, laws and promises? Aren't they just words on paper?

Maybe the best example I can give you for words saving people is the Emancipation Proclamation, signed on the first day of January 1863, by Abraham Lincoln.

Many skeptics said he wouldn't go through with it and obviously many were opposed to it, but as the record shows, when the parchment was unrolled before him, he took a pen and dipped it in ink, moved his hand for the place of the signature, but then, with his hand trembling, he stopped and put the pen down, saying, "I never in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper. If my name ever goes into history, it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it."

His arm was stiff and numb from shaking hands for three hours earlier that day, however, Lincoln continued, "If my hand trembles when I sign the Proclamation, all who examine the document hereafter will say, "he hesitated." So, the president waited a moment and then took up the pen once more, slowly and carefully writing his name.

Even though the immediate effects of the Proclamation were limited, Lincoln's signing of it changed forever, the relationship of the national government to slavery. As one newspaper wrote, "Slavery from this hour ceases to be a political power in the country ...such a righteous revolution as it inaugurates never goes backward."

If this can be said of a man-made law, how much more certain can we be with God's laws, precepts and promises?

For God has signed our Emancipation Proclamation not with ink that fades but with his son's own holy and righteous blood on the cross – and there's no reversing God's decision. But we must believe it, if it is to have any real effect on our lives.

The author of Proverbs goes on to tell us that we are to search for wisdom as if we are mining for precious metal.

I know there are many old mines scattered throughout my boyhood home in Southern Wisconsin. In those days, the precious metal was lead. When I lived in Butte, Montana, I learned about all the copper they extracted from the mountains to support the industrial revolution.

Perhaps there's a mining history around here that I'm unaware of. Whatever the case, Job gives us wonderful insight into how labor intensive, time consuming, and even dangerous mining can be. Job writes in 28: 3 -4, 9:

"Man searches the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness. Far from where people dwell. He cuts a shaft, in places forgotten by the foot of man.

Far from men he dangles and sways. Man's hands assault the flinty rock and lays bare the roots of the mountains."

Job is writing about literal mining, about the hard work of digging holes in the earth and bringing out of it ore that can be used to make all sorts of things that change the very way we live. And in describing mining he says it's difficult, dangerous, risky, and ... lonely.

If you want to make a difference in today's world, then become a miner. Not literally a miner, although I know that the college in Butte Montana has a good mining school, and one of its graduates who used to go to our church out there actually got a job at a gold mine in Nevada – and a young lady whose grandparents live in Michigan)

No, what I'm saying is that following God, becoming a disciple of God, being a serious Christian is a lot like mining. It can be difficult, dangerous, and yes, sometimes lonely.

Pastor, what are you talking about? How can you say this? We're trying to get people to convert to Christianity and you're telling them how difficult it is! Are you out of your mind?

Hey, if being a Christian is so much fun, don't you think there'd be a lot more of us?

Didn't Jesus even say that we need to carry our cross daily and follow him? This doesn't sound too fun to me...

What I'm saying when I say it's lonely is that ultimately your faith comes down to you and God.

Sure, your friends, family, and church family will encourage on your faith journey – and we are so thankful for their doing so – but ultimately it comes down to you going into your prayer closet, closing the door and meeting with God on a regular basis –
talking to him and listening to him

reading his word and racking your brain

crying out to him

and yes, even yelling at him and questioning him

and wrestling with him and

doing whatever it takes – or *not* doing whatever it takes, so that you will finally accept and submit to God's will for your life.

After this happens, you'll come out of your closet and be somewhat confident that God may in fact use you to change someone's world because he's been in the process of changing yours.

But this is a lonely path. Very few Christians let ever do this.

Why?

Because it's not fun, it's not entertaining. It's painful. Sometimes it's just mundane and boring. It's not self improvement per say. We probably won't lose weight or get a tan. It takes focus and time; an expenditure of emotional energy, and for what? For God's glory, not our own!

And this is what is so troubling for people!

If I'm going to exert that much emotional energy, I'd better reap the rewards, but it's for God's sake, not mine!

Christian, I don't want to rain on your party, but I'm here to tell you that the only way you can possibly change the world, is by letting God change your personal world.

Peter reminds us that there is something of far greater worth than gold, silver or any other precious metal one may be able to extract from the earth - He writes that trials come into our lives so that "*our faith – of greater worth than*

gold may be proved genuine and may result in praise glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Notice that it's our faith in Christ that brings honor and glory to God.
And it's the power of God's honor and glory that will ultimately change the world.

Dear followers of Christ, I don't have to remind you that we are living in an ever increasingly troubled and corrupt world. A world which is escalating in its hostility toward the Christian worldview, faith, and families.

Remember all the protests that broke out when the word on the street got out that Roe v. Wade was going to be overturned and abortion was going to be banned in America?

Remember even more recently when a famous businessman joined the Trump administration to help stop wasteful government spending, and the crazy protests that ensued?

Just in the past few years we've read and heard about how this organization or that institution which once prided itself as being a compass for righteousness and goodness has caved to the pressure of a society which has lost its moral bearings.

What used to appall the general public's sensibilities only decades ago has now become common place today. Why?

Because we've gone mining for all the wrong things!

Instead of looking to God for guidance, truth, and wisdom, redemption and salvation we've decided that whatever feels good is the truth, and the more famous and wealthier you are, the more correct your advice is to an unwary public.

*“Man searches the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness. **Far from where people dwell** he cuts a shaft, in places forgotten by the foot of man. Far from men he dangles and sways. Man’s hands assault the flinty rock and lays bare the roots of the mountains.”*

“the furthest recesses in the blackest darkness.”

“Far from where people dwell.”

“In places forgotten by the foot of man”

I don’t know about you, but this sounds like a very lonely place indeed.

And let’s face it, people don’t like to be lonely. Some people can’t even stand the thought of being alone for more than a few minutes. It’s unnerving for them because quite frankly, many of us don’t want to hear the still small voice that will definitely invite them to ponder their own purpose and existence.

But if you’re a Christian, you need to embrace the loneliness and your alone times, because when you do, you’ll be able to hear your Maker’s call - one that says to you and me ... *“Be strong and courageous, because I, your Lord and God am always with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

Amen.