



September 5, 2010
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God's Twitter: Wisdom for the Powerful Proverbs 31: 1-9

Our reading in Proverbs this morning is the very first time—the only time—we'll have heard wisdom from a mom to her son. The whole rest of the book is a father's wisdom, though dad has often advised his son to listen to his mom's wisdom too. This time we hear from mom herself . . . or almost from her. The writer is a son, but he's passing along some wise words from his mom. It's the wisdom of a queen mother for her boy the king. Kings are powerful people. As Mel Brooks observed in one of his movies, "It's good to be the king." It's good to be the king because you can pretty much have whatever you want to have, do whatever you want to do—whether they are good and godly things or selfish and hurtful things. The key for the powerful, for kings, is knowing what things to want, what things to do. Let's listen to a wise, godly, mom's advice to her son, the king.

Read Proverbs 31: 1-9

Were you surprised by her advice? If you were the queen mother, what would be at the top of your list of advice for your son? Maybe not these things—I'll bet most moms here would give more Christ-centered advice to their kids, and you'd be right on target. However, lots of kings, and some presidents, governors and congressmen, we know of could have saved themselves and their nation lots of trouble by listening to this mom's wise advice. Don't you think?!

Here's a simple summary in nonbiblical language: My powerful son who can have whatever he wants: don't spend all your time chasing skirts and partying. There's more to life, more to being powerful, than sex and booze. The people who really need to do a little partying, who could stand to forget their troubles a bit, are poor people who are struggling just to get by in life: let *them* have some beer and wine. *Your* job, my powerful son, is to open your hand to the poor. Do that and *heaven* will throw a party. If you can do that, then you'll probably be able to do all the *other* things your nation needs you to do: keep it safe from its enemies, make sure its laws are good and just and that people obey them, and make it easy for people to live and make their livings happily and in peace.

Now, what might this have to do with us? We are not kings, queens or queen mothers. Most of us probably never think of ourselves as powerful. But, if we think about it a bit, we can probably get it that most of the world sees every person in this room as powerful. We are citizens of the world's only super power—we are like Rome in the New Testament era, not Jerusalem—and we are more safe within our borders than almost any other nation, and we take for granted possessions and lifestyles that most of the people in the world can only imagine but never have. To top it all off, we know Jesus Christ and have an eternal destiny in him and are members of a wonderful church in a wonderful area of the world.

I know, beloved: some of us are out of work, some of us lost our homes, and this passage isn't exactly for you in that sense—except to say that wise governments have

responsibilities to you according to God. But, this passage is for most of the people in this congregation and in America. May God have mercy on me, I always have a wish list of things great and small, and if I were king, I'd have them all, I suppose. But that wouldn't solve things, really, would it? I mean, was there ever a king or president who didn't want things he didn't already have? David had several wives and hundreds of concubines, but one day what he *really* wanted was Uriah's wife Bathsheba—and who could stop him from having her? President Clinton, the recent Governor of South Carolina, and on down the list until you get to me, and you, too—all of us want things we don't have. What are credit cards and second mortgages usually about, what are office politics about, what are adultery, sex before marriage and pornography about, what is partying every time you possibly can about, if they are not about things we want, hungers we have and long to satisfy whether or not they are life-giving or life-stealing? More than almost any other people in the history of the world, we can have what we want to have, and do what we want to do. We are privileged and powerful. Not only does the world know that about us, God our Savior knows that about us, and has expectations of us. *Wise* and *practical* expectations, like the ones King Lemuel's mom had of him.

Part of the reason we do Go Sunday is that we want to live into God's expectations of us as his privileged and powerful people. It's not that we're trying to earn God's approval. It's more like we're in love with God and want to bring him joy. We know that one great way to do that is to go out into the communities around us and meet him where he is in places of need. So, that's what we did. Some were places of simple need like the pet hospital in Gig Harbor—and we were just lending a hand to a small business. Some were places that have government support, but still need a hand with things that won't get done otherwise. Some were with people who don't believe anyone even knows they exist. And some were with people who are downright desperate.

Here are three stories from people who were out in the community with God last Sunday morning. The first person is someone you already know and love, Diane Vaccaro.

Diane, your Go Sunday Team worked at a home right in your own neighborhood, didn't it? That sounds like it might have been an obvious and easy thing to do—but it wasn't so easy, was it? What was it about this project that required courage—that got you beyond your comfort zone?

My GO Sunday project was at the assisted living home in my neighborhood, just down the street from my house. It wasn't until my friend, Jayme Jones, started working there that I actually went inside. She had encouraged me to stop by and visit, so I brought cookies. I needed a purpose to be there. Just stopping by seemed a little strange since I didn't know any residents and I sure didn't want to look dumb just showing up empty handed. I met a few residents and used my loud voice. It was a lot of fun, which I wasn't expecting. I've dropped another batch of cookies (oatmeal this time, because Dorothy said she couldn't remember what they tasted like), and I've chatted with the residents in my front yard as Jayme walks with them down the street.

And, I've watched the care of the yard take a back seat to the care of the people who live inside the house. When GO Sunday project proposals were requested, I knew this was a perfect fit – I'd lead it, it was in my neighborhood, and it did not require any special skills. I asked Jayme for the number of the owner to ask her

permission to submit a proposal. That's when it became a more difficult task. Calling people I don't know, hoping people sign up for my team (picking teams on the playground all over again), more calling, and the worry about doing a great job. All of that was overwhelming to me. I delayed in making the next phone calls to Trisha, the owner, out of fear, then felt worse about not calling the let her know the progress of the project. All along the way, leading the project challenged me to step out in faith and confidence, right up to the day of the project when I prayed I would know how to lead the volunteers on my site well. They did such a great job in the yard. Just today Dorothy was outside my house telling me how nice the yard looked and how her son came by on Sunday to "visit" and check out the work we were doing. I'm so glad she liked it. I think I'll take her some more cookies.

Great idea. Thanks sister. This is Tim Eliason. Tim, over the past two years you and lots of others have helped Lorraine improve her home in the Olympic View Mobile Home Park—and that was part of her getting custody of her grandson, Danny. This year the Lord expanded that and gave you a vision for helping *everyone* in that needy community, but you just couldn't figure out *how* to do it. And then, to your surprise, God provided a breakthrough—and it was through Lorraine, wasn't it? Tell us about that.

- 1) This is a story of one being blessed...to be a blessing to others
- 2) I was with a group of Chapel Hill folks that have been helping Lorraine and Danny during the past year. And there have been some great results there.
- 3) And there is a similar need in the lives of many of her neighbors.
- 4) What really struck me about Lorraine was her compassion for others. She took up the cause of her neighbors and friends. So, even though she had health issues, a home in need of repair, and limited resources, she found a way to give of herself to others.
- 5) Earlier this year, our Saturday Morning Life Group felt called to live out a portion of the Life Group purpose – to be in service together. We took on a project at Lorraine's, and the seed was planted on that day to consider helping Lorraine help her neighbors.
- 6) We talked about Go Sunday sites in her neighborhood that might accomplish the same things that were done for Lorraine.
- 7) Included in that early plan was the idea of community, and Lorraine quickly agreed to be the Go Sunday site leader for a BBQ lunch **for** her neighborhood.
- 8) Lorraine visited her neighbors to see how we might be of help. The needs were great – some had stairs that were collapsing, some needed landscaping done. And many families simply could not afford to remove some of the stuff that had accumulated.
- 9) In the end, we developed 3 sites in Lorraine's neighborhood.
- 10) Throughout the day, I saw a living example of someone who was blessed, in turn being a blessing to others. This entire effort, on that day, in that neighborhood, was rooted in one woman's desire to share that same love that was poured out on her, in Christ's name.
- 11) It reminded me of Jesus' own words in Mark 12:41 where He noted that among the many who gave from their bounty, there was one woman who gave from her need, even all she had.
- 12) One man who received the help of an "army of green shirted people" last Sunday, was a bit overwhelmed that "a bunch of people with better things to do

would come here and plant flowers for me. I didn't think we mattered that much here."

- 13) It took more than our allotted 4 hours to finish. 5 sets of stairs were built or repaired, including a new set for a woman who walks with a cane and has repeatedly fallen down the steps. 5 homes received a landscape makeover including weeding, flower beds, tree trimming. And 7 trips to the dump to help some families unload some "junk in the trunk" of lives that they simply could not afford to get rid of.
- 14) And in the middle of day, in the middle of the neighborhood, a community gathered for lunch.

Thanks, Tim. Praise God. Finally, this is Deacon Jennifer Taylor. Jenn, the Go Sunday Team you led helped a family in Puyallup who is working to get their three children out of foster care and back into their home. How did we find out about this family? What help did they need?

We found this project because, as you know, Fostering Hope is a ministry that serves children and families in the foster care system. Long before GO Sunday we were asking agencies about the needs of foster children and Jeff Claire, one of the directors of a local foster care agency told us about the tremendous need to serve birth parent families who were working hard, and doing things right to get their children back. This conversation pricked my heart, so when GO Sunday rolled around I specifically asked for birth parent families who deserved our help. This family was referred to us because the local agency was impressed by their hard work and determination to be reunited with their kids.

They lost custody of their own children because they were living in squalor. I'm sure you can imagine how bad it had to be to have their 3 girls removed from the home. They live on a couple of acres at the edge of Puyallup and the home was nearly buried in blackberry bushes. It was also directly across the street from train tracks...as in about 100 feet from train tracks. CPS (Child Protective Services) removed the kids from the home because clearly it was not a safe place for them to live. You might wonder how people get to a place where they live like this, I did, but it was clear right away that they were a product of generations. This WAS normal, their families and friends share the same lifestyle. It was our hope to shake up the normal a bit and raise the standard for this young family.

When we first visited the site, they had already done the work of cleaning the home, but I could see that the yard was no place for children. Their case worker had asked if we could help with a fence and blackberry clearing so that the children would have a place to play.

The couple shared with us how they are working hard to get the girls back. The girls are 3, 4, and 6 years old; currently in the care of a foster home. Mom and dad are taking parenting classes and doing 8 hours daily of visitation. They told me they want to get married because they love each other! When we asked what they thought some of their needs were, the mom said she loves to read to the girls and that the oldest already knew how to read. She was so proud of that. She wanted books for them. I could see the problem: without a car she didn't have access to the library.

So at the site we built a fence, tore out more blackberries than you can possibly imagine, installed flower beds and repaired the entry way to their home. Thanks to the Children's Department here at Chapel Hill, we were able to take a big box of children's books and an easel. We took a few other things for the girls, but mostly, we made a HUGE difference in the yard...we made a safe place for the girls to play. In addition to the work our Chapel Hill family did, we invited a few volunteers from a local church to join our team and build relationship with the family. This church has a strong ministry to people living on the fringe and it is a church connection like this that will pull the family through.

Thanks, Jenn. What a perfect match for this family who wants so badly to be restored. Clearly, Jesus loves this family living on the fringe.

What a joy to hear these stories. I want to offer one more thought from this passage and about helping people precious to God. Sometimes we hear people talk about the "deserving poor." I get it: there's lots to be said for people who are willing to help themselves. However, we at Chapel Hill are known to be helping people who are not in any sense the "deserving poor." We are also helping the *undeserving* poor, the poor who are lying in beds they made for themselves. A few of our Go Teams did that. And every year we give tens of thousands of dollars away through our Deacon's Fund to people who would never be considered "deserving" exactly. Why do we do that? The answer has everything to do with Jesus and us. Did Jesus die for you because you and me because we deserved it? What if he'd waited until we did deserve it? It would've been a long wait—an eternity, actually—and the alternative would be hell instead of salvation by grace, because the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life; for at the right time Christ came to save the ungodly. Thank you, Jesus.

Go Sunday is about grace. God's grace to us—and what came around to us through Jesus goes around to others through us. How cool is that? What a privilege. What a joy—here, all over these communities and in heaven.

Now, as we get ready for our offering, I invite the Go Team leaders to come to the sides of the chancel. During the offering we'll get to see every single Go Sunday project. Let's pray.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Begin with prayer. Log in briefly: what was a high and a low for you last week?

Read

Have someone read the passage out loud. Then have a different voice read it again.

Reflect Individually

Take 3-7 minutes (depending on the group and what works) of quiet time for each person to reflect on the passage. Jot your reflections down. This is kind of a surprising passage: what surprises you, or what strikes you as unusual? This advice to kings is in our Bibles, there by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: why is this good advice to the powerful, to rulers. What's this passage have to do with *you* and how you live? What's it have to do with your church? With your politics?

Friends Reflecting on Scripture Together

Share your reflections with each other—you don't have to go around the circle, just share and see where your discussion leads you with the Spirit's help.

Pray

This week, skip telling each other your prayer requests. Simply tell God one thing you're thankful for and one thing you'd like him to help with. Don't forget to pray for your church and the nation and its leaders. After prayer, you may want to check in on some of your personal prayer concerns.