Hi,

I hope all of you, especially the moms, had a great day yesterday. We might be contending with the virus, but the weather sure delivered! Patti and I had a fajita dinner (with margaritas, of course) from Gloria’s, using curbside pick-up. As my son, Matt, used to say, that is livin’ large!

* **My Monday class on Matthew will meet today at 3pm** on [my personal Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle). My Tuesday class on Genesis will meet tomorrow at 12:00 noon (slightly new time!), also on my Facebook page.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* Keep sending in those movie and book recommendations.

What a tough and disappointing year for our graduating seniors. I don’t know what commencement speeches they will hear, but here is a short one from the book of Proverbs.

***Proverbs 24:23-34 (The Message)***

**It’s wrong, very wrong, to go along with injustice. Whoever whitewashes the wicked gets a black mark in the history books, but whoever exposes the wicked will be thanked and rewarded. An honest answer is like a warm hug. First plant your fields; then build your barn. Don’t talk about your neighbors behind their backs—no slander or gossip, please. Don’t say to anyone, “I’ll get back at you for what you did to me. I’ll make you pay for what you did!” One day I walked by the field of an old lazybones, and then passed the vineyard of a lout; they were overgrown with weeds, thick with thistles, all the fences broken down. I took a long look and pondered what I saw; the fields preached me a sermon and I listened: “A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, with poverty as your permanent houseguest!”**

Words can be so very revealing. “Graduation” is an ending word; “commencement,” a beginning word. Every graduation (or commencement!) marks an ending and a beginning, the transition from one stage to another. And late each spring, there are tens of thousands across America, celebrating millions of graduates/commencers. Commencements are a universal experience in our society. There are kindergarten commencements, fifth-grade, eighth-grade, high school, and beyond. And even as adults, transitions from one stage to the next mark the progress of our lives, though it is easy to underestimate their importance. Commencement speakers are speaking to us all.

Today, we’ll try to imagine that the book of Proverbs is a commencement address, God’s commencement address. Like most of the commencement addresses I’ve heard (and I’ve heard more than my share!), the book of Proverbs is filled with lots of good advice. Look at today’s passage: fight wickedness, be honest and prudent, don’t gossip, no payback, work hard. Pretty hard to go wrong with any of that. Indeed, wise pithy sayings are how most of us think of the book of Proverbs, but God is too good a commencement speaker to simply knit one piece of advice after another into a speech.

*Wisdom*

The book of Proverbs does not open with the good, practical advice that we associate with Proverbs. Instead, the first third of the book is an extended presentation of the value of wisdom and the danger of folly. In an extended metaphor, a young man is wooed by two women, Wisdom and Folly. Surprisingly, both women in the metaphor live in the highest point in the city (Proverbs 9:3 and 9:14), a place reserved in all ancient near-eastern cities as the place of god(s). What are *both* Wisdom and Folly doing there?

Israel had always been tempted to worship other gods, Baal being the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon. It is the priests of Baal that Elijah takes on at the great competition recounted in 1 Kings 18. Thus, the choice offered between Wisdom and Folly in the book of Proverbs is a choice between the Lord God and Baal. Who will the Israelites follow? Who, or what, will we follow? Who is our god? Will our god be money or time or career or family or flag or the “divine within” or spirituality? Or will our god be the one true God?

This choice is the most important choice any of us ever make in our lives. Scripture always casts the choice in stark terms – the way of the wise v. the way of the foolish, the narrow path or the broad, for God or against God. We can’t have it both ways. There is no room for compromise. The Laodiceans thought they could be lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, and Jesus spit them out of his mouth (Revelation 3:14-22).

It is this choice that God lays out before us in the first part of the commencement speech, for unless we embrace God as the foundation of our life from which all things follow, there isn’t much point in reading on the book of Proverbs. Without God, Proverbs becomes nothing more than yet another self-help book – and who needs another one of those.

*Seeing God’s wisdom at work*

By beginning the commencement speech (alright . . . the book of Proverbs) with the choice between Wisdom and Folly, God reshapes the specific advice that follows. If we choose Folly, the way of the world, then all the specific advice in the proverbs becomes nothing more than helpful tips that might get you further in life, depending on your goals.

But if we choose Wisdom, the way of God, then all the proverbs become infused with God-awareness and God-purpose. For example, one of the proverbs from today’s reading urges us to forgo revenge. This is certainly counter to how many people think the world ought to work. And even for those who might embrace the advice, chances are it is because they know what a vengeful heart does to themselves.

But if we come to this beginning with God, then foregoing vengeance can be seen to be a reflection of God’s own character, the God who refused to abandon his people or even return hurt for hurt. Fighting injustice becomes a reflection of a just God. Hard work and prudence become a commitment to use well all that God has entrusted to us.

*Movie recommendation*

Patti and I recently watched most of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* from 1961. I’m pretty sure that if you are reading this, you’ve probably seen it. If not, don’t waste any time . . . see it. If you have, enjoy it again! It is #14 on the AFI list of top 100 movies.

*Book recommendation*

Awhile back, Susan Hauser recommended Hans Rosling’s *Factfulness* to us. It is fascinating as well as factful. The subtitle is “Ten Reasons We’re Wrong about the World -- And Why Things Are Better Than You Think.”

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott