

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 2 September 2020

*Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 2 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV).*

I've never started a meeting like Peter starts his second letter. Especially this year, I've done dozens of Zoom, Webex, and Skype meetings. Never once have I started by naming myself and my belief in Jesus, then blessing all the other participants. Even when I was on church council and we started meetings with prayer, never once did I, or we, do it the way Peter does in this letter.

Missed opportunities.

The way Peter opens this letter is much like how most of the other New Testament books begin: by establishing the foundation of faith. He affirms his credentials as both a servant of Christ (and, thus, Christ's church, meaning other people), and an apostle of Christ (being a leader appointed by Jesus Himself). He then greets his audience: other followers of Jesus like himself who have received Jesus' gift of faith. Last, Peter blesses them with Christ's grace and peace that comes from knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Nope. I've never started a letter like that. Have you? Yet maybe we've done something not so different. If you think about it, in our own ways, we commonly introduce ourselves to groups by citing our credentials, greeting our audience, and imparting what we bring to them.

We do these things to establish common ground and levelled communication. Sometimes, we speak to an audience to command their attention directly, even forcefully. A good Biblical example of that would be in 1 Corinthians, where Paul spends much of the letter chastising and rebuking the church at Corinth before blessing them with better teachings. Other times, we speak to simply impart knowledge, which is what Peter does in this letter. No matter what our purpose is, like Peter here, we must establish our credibility with our audience before sharing our message with them.

Great. Now I sound like a speech teacher. Oh well. AGTJ if that's the case, because the apostle Peter's method of baselining communication matters a lot here. In 2 Peter, he shares a lot of hard teaching: stern words about heresy, and a great deal of condensed prophecy, sending his friends hard-to-understand information about the future end of days. Much of that would be difficult for faraway readers or even complete strangers to understand if Peter didn't first lay out a solid foundation.

That's how 2 Peter starts. It's good advice for any speaker anywhere, especially one who passed on words from the Lord. Next time I lead a meeting, I'll give it a try.

For further reading: Romans 1:1, Philipians 3:8, 1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 1:3

*Lord Jesus, thank You for speaking through Peter, for establishing understandability first.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 3 September 2020

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 2 Peter 1:3 (NIV).*

“All I know is I’m not home yet. This is not where I belong. Take this world and give me Jesus.” Those are words to a Christian song by a group called Building 429. I remember them because they were in one of the songs that my son sang as part of a Spoke Folk trip back in 2013. I’ve written about them long ago, but this verse made me think of that song, and that song made me think of Spoke Folk.

If you haven’t heard of Spoke Folk, they’re a youth mission organization. Groups of high school and college young adults bike from town to town (sometimes very long distances), riding during the day then put on Christian stage shows at host churches each night. The host church puts them up for the night, usually there at the church, and then the group heads out the next day to rinse and repeat. They do this all over the country. I encourage you to go to [spokefolk.org](http://spokefolk.org) to learn more about them and about tours in 2021.

Two of my three kids have been on Spoke Folk trips, and they tell stories of learning how much God provides for you while you’re journeying from place to place. You get to know both your peers and your Savior as you’re being physically drained and then spiritually challenged. You discover that you have everything you need when you have Jesus because Jesus provides the rest.

Take this world and give me Jesus: that’s in that song, and in a Spoke Folk show. And it could have been on the lips of the Apostle Peter as well. Before Jesus, Peter had worked his tail off but always had what he needed. After Jesus, Peter still worked hard but discovered Jesus had given him so much more. Everything Peter needed Jesus had provided through His Spirit. Forgiveness, peace, inspiration, love, kindness, knowledge, and a drive to persevere: Jesus gave all those to Peter. Over the next decades, Peter then shared them with people all over his world.

It’s the same message Building 429 was sharing in their song; it’s the same message the Spoke Folk shared when they sang that song. And others. Everything we need we have in Jesus; everything we need He provides. This place is the only home we can remember, but when we know the love of God, we learn that we aren’t in the home where we really belong. Where we really belong is where we will be the church of Jesus in His presence. Take everything else away and that will always be more than enough.

For further reading: Romans 8:28, 2 Peter 1:4

*Lord Jesus, You give everything I know and everything I need.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 14 September 2020

*EXCITING NEWS! Starting in October, you'll be able to subscribe to the new Practical Proverbial page where you'll receive these daily proverbials, weekly podcasts, links to other faith-building resources, and much more! Look for news and updates to come!*

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV).*

We aren't "home" yet (in that we aren't living in Jesus' presence in heaven just yet). But we're 'home' where we live now. Terra firma is the only home we physically know, and much of this fallen world is still extraordinarily beautiful and wonderful because it reflects the glory of God.

My wife and I took off the last 10 days (or so) and traveled to Colorado to see friends and plan for a family getaway next year. We lived in Colorado for 13 years; two of our kids were born there. Even though it isn't home anymore, I have to admit that part of me will always be there, and part of Colorado always goes around with me wherever I am.

It's because God Himself gave me that gift, gave us time to live in this beautiful place. I've been a Christian my entire life, but it was there in Colorado where I first dove deeply into what that Christian faith means. It was there that friends and a church first deeply taught me what is needed to follow Jesus, to live out believing in Him. What it means to be made righteous, sanctified, justified; what it means to take those things seriously. And even when I didn't take them seriously, I learned what it means to really be forgiven by the One who was truly wronged by all my pet sins. What forgiveness looks like, feels like, truly is.

A week ago, we drove up through the mountains and up into Breckenridge. The views are awe-inspiring; the town is vivacious; the weather was wonderful (yes, it was before the snowstorm). In my opinion, a person can't drive through mountain valleys, see the rays of light shimmer through peaks and trees, and see one's self as small but thankful to witness such beauty and not acknowledge the glory of the God who made it all.

Such acknowledgements are glimpses of heaven, brief looks at the glory of Jesus who is in our home there. Who is also in us here. He gives us what we need to live in faith here, and then encourages us with moments of refreshment when He knows we need them most. He does it when we are at home and yet still far from home. Jesus made both the mountains and their splendor, and we men and women who get to behold them. When we do, we realize He is our home.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 4:24, Hebrews 12:10, 1 John 3:2, 2 Peter 1:5

*Lord Jesus, I'm at home in You*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 15 September 2020

*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 2 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV).*

Maybe the Apostle Peter took his lead from the Apostle Paul, who said similar words in his letter to the church in Galatia. After all, they knew each other. Paul was talking about the fruits of Jesus' Spirit being evident as love, joy, peace and the rest. Here, Peter talked about implementing those, about how they build on each other.

Notice that the first trait Peter mentions is faith. Faith is the bedrock of the Christian walk. It is through faith that we believe in, then know, Jesus and all He says about Himself. It isn't simple knowledge; it is more than that. And it isn't just emotion; it's much more moving. Faith is a living connection to Christ through the Spirit He sent to us. Once you know Jesus, it becomes nearly instinctual. It is a God-led confidence that you know in your bones.

Without faith, acting good, having knowledge, exercising self-control, and all those other habits – even love – mean very little. Without faith, there is no confidence in the love and forgiveness of Christ. Without faith, our Christian life is meaningless.

With faith, everything is possible. With faith, hearts change, attitudes change, behaviors change, the present is no longer bound to the failures of the past. With faith in Jesus, life truly begins. Peter understood this.

And a word about self-control. My Concordia mentions that “according to many of the false teachers (of Peter's day), knowledge made self-control unnecessary.” How little things have changed in 2000 years, even with 'superior' technology and advanced university training. Knowledge is meaningless if it is not built first on the goodness that comes from faith. Knowledge of what is in this universe means nothing if it doesn't acknowledge that God first gives it to us. And without self-control, knowledge, even Godly knowledge, becomes a dangerous weapon. Without an acknowledgement that all human knowledge is based first in understanding God Almighty, then is it any wonder that atheism would pride itself on deep education (or education priding itself on atheism)? Knowledge apart from Christ means nothing. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. Apart from Jesus, nothingness is the norm.

Peter and Paul and their contemporaries understood this. I find it marvelous that Peter, the gruff, rough-and-tumble fisherman and first century 'working man' commoner, is the man who shared such tender advice for friends he may have only known in passing. In responding to believers who were being challenged by false teaching, Peter shares love and compassion instead of fire and brimstone. No matter who first led, for love's very reason, we can be thankful.

For further reading: Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 2:3, 2 Peter 1:8

*Lord Jesus, thank You for Your friend, Peter, and the words You gave him*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 16 September 2020

*For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:8 (NIV).*

Peter is talking about goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. Most people try to work on all these qualities simultaneously, though some might try to incorporate them into their lives one at a time, in the order Peter states.

No matter how we work through them, the qualities outlined here at the start of 2 Peter are ones that are productive for healthy spiritual growth. That is the message Peter was conveying: that by incorporating these things into how we live, we position ourselves to better grow in our faith in Christ. To be effective in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ means to truly accept who Christ is and what He asks of each of us.

You know what that means. To live with goodness is to be kind to others. To live in knowledge is to seek understanding with others. To live through self-control is to live with patience in an impatient world. To exhibit godliness is to hold one's self to a high standard, then set it for others. To show mutual affection is to have compassion. And to live out love means forgiving, empathizing, putting those other qualities together for the good of someone else.

You know: like Jesus does. Like Peter saw Him do. Like me and you don't seem to do very well very often.

Does Jesus hammer us because we mess it up? You also know the answer to that. Even when we don't meet the standard He lays out through Peter's words, Jesus is patient and loving with us again. Every day, Jesus' attitude is, "try it again. I love you no matter what." So, He picks us up, dusts us off, and puts us back in the daily fight called "living." He does that so that we'll get another chance to tell about who He is through what we say and do so that others might come to know Him as well.

How productive or effective are you in your knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? It's not just the trivia stuff, though that's nice to know. Instead, how productive are you at showing that goodness by being kind? Of demonstrating mutual affection by giving compassion? Of loving selflessly so that the other qualities have real meaning?

If you're like me (or Peter) assessing yourself honestly in that department can be an eye-opening challenge. Yet just because we aren't perfect doesn't mean we're disqualified from sharing Jesus. Doing our best, striving for the perfection He asks for. Self-owning these qualities helps us in that striving.

For further reading: John 15:2, Colossians 1:10, Titus 3:14, 2 Peter 1:9

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 17 September 2020

*But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. 2 Peter 1:9 (NIV).*

Yesterday, we talked about how incorporating the qualities of goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love into our lives helps us in better understanding our faith because Jesus helps us be more effective in living the life of service that He calls us to live. Today, Peter says that, if you don't have those qualities, you're handicapped. You're forgetful of vital things you need to remember.

Things like how hate is walking in blindness. Things like how Christ's blood washed us clean forever from the sins we so freely undertook. Things like how Jesus coming was foretold all the way back to Eden, and how His promised victory over Satan is already accomplished even as Satan doesn't really believe it yet.

Things like all the ways we put ourselves above God, above Jesus, above Holy Spirit; above all that makes us able to be good, smart, and loving. Perhaps that's the worst kind of blindness. A few days ago, I got a virus in my eye. I had chickenpox when I was a kid, and shingles many years ago. It turns out the virus came back and went into my eye.

Now, I'm stone deaf in my left ear; surgery a few years back to remove a tumor. Losing partial hearing actually wasn't a problem; the choice of a brain tumor over hearing in one ear was simple to make. The tumor is gone and I'm deaf on one side but otherwise just fine. But last week I had to seriously consider what it would mean to lose my sight, and the thought honestly terrified me. I was quickly falling into the self-absorption zone. Me, me, me; what about me?

So, I prayed. I prayed for God to heal me (and He's doing it). I prayed for patience to confront my terror (and He gave it to me). I prayed to be able to see (and so far I can). I prayed to not be blind. Thanks to God, so far the medicine is working. My eyes can see, but am I still really seeing? My eye is working, but what about how I see from my heart? Maybe there's still a sickness there.

Am I seeing the people around me who don't know kindness? Am I living out Jesus Christ's call to truly love my neighbor selflessly? Am I living out those qualities Peter mentioned so that others will want to know more about this Jesus who inspires them?

Of the types of blindness that could afflict any of us, perhaps not seeing through Jesus' eyes would be the very worst one of all.

For further reading: Ephesians 5:26, 1 John 2:11, 2 Peter 1:10

*Lord Jesus, heal the blindness of my heart and let me see others only as You would*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 21 September 2020

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:10-11 (NIV).*

Confirm your calling and election: what does that mean? Maybe let's put it this way: do you ever respond to a nudge? Do you ever feel like God is revealing to you something He wants you to do?

Let's keep it real: we aren't talking about something WE really want to do. We aren't saying, "you know, I really believe God is calling me to go buy a new Ford F-150." Maybe God is calling you to do that, but most of the time it isn't God wanting you to have a new pickup: it's you. And we aren't talking about, "I think God wants me to go to the store to buy beer." Granted, there's nothing wrong with beer though, to be honest, it probably isn't God telling you to go buy it.

We're talking about faith, not frivolity. About living out faith. From God's point of view, He's already called you, chosen you, to do things in this world. For some, that's ministry. For some, it's construction. For some, it's IT management. For some, it's something else; you get the picture. Indeed, the Bible, especially in the New Testament, is replete with verses about our being called by God. It was a subject Paul (and now Peter) spoke about in numerous places.

So how do we know when God wants us to do something in faith? Perhaps a few good 'smell tests' might help. Is your calling/choice in line with the Bible? If not, perhaps it isn't a calling from God. Is your choice/calling beneficial, to others or yourself, and is that Godly? If not, perhaps it isn't a calling from God. Will others be helped or harmed? Does the choice benefit Kingdom work and how? Most important, is it a calling or choice made in love?

Pastors are often 'called' to new churches. They receive a job offer from a new church, and then consider through prayer what Jesus is telling them in the offer. I'm no pastor, but I imagine that called pastors wrestle with those same questions when deciding how to answer the offer. The process isn't so different for we lay people.

This week will present you with many choices, different offers, maybe even a calling. When you aren't sure to answer, think back on some of those questions, then ask God what He's telling you. Is it a choice offered in love and does it line up with good things taught in Scripture? Believe me: when God wants you to know something, He will let you know one way or another.

For further reading: Psalm 15:5, Psalm 145:13, Romans 8:28, 2 Timothy 4:18, Jude 24, 2 Peter 1:12

*Lord Jesus, help me to understand Your holy calling in all my choices this week*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 22 September 2020

*So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 2 Peter 1:12 (NIV).*

Even the most honest people need a reminder now and then to stay along the straight and narrow.

These days, it's perversely fashionable to mock Vice President Pence for his policy of not being alone in a room with a member of the opposite sex. He does this out of respect for his wife, and to also remove any hint of sexual impropriety from his life. Pence isn't the only man to ever have done this. Billy Graham did the same thing; I believe his son, Franklin, may also. And President Harry Truman also kept to the same policy.

They're honest men. They didn't need to be reminded to do this right thing because they did it anyway. And yet, here's the Apostle Peter reminding them all the same. Peter wasn't alone. See the referenced verses below and you see that New Testament authors Paul, John, and Jude all said similar things.

Or there is my grandson, Thomas. Thomas is a rule-follower. If there is a rule that says, "do X", he does it. Or, "don't do Y," and he won't do it. He is only six years old but he has no problem with telling any adult, "we aren't supposed to do Z" if he catches someone (particularly his grandfather) doing it. Nobody needs to tell Thomas to do what is right. At his tender age, he has (thankfully) learned it already. And yet, here are Peter and the others doing just that (and his grandfather is echoing them).

Even honest, upright people need reminders now and then of what is right and what is wrong.

Mind you, our doing the right thing doesn't curry favor with Jesus. He loves us perfectly because of HIS love, His perfection, not because of anything we think we do to earn it. Yet Christ commanded us to be perfect, to live our lives working in perfection. And when we fail to do that, He asks us to come back to Him so that He can fix it. We all need that, even rule followers or good people who usually do the right thing even without being told.

Got skin? Got sin. Even the best of us needs forgiveness. Because of that, even the best of us need to be reminded now and then that Christ looks to us to model Him. Mike Pence, Billy Graham, Harry Truman, and Thomas Tew: good men all of them. Good company to keep; good people to emulate and follow.

For further reading: Philippians 3:1, 1 John 2:21, Jude 5, 2 Peter 1:13

*Lord Jesus, please keep reminding me of what You ask of me. Always keep Your truth in front of my eyes so that I may closely follow You and crowd out the world of sin.*



## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 23 September 2020

*I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body. 2 Peter 1:13 (NIV).*

If you read Isaiah 38, you read about King Hezekiah's prayer. Hezekiah, king of Judah and ancestor of Jesus, had been sick, and the Lord revealed to him that he would die. But Hezekiah prayed earnestly for God to heal him. So, God told Hezekiah that he would be healed, that his life would be extended by 15 years. Part of chapter 38 is a prayer Hezekiah said in praise of God after this. In the prayer, Hezekiah lamented that his body was frail, like a shepherd's tent; that he was like the end of a cloth that had been cut off a loom.

When you are sick, you feel like your world is ending, like you're a used cloth, a useless rag. Then, when God brings healing, your spirit lifts.

Centuries later, the Apostle Peter spoke similar words. He realized his body was frail. He who had spent several years walking man-to-man with Jesus Christ realized that he wasn't Jesus Christ, that he was only a man living in a body that would wear out. He who had been personally known by the Lord understood that he was still just a man, still in need of reminding that there were better days to come.

You and I: we need to know that same thing. 2020 has been quite a year, but if you're reading this, you're still alive. You're still you. You're still loved and forgiven and provided for by that same Jesus who knew Peter and healed Hezekiah. Your body (like mine) is like Hezekiah's (and Peter's): a tent, an imperfect dwelling place; my tent seems to be made in multi-room size. You and I, like the people of Bible times, need to be reminded that God selected us personally to be us, to live our lives in service to His eternal kingdom. We have important parts to play, and God has us where He knows it is best to play them. We may be frail, but with God empowering us, we have more than all we need. Just like Peter. Just like Hezekiah.

Every day brings new challenges and new adventures. Today, you may get a promotion. Today, you might win the lottery. Today, you may take an important step in a beautiful journey. Or, today may be the day you lose a job, lose a child, lose your way. Wherever today finds you, when you take a moment to breathe, remember that God is still with you. God still loves and provides and heals. God's Son is still on your side no matter what. With Him, the tent of your life can still keep out the worst of any wind, snow, or rain.

For further reading: Isaiah 38:12, 2 Peter 1:14

*Lord Jesus, You provide all for me. Thank You! Thank You for always protecting me like you did Peter and Hezekiah.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 24 September 2020

*I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 2 Peter 1:13-14 (NIV).*

Peter knew he would soon die, that the authorities in Rome would not let him live much longer. There are many people who believe this book wasn't even written by the Apostle Peter; Wikipedia supports this view. Whether Peter wrote it or not, one thing is still clear:

Life is a one-way death trip.

Just yesterday, after a devastating break-up, a friend of a family member killed himself; please pray for this young man's family. Who knows what demons plagued the poor man's mind as he concluded his only way forward was suicide. I wonder what might have happened if someone had told him that he wasn't alone, that the hurt of a relationship ending could be salvaged with the knowledge of a relationship with Jesus that never ends. This side of eternity, who can now know what he thought. He's gone.

Before this happened, yesterday my wife and I were talking about death during our daily devotion. Both of my parents are dead. We were discussing how faith is the only lens through which we can look at death and know there is hope. My parents died believing in Jesus, and we'll see them again one day. Until then, here on the Third Rock, they, too, are gone. Death is an awful thing; maybe the worst thing of all.

Yet Jesus defeated death. He defeated the eternal punishment of separation from God. Jesus physically, conclusively, empirically, scientifically, faithfully, Scripturally resurrected and defeated the fitting punishment for human sin. He proved it possible for mankind to be spiritually saved and made the pathway for that to happen. Peter knew this; Peter saw it; Peter touched his living Savior after He rose. Every day for the rest of his life, Peter lived one day closer to his own temporal death. And yet he knew that physical death here was only the beginning of the life we were actually born to live.

Whoever wrote 2 Peter, whether it was a stranger known only to history or Cephas the rock on whom Jesus built His church, is long dead and gone. The body of St. Peter rests under an altar in Vatican City. Countless others lie in graves all over the world. And yet for those who believed in Jesus, those are simply empty vessels awaiting the time when Jesus returns to reunite them with their spirits long departed. Until then, human life is a one-way death trip. We are each bound for the grave, joining Peter, other writers of the Bible, my parents, and the friend just lost. Come quick, Lord Jesus, and thank You for that.

For further reading: Isaiah 38:12, John 13:36, John 21:18, 2 Timothy 4:6, 2 Peter 1:15

*Lord Jesus, conqueror of death, all praise and thanks to You!*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 28 September 2020

*And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. 2 Peter 1:15 (NIV).*

Some time ago, I mentioned here the thought I'm about to share again. In a hundred years or so, if God wills that our world should continue to exist, nearly all the people on this planet won't know you or I ever existed. In a hundred years or so, outside our children, grandchildren, or close families, the only tangible reminders of our time here on Planet Earth will be the few possessions we leave behind. Those and, perhaps, a stone marker in some cemetery. Everything else that says "Dave Terry (or you) was here" will be gone. These words? Likely forgotten. Your successes at work? Almost definitely forgotten (unless you do something with societal impact or that generates fame). Your wishes, dreams, desires, thoughts, and opinions (especially online)? Gone, gone, gone.

Sobering thought, isn't it? And it's only Monday.

So how is it that we remember the words of a poor fisherman from Galilee two thousand years after they were written? The short answer (that you already know) is "they were inspired by Jesus, who is God." And the long answer (like the short one) is, of course, "Jesus." We remember Peter and his words because Jesus chose him. Because Jesus taught and spoke and worked and lived through him.

Because Jesus inspired your heart to read them. Have you ever seriously considered that phrase? This isn't some Biblical game of "Blue's Clues" where we figure out the clues "because we're so smart." No, if you are still reading these words, or if you've ever picked up your Bible to read it, or if you've ever prayed silently for any reason, it's because Jesus' Spirit first reached into your heart and inspired you to do it. My words aren't special; to be honest, neither were Peter's.

But Peter assured his friends that he would make every effort for them to remember what he taught (about Jesus) by taking it to Jesus in prayer. He would go to God and trust that God would do what He saw good to do. That God would pass on what He chose to through Peter's words (or anyone else's in fact).

So, two thousand years after Peter's prayers, we remember the things he taught about Christ because Christ inspired people to cherish, preserve, and teach them for all this time. I pray that same kind of prayer. Namely, that you would remember what God says in His Word, that you would learn the words of Jesus and share them with others. That you would more closely model His life (just as I'm working to do the same thing). If that happens, then it doesn't matter if anyone remembers us come 2120. What matters most will already be known.

For further reading: Luke 9:31, 2 Peter 1:16

*Lord Jesus, I pray, use these words to share Your inspiration so that people after us may know You.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 29 September 2020

*For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 2 Peter 1:16 (NIV).*

Last week, my 99-year-old third-grade teacher called again. I've written before that she and I keep in contact. She's retired and living in Arizona, and last week was her birthday. We sent her a card, and she was calling to thank my wife and I for it. We talked for about 20 minutes, talking through plans for her centenary party. I relayed to her that I was reading an excellent book about U.S. Grant, and we both talked about how Grant had lived in Galena, Illinois (not far from Clinton, Iowa, where she had taught school and I attended). We talked about how Grant had been given the house, and we had both toured it years ago.

We were eyewitnesses to something from history.

And I remember (from way back in third grade) how she told our class that she grew up in the same town as Robert Wadlow, who is the tallest man ever recorded (he was 8 feet, 11 inches tall). She had known him when she was a little girl. Eyewitness, again.

My parents grew up in the 1930s, and Mom used to tell me how, at Decoration Day parades, veterans of the Civil War still marched. And my Dad spent summers during World War II on the Jersey Shore, where sometimes debris would wash up from German U-boat attacks that had taken place far over the horizon. Me, I personally witnessed 9/11/01 in Washington DC.

Eyewitnesses yet again.

Peter was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus. He participated in it. He saw the miracles; he knew the man. Peter was there at the Transfiguration. And when the thousands were fed. He was there during the Last Supper, and in Gethsemane, and at the cross. And Peter was there when Christ resurrected, for the next 40 days while He taught, and when Jesus rose into heaven. Peter wasn't just passing on things he had been told learned. Peter was sharing what he had seen and experienced himself.

Even after two thousand years, his words are still relevant, still true, still riveting for us.

What have you witnessed in your life? You may have stories of famous people you met, big events you saw in person. Or you may simply have stories about average, everyday occurrences in your life. Both are important. After all, Jesus witnessed to the woman at the well, and to a paralytic caught by the pool. And to thousands of hungry people on hillsides. They were average, everyday people, too, yet they witnessed the extraordinary love of God in person. I'm betting you have as well. Ninety-nine years from now, what will your witness be?

For further reading: Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 13:26, 2 Peter 1:17

*Lord Jesus, thank You for those who share Your story, for those who talk about encountering You*

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## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 30 September 2020

*He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. 2 Peter 1:17-18 (NIV).*

Did you know that Tokyo Disneyland is located in the town of Urayasu in Chiba Prefecture (think 'zone' or 'state') about 10 km south of Tokyo? That fact became known to me (even though I've actually been to Tokyo Disneyland) when I was watching a DisneyPlus show on how it was built. Tokyo Disneyland was the first Disney park built outside the United States, opening in 1983 (just a few months after EPCOT opened in Florida). It is modeled on both Disneyland (in California) and the Magic Kingdom (in Florida), and consists of most of the same themes, areas, and attractions that comprise those other two parks.

But recently, Tokyo Disneyland has begun re-imagining (or "Imagineering" in Disney-speak) some of the attractions around Japanese thinking. You'll still find Mickey Mouse, Cinderella, and all the other Disney characters, but if you go to Tokyo Disneyland, you'll see them in distinctly Japanese presentation; as if they were conceived with Japanese customs, thinking, and ways of life in mind. I would imagine you'd find the same thing at the other non-USA parks, in China and France.

Tokyo Disneyland is successful because it was as if the designers heard a voice from heaven. No, the voice wasn't Walt Disney. Instead, the park is successful because it took the idea of Disneyland and made it understandable to the Japanese. Sure, the park is fun and extravagant. It is also approachable by anyone in Japan; a place open and inviting and full of wonder and amazement in ways that anyone can easily understand. It is happiness in the face of adversity, family instead of fear.

You know: like Jesus. Like God. Like what it must have been like to follow Jesus during His brief sojourn through first century Judea. Like how it still feels when you encounter Him and He addresses you, meets your need, in the most basic, fundamental ways. He provides for us. He gives us love, each other, all we need. He abides with us during the tough times. He gives us knowledge and reason and hope and power and energy and, most of all, His divine love.

And He does it without the Disney glitz, though I have to say that 'the happiest place on Earth' makes me happy. I love going there; I loved going to Tokyo Disneyland many years ago. I love that such a place was designed just to make people happy. Yet I love Jesus more. Hopeful togetherness and happiness are things Jesus wants for us now, in or out of some amusement park. Maybe Walt knew that, too.

For further reading: 2 Peter 1:19

*Lord Jesus, thank You for Your words from Your sacred mountain.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 5 October 2020 Today's Topic: Prophets

*For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 (NIV).*

Peter echoed Samuel in this verse. In 2 Samuel 23, the Israelite judge said "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue." Samuel was a prophet; he spoke words that God inspired him to speak on His (God's) behalf. So, what is a prophet?

A prophet is a person chosen to speak for God. In Old Testament days, God Himself chose His prophets. Sometimes that person was a rabbi, or a teacher; think Samuel or Nathan. Others, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, were charismatic men who God chose to reveal His messages. Still others, like David and Solomon, were known leaders. In our time, there are people who term themselves "prophets" though it is unclear whether or not their commission as prophet is God-ordained or not.

No matter who the prophet was (or is), they carried a message from God. Moses spoke directly with God and led His people out of slavery. Samuel told Eli (the chief judge) that his sons were doing evil. Samuel also took God's anointing to Saul to bless him as Israel's first king. Nathan confronted King David about his sins and vectored David back to repentance. Daniel interpreted dreams and befriended his enemy on God's behalf. Isaiah and Jeremiah pronounced God's punishment for centuries of Israel defying Him. Today, we know these things happened because they are contained as accounts in God-inspired Scripture. There are many others. They're still vital to our understanding who God is and how we, His people, should live our lives.

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul said that, "all Scripture is God-breathed." All of it, even the uncomfortable parts (like the ones in Joshua where Israel smites the rebellious people of Canaan...or the ones where Jesus and so many others condemn sins that we overlook today). All the Bible is God's divinely inspired word that He revealed to dozens of authors over fifteen hundred years. The Bible we read today is astoundingly identical to the earliest fragments we have of Psalms, the book of Isaiah, and many books of the New Testament. We know this from archaeological evidence.

It's as if God wants us to know something about Him. As if He chose us to say things for Him. Imagine that.

That's what the words God gave to the prophets tell us. They revealed aspects of God's character, His will for us as His treasured creation, and how He wants us to live with each other. People have always struggled with this; it's the story of mankind going back to Eden. And yet all the prophets, even up to Peter, still carried the true message that God is our Lord of love, justice, forgiveness, and life.

For further reading: 2 Samuel 23:2, Acts 1:16, Acts 3:18, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 1:11, 2 Peter 2:1

*Lord Jesus, You give us Your words through the prophets. You spoke through them to give us messages we need to hear. Thank You.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 6 October 2020 Today's topic: What About Differences

*But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Peter 2:1 (NIV).*

“Is it according to the Bible?” That’s the only test to apply to things people say and do about God and how we should follow Him. Is what they’re saying in line with God’s Word? Is it something Jesus commanded? Is it Godly?

As of the 2010 census, Celina, Texas (where I live) has a population of 16,315 people. At present, there are 16 churches, of which six are Baptist. The rest are non-denominational, Assemblies of God, Mormon, Methodist, Roman Catholic, or Church of God. Within the rest of Collin County, there are over 100 other churches serving over 1 million people. Each one of them teaches something slightly different about Christianity because many people may believe slightly different things.

Now, it’s nothing new that, if you can’t find what you’re looking for in one church, you can go to another (especially in north Texas). That goes back all the way to the Protestant Reformation. Yet, in truth, it goes back all the way to the time of the disciples, just after Jesus ascended to heaven. In those days, the small but quickly growing sects of Christianity met in peoples’ homes. Then as now, as long as it was preached that Christ was crucified, the rest of what was taught was of secondary importance.

Then as now, when teachers of old would attribute their own opinions and teachings to Jesus, trouble soon arose. Heresy doesn’t require much to take root. In fact, all it takes is a little human pride and darkness and soon the seeds of division begin to sink toxic roots.

In our day, hundreds of denominations in the Christian world preach slightly different messages. One would hope that the only denominator between them would be the Word of God. “Ecumenism” as a theory seems appealing; that there would be truths which are universal to Christ’s church. In practice, well, that rarely seems to be the case. Hence, in a small town like my own, there are sixteen different formal congregations and who knows how many others. They start because one or more people find something about church doctrine or practice that just doesn’t scratch their itch.

And that’s the problem. After all, it’s not about me.

It’s about Jesus. Peter knew that. He knew that divisions would come, groups would splinter, even in his own time when there were still hundreds of people alive who had personally encountered Christ. People would either deliberately or inadvertently steer the church wrong. He warned his friends – and us – to beware of such things. The good news is that the Good News is the only standard by which we need to compare. If what is said lines up with the Good News of Jesus, then all’s well. If not, well, then maybe it’s time to pass it by.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 13:1-3, Jeremiah 6:13, Acts 3:18, 1 Peter 1:11, 2 Peter 2:2



*Lord Jesus, please always keep Your holy word before us. Let it be the only standard by which we may gather in Your Name.*

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## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 7 October 2020 Today's Topic: The Bakker's and Us

*Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 2 Peter 2:2 (NIV).*

Do you remember Aimee Semple McPherson? If you don't, Ms McPherson started the Foursquare Church. She was one of the most famous charismatic preachers of the 1920s and 1930s. Her church still has 7 million members worldwide. That's an amazing testament to the power of God's Word because, like so many others, Ms McPherson proved herself all too human. In 1926, she was reported as kidnapped from a beach in California. Several weeks later, she was found in Arizona, where it was reported she had been living with a former church worker. Over the next 18 years, there were unconfirmed reports of other affairs and other shady behavior. "Sister Aimee" died of an accidental Seconol overdose in 1944.

Or there was Jim Bakker. If you grew up in the 1980s, you'll remember the story of Jim and Tammy Faye: televangelists famous for their outrageous 'prosperity gospel' ways that ran contrary to the simple message of the real Gospel. It wasn't surprising (but was tragic) how quickly the Bakker's life disintegrated following the revelation that Jim had an affair with a staffer, then paid to keep her quiet. Jim and Tammy Faye divorced. He served time in prison; she remarried before succumbing to cancer in 2007. Jim Bakker was paroled in 1994, and in the 26 years since, has remarried, started another thriving ministry, and is back on TV again.

Those who are entrusted with the privilege of carrying the Word of God will find themselves under attack by the evil one. That shouldn't be surprising. Satan doesn't attack people when & where they're strong: he hits us in our weak spots. He attacked Sister Aimee, and the Bakker's, and Jimmy Swaggart, and the Schuller family. If you stand up and say "I believe in Jesus," Satan will gladly paint a target on YOUR back. He'll enthusiastically use others to do it.

But even worse than that is letting him lead others astray. Those entrusted with the Word of the Lord must always be on their guard that they are faithfully ministering it. If they don't, Satan will hit those weak spots and exploit them. In doing so, he'll wreak havoc on the trust and faith of others, and bring disrepute on good works that God has already done. When the Bakker's fell, many thousands of trusting believers became disenchanted. Something similar happened to many people who followed Aimee McPherson.

It's true: our God is much more powerful than that. But why put Him to the test? Wouldn't it be much better to simply stay on the straight and narrow and not allow evil to gain a foothold? Sure, it would, but in our fallen world, that's easier said than done. Temptations are tough to resist; I know this. So did Bakker; judge against God's Word whether his current ministry is true to that Word, then respond accordingly. Forgive generously while moving forward wisely.

For further reading: Jude 4, 2 Peter 2:3

*Lord Jesus, forgive those who work against You. Help me to stay true to Your way.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 8 October 2020 Today's Topic: No Matter Who

*In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. 2 Peter 2:3 (NIV).*

On one side of the political aisle, the presidential candidate was accusing his opponent of being a disloyal so-and-so who would bring about bloodshed. The opposing candidate responded in kind by attacking his opponent as a big government tyrant who wanted to be king. Both men were famous and accomplished; both said they wanted what was best for the country.

Sound familiar? Only if you've read about the election of 1800 between President John Adams and Vice President Thomas Jefferson. Vitriol knows no bounds, and it fairly split the young United States. That election ended up in the House of Representatives, where Jefferson was elected and Aaron Burr was elected as Vice President (Four years later, while still Vice President, Aaron Burr murdered Alexander Hamilton).

Or there was the 1860 election in which the man now regarded as the greatest of American presidents, Abraham Lincoln, was viciously slandered by two opposing political parties. When Lincoln won, one of those parties eventually led eleven states to secede and start the Civil War. Even during the war, Lincoln was called terrible names by his own people and supporters. How much things haven't changed.

Were those stories, names, and such fabricated? Some were, some weren't. The Ninth Commandment doesn't seem to care. We are not to bear false witness no matter what; period; no matter who's on the ballot, no matter who it puts on the cross. We are not to lie under any circumstances.

We are to remain truthful because most people seek the truth, seek to be part of the truth. Nobody likes being lied to, and nobody wants to be called a liar. Jesus knew this with the same heart that He knew how people IN HIS CHURCH would willfully lie, slander, and do whatever they needed to do to gain power. That hasn't changed, either. Why, hardly a month goes by without some news story concerning sexual abuse in the church. Sex crimes, embezzlement, lying, tax fraud, adultery, violence, even murder: it's almost as if the church is made up of sinners, in desperate need of a Savior. Good thing we have Him.

It's nothing new when people we entrust with power – teachers, leaders, clergy, etcetera – abuse that power. Usually the first indication is how they've lied about it. And they need to be held accountable. We need to do what Peter would have done: tough love and discipline. That will only work if it is first begun with the love of Jesus and honest forgiveness. We need to call out the exploitation, caringly but in determination. Otherwise, we share in their sin, no matter who they are on the ballot, in the pulpit, or looking back at us in the mirror.

For further reading: Exodus 20:16, 2 Corinthians 2:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 2 Peter 2:4

*Lord Jesus, help me to forgive as You do. And help me to uphold Your loving standards and justice.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 12 October 2020 Today's Topic: Keep It Real

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. 2 Peter 2:4-9 (NIV).*

Let's keep it real: there is more to these verses than simple explanation...except that there actually is a simple explanation. I won't keep you in suspense: God abhors sin. He won't tolerate it. He can't because He's God and He's holy. These verses give repeated examples of how God both punished unrepentant sin and preserved those who repented. Peter gives several examples of this. Rebellious angels; Noah; Sodom and Gomorrah; Lot: Peter lists them all as examples of those who both rebelled against God and those who clung to God's promise.

Which one are you? Be real, be honest. Answer: both.

Make no mistake: "the Lord will not leave them in their power." The wicked will only rule so long; sin will only look like it is victorious. In reality, in the long-game, in talking about both now and in eternity, the Lord NEVER abandons those who believe in Him.

Yet look in the mirror and make no mistake about something else (especially if you think you're doing just fine): we all have the potential to rebel against God. Even the most 'righteous' among us. Without the righteousness of Jesus covering us, we're as bad as those condemned to hell. The angel removed Lot and his wife from Sodom before it was destroyed, yet Lot's wife doubted God and went rogue. Even Noah, who had trusted God for a century or more while building the ark, gave in to temptation and got himself good and drunk.

Even you. Even me. Even in every one of us is a sinful nature, screaming to break free at each and every moment. In each and every one of those moments, remember Jesus. Remember that He isn't indifferent in our lives. Remember that He's always there with us, beckoning us to turn and start over. And, even when we fall, remember that He who abhors sin is always there to pick us up and begin again.

For further reading: Genesis 6:1-8, Genesis 19:16&24-25, Numbers 26:10, Psalm 37:33, Matthew 10:15, Romans 9:29, Romans 15:31, 1 Timothy 3:6, Hebrews 11:7, Jude 6-7, Revelation 3:10, Revelation 20:1-2, 2 Peter 2:10

*There's a whole world here, Lord, fighting against You. Grant me your strength to be in it but not of it.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 13 October 2020 Today's Topic: Hawaiian Coffee and Sin

*This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings. 2 Peter 2:10 (NIV).*

Yesterday, my wife and I drank up the last of our Hawaiian coffee. We went to Oahu last year and bought a bunch of different coffees from a local plantation. Yesterday, we drank the last of them. First-world problem, right? Yep. And, as you'll remember, yesterday I wrote here about keeping it real, about how all of us have a sinful nature screaming to get out (even those of us who think we have all our stuff wired tight). How are these related?

I was at a men's retreat this weekend where our speaker, Tullian Tchividjian, talked about how he once preached to his congregation, "if you only knew my inner thoughts even now, you would throw me out of here." He was a VERY compelling speaker, and my own life story is so much like his that it's shocking. Check him out at [www.tullian.net](http://www.tullian.net); I'll share more of his words in the posts to come.

So, what does a retreat speaker have to do with Hawaiian coffee? Well, if you only knew what I used to think or do, you'd never read these words again. Some of you do, and some of you know my back story; weave your way through ten years of these posts and you'll find it there. I spent so much of my life doing un-Christ-like things, and I hurt so many people. Yet now I'm thankful to God every day that you still come here to read, and I hope I'm doing God's work in making your time useful.

Left to our own devices, every one of us would gladly give in to our corrupt desires. We would enthusiastically give God the finger; we would gladly hurt those angelic beings sent to aid us in our troubles. Have you ever known stubborn people so bull-headed that they'd rather see their own houses burn down than accept your help putting out the fire? When Tchividjian's life came crashing down, he reached out for help and was rebuffed by many of the bold Christian people who had always been his friends; I could share similar experiences. And, for a while, he (and I) felt bitter, cursing God for misfortunes we'd brought on ourselves.

Yet, like a cup of Hawaiian Joe, Jesus offered hope. He beckoned Tullian (and me) back, working His outrageous grace through other new friends and strangers. God's mercy showed up while mine ran out, and thanks be to Him for that. Warm, inviting, energizing, blessed, and exactly what we need: when we least deserve it, Jesus offers His sweet forgiveness and puts us on the road back home.

But now that we're out of coffee, when are we going back to Honolulu?

For further reading: Jude 8, Jude 16-18, 2 Peter 2:11

*Lord Jesus, thank You for always reaching out, even when I fight You off. Thank You for the witness of bold friends, and Your tender mercies.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 14 October 2020 Today's Topic: Better Angels

*This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. 2 Peter 2:10-11 (NIV).*

According to my Concordia reference Bible, verse 11 references Jude 9. And Jude 9 references apocryphal books called "The Assumption of Moses" and "The Apocalypse of Moses." These books are lost to history; we don't fully know what they said. Verse 11 also references an account, contained in Jude 9, of the archangel Michael arguing with Satan over the body of Moses. Because we don't have copies of the lost books, we can only speculate if Jude was referencing one of them. We must accept Jude 9 (and 2 Peter 2:10-11) at face value. But this brings up other questions:

Do angels fight for us? Do angels work on our behalf?

Angels are heavenly beings created by God, having more powers than men but not made in God's image as humans are. Jude (and Peter) argue that angels who cling to God are incorruptible and do not bring abuse, disrepute, or sin on God, other angels, or humans even as we humans bring sin going the opposite way.

That's good to know because, in this life, there is sin. In our lives, we are sinful and we do sins. In this world, sinful people oppose us, hurt us, complicate our lives as we do theirs. Sometimes, in a fallen world, we need help from others who haven't been corrupted by sin. I tell the story of my son, who was 2 years old and upstairs in our house. He and I were home alone one Saturday, and I was cleaning, and ran downstairs to grab something. I immediately heard the music on our radio blaring at top volume. Running back upstairs, I assumed my son had been playing with the radio, yet I quickly saw that was impossible. He was all the way across the room, holding a bottle of bleach water in his hand. He'd sprayed a little in his eyes and was crying. Scooping him up, I quickly rinsed his eyes and made sure he was ok, then went over to turn down the music.

I maintain someone else was there, cranking up the volume to get my attention. I think it was an angel. Was it Michael there, turning up the radio? I have no idea...but SOMETHING happened. Either way, it happened so that sinful me would help my son when he needed it. If you think about it, other things happen in our lives that aren't easily explained. Perhaps these are instances of Jesus working through angels He sends to help us. Peter and Jude might have agreed.

For further reading: Jude 9, 2 Peter 2:12

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the angels You send to work in our lives, for helping us through them.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 15 October 2020 Today's Topic: He Was Right

*But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. 2 Peter 2:12 (NIV).*

I have a confession: I haven't always professed my belief in Jesus this way. In fact, I spent quite a few years being a cocky, profane hypocrite. I said I was a Christian, but I only would have told you that if you had pressed me on it. I was scared to do otherwise. Other than that confession, nothing about my words, demeanor, or attitude would have told you I was anything other than just another fool with a loud-mouth who said too much of too little worth.

This point was brought home to me by friends with whom my wife and I visited last month. We were in Colorado and were invited over to see some friends we hadn't seen in many years (from our time in Italy, in fact). Our friend, Wanda, told her husband, Brad, that she had been reading some of these Christian blog posts. Brad's remark: "that doesn't sound like the Dave Terry I remember."

He was right. You see, I could have been the guy Peter was talking about in verse 12. I was an unreasoning animal, a creature of sinful instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed. My words and actions brought disrepute on God for many years. Yes, I believed, but I was a hypocrite. Profane, immature, unreasonable, drunken, unkind, dishonest: keep it up with the negative adjectives and more than a few would stick to me. As a young man, and for many years, this was my pattern. Even after God blessed me with a wife, a family, and success; even after rediscovering faith and what it really meant. Jude could have been talking about me when he said, "these people slander whatever they do not understand."

Thanks be to the Lord that He's better than me, that He has outrageous mercy and grace. That He sends other people, like my friends, to witness with their words and lives. Sometimes it doesn't sink in immediately. Sometimes we push against the goads, we struggle against what we know is right. Pride will do that to us. A little pride is the engine of satisfaction, but too much of it can douse that engine in dangerous fuel.

There's a better way. In every moment during my most distasteful days, Jesus was there. He was patient; He was sinless; He was providing for me; He was beckoning me to change. It took time for me to listen, and listening meant stripping down my soul until I had no place left to turn but to Him. And that's when the good times truly began.

For further reading: Psalm 49:12, Jude 10, 2 Peter 2:13

*Lord Jesus, all I can say is "thank You."*

## Practical Proverbial, 19 October. Today's topic: Balaam's Donkey Today

*They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. 2 Peter 2:13-16 (NIV).*

Peter doesn't have kind words for people who have willfully indulged in their sins. I was one of them, for a very long time. I think about that now, and I'm ashamed. Even as I'm so imperfect now, I'm ashamed of who I was, what I said and did, ashamed to have hurt others. Ashamed to have dishonored God and my family and myself.

Here's the kicker: even though I haven't done such things in years, I did them. I sometimes still think of them. Sometimes, the lust creeps back into my mind. Sometimes the bad language still seeps out of my mouth. Sometimes I'm still immature and intolerant and angry. I'm still sinful. On my own, I still don't deserve Jesus' forgiveness. I recognize it, am sorry for it, wish I could make amends for it.

But I can't. And neither can you. And, best of all, Jesus knows it. He recognizes it. He and only He makes you and I righteous. On our own, we aren't righteous, but with Him covering us, He makes us worthy, makes us righteous. On our own, like Peter says, we're like Balaam, who led the Israelites astray only to be rebuked – and saved – by his donkey. We're foolish, pursuing our own brand of wisdom until reality smacks us in the head to get our attention. With Balaam, it was a donkey, swerving off the road to avoid God's avenging angel, who Balaam couldn't see.

Yet with us, it's that righteousness. Jesus forgave us. He took away our sin and the death-consequence for it. We won't spend eternity apart from Him, and that eternity begins now. More, when taking away our sin, He took away our shame, our guilt, our self-punishment. When those bubble up, He beckons us to think of Him, of the nail marks in His hands, of all He did to build up His church, of His solid love.

In the long run, it's better to cling to that than the sadness of what's passed.

For further reading: Numbers 22:4-30, Deuteronomy 23:4, Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, Ephesians 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:7, James 1:8, Jude 12, Revelation 2:14, 2 Peter 2:17

*Lord Jesus, always remind me of Your unfailing love and sacrifice for me. Welcome me home when I forget these things.*



## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 20 October 2020. Today's topic: His Much Better Way

*These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 2 Peter 2:17 (NIV).*

Have you ever gone through times in your life when you felt desolate? Perhaps you lost a spouse, or a child, or a parent? Perhaps you did your best and still lost your job. Perhaps you had to declare bankruptcy, or your house burned, or your pet died, or you found out you have a terrible disease.

You get the drift. Most of us have been there. Why, even if something dreadful hasn't happened in your life, I'm betting today you've experienced something that left you feeling desolate, barren, alone.

Here's the bad news. It can get worse. You can shut your heart out to God completely and denounce Him. He won't punish you. No, He'll do something much worse. He'll do to you the same thing He did to the nations of the Old Testament. God can remove His favor from your life. God can remove His protective hand from your life and let the prince of this world reign in it. All it takes is for you to turn your back on Him and deny Him. It can get very much worse, my friend, and I hope it never does for you.

This is the kind of people Peter is talking about in this verse: people who have denied God, who have abandoned Him. They live in spiritual and emotional misery, in constant sin and constant regret. I wouldn't want to live in a world without love, but there are many, many people who don't care about that. Hell may very well be fire, brimstone, and torture, but I think that it is also something much worse. Hell is a place where everyone exists in the absence of God's love. It isn't punishment: it's God accepting the choices we made and demanded He accept. It's His turning us over to the consequences of our choices. Fire and pain would be easy compared to living through eternity with a barren heart.

These were the kind of people Peter was describing. Darkness was their final destination.

Don't let it be yours.

Making sure it isn't yours is easier than you might think. It starts with saying to Jesus, "I've sinned. I'm a sinner. Forgive me." Say it and mean it. "I believe in You Jesus. You're the only God. You're my savior. Save me." If death and eternal misery can happen in a blink, then so can eternal life and light. Light shines in an instant. In fact, the light of Jesus was what Peter, Jude, and the rest of the apostles were yearning to share with everyone they met. It's even more so today.

This world shows us desolation and pain. Why settle for that when Jesus invites us to be part of His much better way?

For further reading: Jude 12-13, 2 Peter 2:18

*Lord Jesus, forgive me. I'm a sinner. I believe in You. I need You. You are my only Savior.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 20 October 2020. Today's topic: Knowledge Starts With Jesus

*For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them." 2 Peter 2:18-19. (NIV).*

Did you know that, just this week, scientists discovered 2 new organs in the human body? That's right, doctors in the Netherlands announced they had just discovered 2 previously unknown salivary glands in the human skull. The story can be found at <https://www.sciencealert.com/chance-discovery-reveals-mysterious-organ-lurking-in-human-head-missed-for-centuries>.

This isn't in some new species, discovered in some remote South American jungle cave: this is in the middle of every person's head! Right behind the nose and right in front of the brain: BOOM! Two undiscovered organs that learned professionals have been overlooking for hundreds of years, assuming they were something else. But our learned professionals know more than common people, right?

It brings me to Peter's point: just because someone is educated, learned, even experienced doesn't mean they have all the answers. If you want answers, go to God. Period. Whenever we have questions about that, repeat that last point: go to God.

Mind you: it is a good thing – a blessing – to have human curiosity and people who are deeply educated about many things. I don't know much about human anatomy (other than mine is overweight), but I'm thankful God inspired others to learn about it. I don't know how to weld but I'm thankful there are people like my son, who is highly trained to do this difficult work. I can't do many things that others can, but, then again, most others don't have my skills either. Thanks be to Christ for all of us.

Yet when it comes to real answers – the ones about life and death – then all the education in the world could make me (or you) a slave to this world. Indeed, many who are highly educated try to lead others astray. We as a species have misplaced God from His rightful place in the natural order and tried to replace Him with the shabby false gods of 'reason' and 'knowledge.' Yet the more we dig into how things are, the more we discover our gross lack of real understanding. If that's wrong, then would someone please explain how gravity came to be? Or how inanimate organic matter becomes alive? PhD's and scientists can't explain these simple things. It's sort of like overlooking new organs in the average human head. But what do I know?

Apparently not much, which is why I'm thankful for Jesus, who is both above my pay grade but also readily accessible as both Savior and friend. When I need to know what to think about something, the place to start is with Jesus. After all, the start of all real knowledge is Him.

For further reading: Romans 6:15, Jude 16-20, 2 Peter 2:20

*Lord Jesus, without You, there is no reason; without You, knowledge means nothing.*

**Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 22 October 2020. Today's topic: Only Faith That Saves**

*If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 2 Peter 2:20. (NIV).*

A friend of mine converted FROM Christianity to Islam. In an era where (literally) millions of disillusioned Muslims are converting to faith in Jesus, my friend repudiated her faith in divine Christ and subscribed it to Islam. She did it to marry a Muslim man, but she exercises her faith in Allah much more devoutly than most Christians show theirs in Christ. When we worked together in Minnesota, several times per day she would disappear behind the office cube walls. Once I walked back to see what was happening and I found her praying towards Mecca. To tell you the truth, I admire her devotion even as I know it is misplaced.

She practices her faith so devoutly, so earnestly, and she speaks honestly of peace and how practicing Islam brings her relief. She told me once that she never got that feeling from Christianity, and that she saw many more like-minded devotees in Islam than she ever saw as a Christian. Living in (now) Muslim south Minneapolis allows her to stay in a cloister while still being in the world. She raises her children in the faith and they are part of an extended family that, before the events of this year, was beyond compare. I don't know what it's like now, given that riots shook the neighborhoods around hers. Like I said, I admire her practice.

And it's a shame – an eternal shame – that her faith is misplaced. Allah cannot save her. Allah is not the Triune God. Whatever Islam is, it isn't the way of Jesus and, because of that, it leads to damnation. Talking about these things isn't some child's game of "my faith is better than your faith." That would dishonor the true God. No, this is simply the truth.

God allows us complete free will, even including the free choice to disavow Him. When we do that, the enemy is invited in. Sure, the enemy may come bearing alleged peace and flowers, but flowers die and peace without the victory of Jesus' salvation is simply the absence of open warfare. The enemy actually wars against us by many other means. When we empty our hearts of Christ, the demons set against us are free to move in. When they do, they wreck us worse than we were before. There's a better way.

I hope that doesn't happen to my friend. She's one of the most competent people I've ever worked with. In this challenging time, I pray that she comes back to the true faith in Jesus Christ.

For further reading: Matthew 12:45, 2 Peter 2:21

*Lord Jesus, preserve and forgive us when we turn away from You. Take care of my friend.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 26 October 2020. Today's topic: He Forgives Every Sin

*It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud." 2 Peter 2:21-22. (NIV).*

Does God forgive every sin? Will He forgive us even when we repudiate Him, when we say "I don't believe in you?" Simple answer: yes, but God can't be fooled. He understands if we are honest. God sees inside our hearts. He knows when we mean something and when we don't. A lie is a sin and saying "I believe in you" when we don't truly believe is a lie. God understands that. Would He welcome back my friend who converted to Islam? Answer: yes, when she genuinely confesses her need for Him. Just like me or you.

And that's the thing. That's why Peter spent so much of chapter 2 talking about this concept. Salvation is God's free gift for us. He didn't do it for Himself: He doesn't need to be saved because He's holy and perfect already. He doesn't need to be made righteous because He's already righteous. God saved us because He loved us. He knows we can't save ourselves.

And yet, we each know of people who want nothing to do with this. They have their own reasons; some say they once were Christian, or were brought up as Christian. Now they want nothing to do with Christianity. God respects their choice. Or you know of people who only ask for prayers when they are in need. When they don't think they need faith, they scorn it. Don't spend too much time looking down your nose at them lest you see them in the mirror.

Same for me, you know. I'm judgy; I'm cocky; I'm confident enough in my own faith to walk a razor's edge of it where, on one side there is Jesus, and the other are my judgments. I've walked in both worlds and the better one by far is the one where Jesus is, where His leadership guides my life. Yet there's also that pleasing comfort of those pet sins. Like sweet sounding sirens, they try to sing me back.

Giving in to them would be so much more costly, though. It becomes almost impossible to break free of sin's grip if we give in to it again and again. Yes, it's that powerful. Yet know this: even more powerful is the searching love of our righteous Savior. Jesus forgave all our original sins. He forgives EVERY new one when we come to Him with genuine hearts.

For further reading: Proverbs 26:11, Ezekiel 18:24, Hebrews 6:4-6, 2 Peter 3:1

*Lord Jesus, let my heart genuinely confess my sins to You, and let me rest peacefully in Your forgiveness.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 27 October 2020 Today's topic: That's When Your Heartaches Begin

*Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 Peter 3:1 (NIV).*

This puts me in good company: Peter's reason for writing his letters is the same as mine: to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. You could do me no greater compliment than to look in your Bible to learn more about today's verse. No greater honor could be paid than for you to be encouraged in your faith, strengthened in your relationship with the Lord Jesus, who saves us all. When that happens, give all the credit to God because He's the one who made it happen.

THAT was the wholesome thinking Peter urged; that's why I write here. It is for God to use these words to help you somehow in your walk today. Let's face it: we all need that help. We can't do this faith-journey alone; we can't journey through life without others. And others are here to channel the Lord's love to help us as well.

That becomes important, even critical, every day when we're faced with idolatry. You know you will be; you know that something today will occupy your interest so much that you'll put aside thoughts of God, thoughts of yourself even. Hard work and focus are good things, inherent in our human independence. But they can facilitate our idolatry if we let them. We can make work, sex, leisure, money, anything an idol, and the evil one will happily use that to drive a wedge into our relationship with God. If you think about it, every sin we do is a combination of at least two sins, one of which is idolatry. We choose something other than Jesus and, like Elvis sang, that's when your heartaches begin.

The good news is that Jesus forgives all sins. All of them. Recognize idolatrous immorality then flee from it so you can confess genuine sorrow, real remorse, true repentance. He will forgive you. That doesn't make him a wish-machine: it simply shows His divine character. You know when you feel that genuine sorrow: it's when you feel it deep inside, when you're ashamed of what you've done, when you want to 'take it back' but accept that you can't undo what you did. Go to God with that on your heart and you'll find He's been waiting for you.

When you do that, you'll understand how every believer needs to go to Christ every single day because every day we mess things up. Every one of the apostles and church heroes of old had to do the same thing. And so will you every day of your life. Feel the relief of Jesus' forgiveness and know you're in good company. That's when the best life begins.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 10:14, 2 Peter 3:2

*Lord Jesus, let my heart genuinely confess my sins to You, and let me rest peacefully in Your forgiveness.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 28 October 2020. Today's topic: So Should We

*Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. 2 Peter 3:1-2 (NIV).*

At first reading (and for most of my life), these verses sounded pretty dull. I suppose most young people would say that, maybe even many seasoned ones. It's natural; it's the way of things. These days, they aren't so dull. In fact, they make sense. They appeal to me having lived long enough to start appreciating wisdom. I can almost hear Sam Elliott saying them, speaking in that oaky timbre of his. They're words a wizened and experienced Peter would remind his younger self to heed.

Chapter 3 of 2 Peter is the last chapter of the book. Much of it is spent talking about the final days of the late, great Planet Earth, and about Judgment Day, about the last day of the world. If you're an unbeliever, these seem either laughable or sobering, even terrifying, thoughts. They're the stark reality that Jesus means what He says about coming back, about setting things right, and about judging sin; about destroying this fallen place and restoring it into what it was originally spoken to be.

If you're old Peter, and you've known Jesus as both Savior and friend, and you have been entrusted with knowledge He gave you, you want to share this knowledge so that anyone you meet will heed it and avoid the desolation of being found unbelieving. The old man Peter had lived long enough to see the wisdom of the words and wanted to share them before it was too late. Before Jesus returned, or Nero struck, or both.

And if you're young Peter, or the unbelieving people around him, then you don't yet understand this wisdom, don't really see the full value in it. Surely the loving God, who you say sent His only Son to redeem us in love, wouldn't do this to his chosen very good creation? What will be is what we've always known. Go away, old man, and bother someone else.

That'd be sad, wouldn't it? It would be sad to ignore someone who's just trying to help you. It would be sad to stare wisdom in the eyes and think it is actually unwise. It would be even sadder to think that the judgments to come would endanger me, or you, no matter what age we are. Peter understood this, first as a young man, and then after many years. So, he quoted Jesus. So should we: it's the wise thing to do.

For further reading: Luke 1:70, Acts 3:21, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Peter 3:3

*Lord Jesus, come quickly. Have mercy on us. Forgive us our sins. Renew us and Your world. Until then, help me, use me to reach those who don't know You.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 29 October 2020. Today's topic: Shake It Off

*Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 2 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV).*

A few days ago, we discussed (here) how a 'new' organ was recently discovered in the human head. Today comes a story (from CNN, USA Today, Fox, and the Times) that a new coral reef, one the size of the Empire State Building, was recently discovered off the coast of Australia. You know what that means: people have been sailing off Australia for hundreds of years and have, in all that time, overlooked something obvious. In other words, even as a learned, educated, and experienced people, humanity has many things to learn.

Keep that in mind as this world seems to careen out of control. The talking heads of the media, academia, and 'leaders' all tell us to ignore simple things in front of our eyes. "Gaslighting" has become a commonplace word in our modern lexicon: you don't see what you're really seeing. Maybe the folks who are predicting this as the start of the end times are right; maybe they aren't. From what I've read in the Bible, there are many more signs to be fulfilled, but who am I to say? Besides, if I were to agree, no doubt someone would disagree. And if I disagree, no doubt there is someone out there who would criticize me for not agreeing.

After all, "haters gonna hate (hate, hate, hate, hate, hate)". Or so Taylor Swift sang. And she's become a modern day scoffer! Right after that, Taylor sang that we should just shake it all off and not sweat the small stuff (and for good reason; more in a minute). Now look at the poor girl. All alone, rich, famous, and still pining in angst over lost boyfriends.

Perhaps Taylor needs to be reminded that the scoffers scoff (scoff, scoff, scoff, scoff; ok, I'll stop). When the heartbreakers stop breaking and the fakers stop faking, they're left to see that God is bigger than all of it. Jesus was and is and is to come before, during, and after this world. No matter what undiscovered reefs we sail, no matter how many people hate us, no matter what the smartest people say, what Jesus said is still over it. Nothing they (or we) know was created without Jesus; nothing we (or they) think or say is done without Jesus knowing it first.

And with that in mind, someday I'd like to see that reef in Australia. In the meantime, when the world comes at us, just shake it off.

For further reading: Isaiah 5:19, Ezekiel 12:22, Matthew 24:48, Mark 10:6, Luke 17:30, 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Peter 3:5

*Mighty Lord Jesus, You are over everything in this world. There is nothing that is that is apart from You. We are but small.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 2 November 2020. Today's topic: Beginning Ending

*But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 2 Peter 3:5 (NIV).*

The father of a friend of mine died yesterday. Ervin Williams was 88. He's the father of two, and wife of Doris, who journeyed to Heaven 27 years ago. I first met Mr. Williams in 1983, when my Dad and I walked into the First Presbyterian Church in Mitchell, Indiana one August Sunday morning. I'd spent the previous week attending Mitchell High with Erv's son, Dave, who quickly became one of my best friends. Mr. Williams came up to my Dad and I after service and introduced himself. After that, every Sunday, you could count on his friendly handshake and welcoming smile. I can honestly say he was one of the most devout, honest Christians I've ever known; a truly kind, decent man simply living out his faith.

Why mention this today and in the context of this end-times-related verse? Aside from eulogizing one of my role models in Christ, Erv Williams got to meet Jesus yesterday. He got to see Him face to face, and I believe with all my heart he got a big hug from Jesus. He got to see Doris again, and his own parents. And long-departed family, friends, and people he's wanted to meet all through history. By now, he may have even met Peter. I mention all this because yesterday was the end of Mr. Williams' long life yet it was the beginning of a much longer one; a renewed life outside the boundaries of time as we know it. He's in heaven with the Lord and is living a life of new and exciting eternal meaning.

Yesterday, he met the same God who created this Earth we live on. The Triune God who made Himself known to us through His Son and His Spirit is the same one who created the earth as is recorded in Genesis: the same Earth that Adam and Noah and Moses and Elijah and Peter and John and Jesus and all the other people we've met through the Bible knew. God spoke this place into existence, re-made it through a flood, and will end it at a time only He knows. It's the same place, the same Earth, the same people, the same God. God promised our lives would end, and that this earthly home we know would as well. Yet He also gave us His Son, who is the way out of ending. If you aren't ready, take up Jesus' invitation to know Him now and let Him make You ready. Erv Williams did and it made all the difference.

For further reading: Genesis 1:6-9, Psalm 24:2, Hebrews 11:3, 2 Peter 3:6

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the miracle of our home here. And thank You for the blessing of friends like Ervin Williams. Take care of him till we all meet again with You.*



## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 3 November 2020. Today's topic: Do You?

*By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 2 Peter 3:7 (NIV).*

The same God who created everything by speaking it, who (according to Genesis) called land to exist separate from water, will destroy this same earth as we know it.

I don't like to think about that; really don't. I don't like to think that magnificent places like Yellowstone, the Boundary Waters, Victoria Falls, the Kenai, and a thousand beautiful places will be destroyed in unstoppable fire. Even more, I don't want to think of every one of us being judged and assigned a place with the living in heaven or the desperate in hell.

Yet many verses in the Bible talk about God creating the Earth as a home for mankind forever. That, at the end of the age, God will remake this place into a new Earth where, once again, our Triune God may make His dwelling among us. It will be a place free of sin and the consequences of sin; where man may live in harmony with God once again.

Many other places in the Bible refer to fire as a purifier, and perhaps that is what Peter means here. Perhaps this verse refers to the Earth – and we who inhabit it – being purified by the judgment and fiery love of Christ. That He will either physically or metaphorically burn away our sins to purify us and our home of them.

To those who are conscious of our sins (who know faith in Jesus), the last day is a day to look forward to. Me, I long for the day to be rid of the degeneration of my body, the results of my sins, and the fallout that occurred because of things I've done. I look forward to the day when Jesus makes me new and frees me from living in the wreckage of bad choices.

Yet to those who choose to live their lives outside of faith, it's a thing to greatly fear. I've long thought that the worst part of hell would be the separation from God. To exist forever without love, joy, hope, or peace. It isn't a punishment that God wants for us. Instead, it is Him loving us enough to allow us the consequences of what we chose in this life. To someone who doesn't believe in Jesus, the day of fire may indeed be real fire: it may painfully purify them of all love, removing His protection and allowing love's opposite to fully consume them.

That would be worse than fire. No, I don't want to think of the beautiful places of this Earth being destroyed by even holy fire. But even more, I don't want to think of other people being devastated by the holy fire of righteous judgment. Do you?

For further reading: Matthew 10:15, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 2 Peter 3:8

*Lord, I look forward to You cleansing purification. Have mercy on sinners for Your love's sake.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 4 November 2020. Today's topic: the Same I AM

*But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 2 Peter 3:8 (NIV).*

Perhaps there could be no better verse for this day. Right now, nobody yet knows what the next few years will look like; right now, the wounds are fresh and the sting is still painful. Right now, it's a time of apprehension for many, relief for others, scheming for a few, and uncertainty for us all.

And, right now, with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. Right now, eternity matters most to the Lord and because of the Lord. Right now and for every day to come, the eyes of the Lord are on us and nothing that we think, say, or do will be done apart from His view. Nothing that has happened or is going to happen will happen without the Lord being over it, allowing it, or using it for the good of His Kingdom. When times seem so uncertain, remember that the same Lord is Lord over all.

A thousand years ago, nobody could have imagined electricity, or flying, or printed words that are readily available, or medicine that can treat or cure most conditions. A thousand years seem like a very long time, but in reality they aren't. In the space of a planet that is only several thousand years old, they seem even shorter.

And yet there are days that seem interminable. Days like election days, or when you're awaiting a diagnosis, or when you feel anxious: those days seem like a thousand years. Our fallen nature lives hand in hand with our redeemed man, and when days seem to drag on, it seems more real than it actually is.

Over thousands of years and days that seem like it, the same Lord is still Lord over everything. Our world practically begs us to worship a thousand other gods in a thousand years, but the triune God of Father, Son, and Spirit is still the only real one. He is still the same creator, the same Savior, the same judge, the same I AM. He exists outside of time to meet us in time: in time that He created to bless us.

Knowing that, shouldn't we use our time to bless others? To share what we know about Him with other folks who don't know Him? To bring comfort and His peace to our fellow man when they are hurting and in need? Someday, our time will expire; our hourglass will run out. Someday, the days of this world will come to an end and it will be purified to be sinless and clean once again. Until then, you and I are God's heralds, his play-by-play announcers in this game of life. No matter how things turn out in these so uncertain days, our God will never change. Remember that today.

For further reading: Psalm 90:4, 2 Peter 3:9

*Lord and Father God, abide with us now when our world seems so upside down.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 5 November 2020. Today's topic: Worth Fighting For

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV).*

So here we are again: the United States in the middle of a legally contested presidential election. For the second time this century, courts are being involved in deciding the final counts of votes that will determine who wins the presidency. Whoever wins may win a pyrrhic victory. Without diving deeper into the politics of the whole thing, let's state this: it's something worth fighting for. Both sides seem to agree on that.

You know who else believes we're worth fighting for? Jesus. God. The great I AM. He arranged all of ancient history to reach its culminating moment on Easter Sunday. Since that morning, God has patiently waited to end this world and replace it with the sinless one in which He will once again walk among us without touching on sin. A while back, I mentioned that my friend, Pastor Mark, once told me that he didn't think the world would end soon because he didn't see how the Gospel had been preached to all peoples. There were still many who hadn't been told about Jesus.

Peter might agree with that; I know I do. Indeed, Peter's verse here reminds us that God patiently wants EVERYONE to come to repentance. He wants every person on this planet, all 7.7 billion of us, to intimately know Him through His Son, Jesus. He wants every person here to experience faith in Him, to be saved from the eternal consequences of our sins. That's everyone, even Democrats and Republicans, even Muslims, even pagans, even atheists. Jesus wants to be able to hug every single person He created here to tell them "well done, good and faithful servant" when we reach Him in eternity.

And make no mistake: we will all face Him. I honestly hope His patience extends beyond our understanding of His word. Like my friend Pastor Vern, I honestly hope that Christ's desire for all of us to know Him means He has ways of that happening that we simply can't comprehend. That His love, like life itself, finds a way when humanity couldn't. Yet if that is not how things work out, then we need to remember how God promised, that when this world ends, we will meet Him to answer for all we've done.

Thanks be to Him for His mercy in that. Thank God for Jesus, for Him doing what I can't, and you can't. Thankfully He is patient; thankfully, Jesus believes we're worth fighting for. One day, all of us will meet Him, even those running for president.

For further reading: Isaiah 34:4, Luke 12:39, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Hebrews 12:27, Revelation 21:1, 2 Peter 3:10

*Lord Jesus, have mercy on we sinners. All thanks and praise to You for Your loving patience.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 9 November 2020. Today's topic: Expect It

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. 2 Peter 3:10 (NIV).*

Here's another one of those famous Bible verses that even unbelievers have probably heard. Several verses mention the end of the world happening 'like a thief.' It's not that God would break into your home, or steal from you, or threaten you. Instead, the meaning is inferred that it will happen when it isn't expected. Yet, more important than that is remembering how thieves, heavens, elements, earth, everything done in them, the Bible, unbelievers and even believers all have one thing in common.

They (and we) are all created.

Yes, the last day will come only when God the Father knows. Jesus said even He didn't know, and neither did Their Spirit. It is a knowledge the Father keeps only to Himself and the others choose to allow to be so. When it happens, it will be unexpected. It will shock us. Like most things, after it happens, it will all make perfect sense. We'll be able to see how it happened just when it should, just as it should. But the initial time of it will come when we don't expect it.

And we will see how God the majestic three-in-one puts all creation back under Himself. More specifically, He will restore all that He created by stripping away the corruption of sin. Humanity's sins; our ancestors' sins; our sins. The consequences of them will be ended and God will wipe away the dirt of corruption. He'll then replace it with what was originally created.

Creation to creation. For His sake, for our benefit. He who spoke it all into existence out of love will speak it into redemption out of love. Don't be surprised at that. Not only did he foretell it: He's done it before. After all, for thousands of years He provided for His chosen people, despite their continuous rebellions, and set the stage for the arrival of His Son, their Savior. He told them through hundreds of prophecies. Now, for thousands of years since then, He has patiently arranged all time and creation in advance of His return. He told us in His Word.

And when He returns, it will be with sound and righteous fury to re-institute His universe of love. To those who're unprepared, it will sound terrifying. To those who've accepted His Savior Son, it's a day to look forward to. Where do you find yourself?

After all, this verse isn't hidden. It's been around for two thousand years. Jesus has been waiting that long for you to meet Him, for Him to reach out to you. We should expect it.

For further reading: Matthew 24:35, Hebrews 12:27, Revelation 21:1, 2 Peter 3:11

*Lord Jesus, I look forward to Your return with excitement and anticipation. Please use my life now to help others know You so that they, too, may feel the same way.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 10 November 2020 Today's topic: Transitory

*Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 2 Peter 3:11-12 (NIV).*

My Concordia Bible says "the transitory nature of the material universe ought to make a difference in one's system of values and one's priorities." Have you ever really considered that where we live is "transitory?"

I haven't. Really haven't. This planet is all humanity knows. Twelve men have walked on another celestial body. Other than them, except for Jesus Christ, every one of the billions of us who have ever lived has walked only here on the Third Rock. Face it: this is the only home we've got.

And it's a rental. Yep. We're only temporary occupants of the fallen world. Once upon a time, the first two inhabitants of it lived in perfect harmony with both their God and His nature. Then, they chose sin and everything changed, even the nature of nature itself; 'unnatural' became natural. Since then, everything has been corrupted by mankind's sins.

In the end, it will be restored. The coming purification will wipe out all vestiges of sin. Those made righteous by Christ will reside in a world made clean, free of corruption, free of temptation, free of the pathetic, sad nature of unnatural sin.

The elements of sin – rebellion against God – won't be able to withstand the heat of that purification. Like Linda Blair sprinkled with holy water, sin will cry "it burns!" Yet that fury will cleanse away all impurities. The dross will fall away; only the gold of Christ's people will remain.

Knowing that, shouldn't we temper our thoughts, words, and actions with that knowledge? This place, the only home we know, will be made new, made perfect again. Knowing this, shouldn't we live in ways that show we want to be a part of it? Shouldn't we be eager to cast off our sins, to take ourselves away from temptations, to learn to be slow to speak, slow to react, and quick to follow Christ?

Face it again: I'm betting neither you nor I have thought much about that. Most times, we let ourselves become too busy living our lives, following X in pursuit of Y, to consider that the end will come (and soon). That we should choose to submit our following to Jesus instead of that X or Y. Everything we have or know here is transitory, temporary, terrestrial. Everything up ahead is forever.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 1:7, 2 Peter 3:13

*Lord Jesus, I'm sorry that I have messed up, that I forget how You save me despite my rebellion. Thanks for not abandoning me, for loving me when I don't deserve it. And thanks for the promise to make all things new.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 11 November 2020 Today's topic: Pumpkins Forever

*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13 (NIV).*

Last night, I did something I really enjoy: I processed 10 bags of pumpkin. Crazy, eh? I processed 10 bags (containing 2 cups of pumpkin puree each) that are now safely ensconced in my freezer. I've been doing this for years. Every Halloween, we get one or more pumpkins for decoration and, every year, when we're done with those decorations, they get processed into food.

The process isn't difficult (so even I can do it). You cut up the pumpkin, scooping out the seeds. Cut the large pieces into small pieces, put them on a baking sheet, and bake at 350 for an hour or so, until the 'meat' is soft. Let the pumpkin cool. When cool, cut off the peel, cut up the 'meat' into small pieces, and puree it in a blender (or food processor). I usually add a cup of water (to make pureeing easier), so I empty the puree into a sieve (to let the water filter out). Label bags, measure 2 cups into each bag, and put it into the freezer. For the next year (or more), we'll have our own pumpkin ready for breads, pies, desserts, and even chili (don't knock it until you've tried it).

For several years, I even grew my own pumpkins at our farm in northeast Texas. Since we sold the farm, we've had to buy them at the store. To me, there's something wholesome, something righteous, about growing and "putting up" your own food. When I die, I hope Jesus lets me be a farmer. I don't know if there'll be food (or farming) in heaven, but I think it would be the most worshipful, God-glorifying vocation to tend to His creatures and to His garden by farming it. It's something I love doing.

Imagine doing that for eternity. If you like surfing, imagine surfing forever; imagine Jesus surfing with you (Laird Hamilton watch out). If you like painting, imagine painting with Jesus; Bob Ross watch out. Imagine singing with Him, or cooking, or sewing, or whatever it is that brings you closer to God. Imagine doing that forever as a way to worship and glorify God: by using for Him the gifts He freely gave to you.

That isn't some figment of your imagination: it's a promise. Peter says as much. So did Isaiah, who prophesied that God would measure to us what we had measured in devotion to Him. Imagine offering our best to Him here, then receiving immeasurably more in return in eternity. In a new heaven and new earth, they will be ways for us to worship God in all we do.

That includes pumpkins, growing or 'putting them up' for food. Don't believe me? Come see me next fall and we'll do it again.

For further reading: Isaiah 65:7, Isaiah 66:22, 2 Peter 3:14

*Lord God, thank You for the gifts of vocation that I cherish. Help me to use them in worshipping You.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 12 November 2020 Today's topic: Point to Someone Else

*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 2 Peter 3:14 (NIV).*

Who is "him"?

Of course, the obvious answer is Jesus. When we turn over our hearts to Him, we become motivated to want to live cleaner lives. Turn away from sin; resist temptations, even avoiding them; forgiving; listening. These are evidence of the fruits of God's Spirit taking up residence within us.

Yet don't be persuaded by the slippery slope that my original question asks. We may want to live spotless, blameless lives, but doing so doesn't make us more justified, sanctified, or righteous before God or men. We are justified, sanctified, made righteous only by Jesus, not by anything we do. We don't do anything to earn His favor, or His forgiveness; we don't have to pay penance or anything like that. All that needed to be done to attain forgiveness was done by Jesus already. He gives us that because He loves us, not because we earn or deserve it.

Knowing that, maybe the "him" we are to make every effort to appear godly before isn't just Jesus. Maybe 'he' is our brother, our sister, our fellow human being. Maybe it is mankind that needs to see our spotless, blameless, at-peace lives. Perhaps it is our fellow man who needs to see that our faith in Jesus changes us, makes us act in different ways. Just maybe other men need someone to look up to, something to aspire to.

That really isn't far-fetched. Jesus doesn't need our good deeds, even as He wants to see us motivated to do them. But our fellow people need them. Jesus doesn't need you to work in a soup kitchen, but there may very well be a homeless person who does. Jesus doesn't need you to be kind to strangers at the gas station, but someone having a terrible day might. Jesus doesn't need you to forgive a grudge but somebody just might be yearning to hear from you. Jesus is at peace with us even if we aren't at peace with Him.

You get the picture. Things like those are things that Christ loves to see His people do. But He doesn't need them. Indeed, even our best behavior, if motivated by selfish means, is like a filthy rag in the presence of God. SelfLESS behavior, however, is a horse of a different color.

Yes, Jesus is the "him" to whom Peter was referring. Yet perhaps, if you were to ask Jesus about it, you might not be surprised if he asked you who you thought "him" was. And if that ever happens, don't be surprised if He points to someone else.

For further reading: Isaiah 64:6, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 2 Peter 3:15

*Forgiving Lord Jesus, direct my heart to always want to serve You by serving others. To change my ways to better represent You in an unkind world*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 16 November 2020 Today's topic: The Same Message

*Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 2 Peter 3:15 (NIV).*

Sometime in the late 30s AD, Paul traveled to Jerusalem to meet with Peter, James, and the other Apostles. It was a two-week meet-and-greet. Some people think it was Paul inquiring of Peter of the latter's experiences with Jesus. Others think it was the Apostles inquiring of Paul how he came to faith.

Years later, Paul and Peter met again. The church had grown rapidly through Judea, Samaria, (modern day) Syria and Arabia, and was moving into Asia Minor. At this second meeting, Peter and Paul agreed to present a unified message to potential converts. Peter would continue witnessing to Jews; Paul would witness the message to non-Jews.

That message? The same one Jesus had entrusted to His disciples. Salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. The only way to heaven that God has given to us is through faith in Christ. Believe in Christ and live.

That's the same message we hear (and share) today. Over thousands of years, it is the message that gave rise to Western civilization as we know it. It is the message that spurred the creation of long-lasting representative republican democracy. It is the message that keeps the spark of hope burning among new converts in Africa, Iran, China, and a hundred thousand other improbable locations. The work of those early disciples, recorded in bits and pieces through the New Testament, continues in us today.

Someday, in heaven, I'd like to talk with Peter and Paul and ask if they'd share some of the things they talked about. What I know about the words (and work) God spoke through them has made a huge difference in my life. Not so long ago, I was a shallow, callous, profane, and hypocritical younger man. God had been working on me for years, but it took Him stripping me down to my core for me to finally pay attention.

And the message that got my attention was the same one Peter and Paul had been sharing all those years ago. Believe in Jesus and be saved. It really isn't any more difficult than that. In the times when we feel most desperate, realize that God isn't done with us yet. That, as long as He gives us fresh breath and new days, we get to share that same message with others in what we think, say, and do. Like Peter and Paul did. Like you and I can today.

For further reading: Romans 2:4, Galatians 1:18, Galatians 2:6-10, Ephesians 3:3, 2 Peter 3:16

*Lord Jesus, thank You for Your saving grace, for Your servants of old and now, for giving me today to share Your message of salvation.*



## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 17 November 2020 Today's topic: Who To Believe

*He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. 2 Peter 3:16 (NIV).*

Listening to the news this year, it's been hard to know who to believe. There's a deadly virus on the loose that's going to infect us all; no, the virus isn't as serious as they're hyping it up to be. Biden won; no, Trump won. We're on the edge of a meltdown; no, things are just fine. It's safe to come out of lockdown; no, it's getting worse than it was before.

Who do you believe?

In verse 16, Peter recounts how unscrupulous people tried to twist the words of Peter's friend, the Apostle Paul. Peter had encountered Paul several times and found him to be a passionate, erudite evangelist for Christ. Indeed, during one visit, Paul had rebuked Peter, and it made the men respect each other even more.

That's a pretty amazing thing, considering that both men lived in an Israel that was occupied by a hostile foreign army. That they were outspoken leaders of a religious sect whose values ran contrary to established norms (both Jewish and Roman). That most of the rest of the world was hostile to this new "Way" and wanted to see it suppressed.

Those Christians are troublemakers; no, there's something about them that I like. It's impossible for a man to come back from death; but I saw Jesus alive. That new religion has quickly grown all over the known world; no, there really isn't much to it.

If you're John Q. Public in first century Judea, who do you believe? If you're John Q. Public in 2020, the same question applies. When you don't know who to go to for the truth, who do you believe, especially when clever people seem to distort and twist what's being said? Believe it or not, you already know the answer.

Believe the one who's preaching the truth about Jesus. That Jesus is God and we aren't. That Jesus is the only way to heaven. That Jesus is both love and supreme justice. That Jesus calls us to confess our sins, repent of them, and allow Him to remake our lives for His Kingdom's good.

In Judea, you would have believed Paul or Peter. They and their friends had personally experienced this Jesus. In our world today, believe them still because truth is still truth whether it's two thousand years old or freshly spoken just now. There aren't versions of truth: there is only truth. In a time when it's hard to know who to believe, Christ Jesus is the best and only constant. Listen to what's said about Him.

For further reading: Psalm 56:5, Jeremiah 23:36, James 1:8, 2 Peter 3:17

*Lord Jesus, You are the center of the universe, the only truth, and the One in whom I believe.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 18 November 2020 Today's topic: Your Christmas Carol

*Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. 2 Peter 3:17 (NIV).*

Yesterday, we watched a recent Christmas movie: "The Man Who Invented Christmas." It's a fictionalized account of Charles Dickens and his struggles over writing "A Christmas Carol." You know that story: Scrooge and the ghosts and Tiny Tim and "God bless us everyone." My wife loves Christmas movies; most of her favorite movies are actually Christmas movies, including this new one (which came out only three years ago). So it should come as no surprise that we've been watching Christmas movies for most of a month now. I kid her all year long that she's part elf, because she enjoys giving gifts. "Gifts" seems to be her love-language, how she expresses her heart.

Back to Scrooge. We've already watched several versions of the old story. One of my favorites is the musical with Albert Finney. In that, the miserable Scrooge transforms from the money-loving miser into a good and decent man in the space of only a few nightmares. Nightmares, that is, that warn him of how pushing love out of his heart has filled it with selfish loathing.

That's really the same message as verse 17, isn't it?

Aren't we all a little bit like Scrooge? We all need a wake-up-call nightmare now and then, to make us question just what we believe. Perhaps we could use a visit from the spirits of Christmas to forewarn us of what could happen if we chose to abandon our Lord. Charles Dickens was a believer in Christ, though one skeptical of most evangelical methods used to preach Him. Yet Dickens imbued his characters with Christian virtues, especially those involving mercy and redemption. After all, Scrooge didn't start out as a heartless miser. It took a lifetime of spiritually lawless choices to grow his heart cold: so cold that only the spirit of Christmas – or the Spirit of Christ – could warm it back to life. At the end of the story, Scrooge was redeemed. Sort of like Dickens himself.

What say you about that?

Maybe this Christmas season you'll read Dickens' book. Or watch the movie. Or maybe see a play about it. No matter, consider it to be a forewarning to you (and me) as well, that we should hold fast to the love of Jesus because He holds fast to us. Nothing can ever tear us away from the love of Jesus, but we can freely abandon it. Let's hope that doesn't happen. Instead, let's hope we each realize the happier invocation for God to bless us every one...for indeed He has. Especially at Christmas.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 10:12, 2 Peter 3:18

*Christmas Savior Jesus, You have blessed me so richly. Thank You. Thank You and please inspire me to share those blessings – and You – with someone else today.*

## Practical Proverbial, from 2 Peter, 19 November 2020 Today's topic: Right On, Right On

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV).*

Read that verse again. It really is a great way to both end and begin a conversation. It's a doxology, a blessing, a call to worship, and a call to arms. "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord because to Him be all glory forever...this is most certainly true."

Right on, right on.

This is a doxology. It's a hymn praising God in Jesus Christ. Jesus, our God, is the source of all grace and knowledge. Nothing that is known has been known apart from Him for He is the beginning and end of all knowledge, logic, reason, and truth. None of those wonderful things are ours by deserving them: they are gifts from Him.

This is a blessing. It is a benediction spoken to cherished friends, new believers, and even total strangers. It is a set of simple truths, namely that the grace and knowledge of Christ are divine gifts given in love from Him to us to each other. That is worthy of praising Him.

Which means that this is a call to worship. We GET TO read Peter's words and then share them with each other. In doing so, we're giving praise to Jesus and His Spirit that inspired them into us. It's like singing a new song to God, like being part of a church service where you feel that Spirit moving in your heart and know that all is well in your life.

Yet don't get too complacent because this is a call to arms as well. Not martial arms just yet, but a call to boldly, soldierly carry these things out into a world full of hostile forces. The devil who wars against us and our God is the same evil one who deceived Eve. Who laughed at the slaughter of children murdered by Herod, who reveled in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, who squirms in joy every time we speak anger at each other. We are called to be soldiers in the army of the Living God and to boldly proclaim the grace, knowledge, and glory of Him against this same evil right here, right now. Right on, right on indeed. More like, righteously move right on.

Peter lived his unsettled life in service to his friend and savior, Jesus of Nazareth. Tradition has it that Peter died in Rome, crucified upside-down in the arena because he didn't consider himself worthy to die the same death that Jesus did. Before doing that, Peter spent decades starting new churches and ministering to new believers. He does it still through the words he left for us in this book. Read them again, remember, and give praise to the God who inspired Peter to write them.

For further reading: Romans 3:24, Jude 1

*Thank You, Lord, for the words and life of Your friend, Peter.*