

***Walking with the Wise:***  
***Sharpened by Lives that Yet Speak***  
(Proverbs 13:20)

Present, continuing fellowship with the wise  
that contributes encouragingly to my spiritual progress.

The Scripture gives us a helpful glimpse into Ezra's heart (Ezra 7:10, *For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*)

We have a similar and perhaps deeper glimpse into the Messiah's heart, when he prays, *Sanctify them in the truth, Your Word is truth* (John 17:17) and *For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves may be sanctified in the truth* (John 17:19).

I. Insights into Solomon's Counsel

A. It Captures the Nature of our Spiritual Journey –  
Walking with God

Walking with God is a full-orbed, purposeful journey, built on personal communion with each member of the Godhead as I enjoy God's display of a covenantal relationship toward me and I with Him.

B. It Implicitly Recognizes *the Potential Value* of Walking  
with Others

“At one level we want friendships. At another level we don't want them! In creation, we were made to live in community, but because of the fall, we tend to run from the very friendships we need. Quite often, our longing for them is tainted by sin. We pursue them only as they satisfy our own desires

and needs. We have a love-hate relationship with relationships!

The Bible recognizes this profound tension, but still places our individual growth within the context of the body of Christ. The Scriptures call us to be intimately connected to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our fellowship is an essential ingredient for lasting change. The work of redemption involves our individual relationship with Christ alongside our relationship with others” (Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp, *How People Change*, 65).

C. It Recognizes that God Made Us Inter-dependent (“with” – presently, personally, historically, etc.)

“Without a Christian friend, walking the narrow road to heaven is a very difficult path. Even Solomon says, ‘Woe to the one who is alone. When he falls there is no one to help him up again’ [Ecclesiastes 4:9-10]. Hardly a day passes when a Christian does not need either comfort, or admonition, or warning, or encouragement, or instruction, and the like. So it is a great benefit to have a faithful fellow-traveler on the path to the heavenly goal!” (Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther. “Wedding Address on Genesis 2:18,” *Occasional Sermons and Addresses*).<sup>1</sup>

On June 27, 1736, at the age of 21, George Whitefield (1714-1770) preached his very first sermon before 300 people on this very passage in Ecclesiastes. Many in the crowd were part of the kinds of religious societies that had proven so spiritually helpful to him in coming to faith.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walther (1811-1887) served as the first President of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. He became president of Concordia Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 2 vols., 1:96).

D. It Recognizes Our Need to be Discerning

E. It Recognizes the Long-term Formative and Transformative Spiritual Benefit of Such Fellowship

“It is a fair and encouraging symptom of begun wisdom and piety, when a disposition is discovered to ‘*walk with the wise;*’ to associate with them; to court and frequent their company; to prefer them as companions and intimates. As ‘two cannot walk together unless they be agreed,’ such association augurs well. It is one of the ways, and one of the first ways, in which when there is, in any heart, ‘some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel,’ it begins to show itself.

By such association also, good principles will be confirmed and strengthened; virtuous and holy habits formed and established; and all the affections which constitute the spirit and essence of true religion settled and matured. The spirit of the wise, or pious, is imbibed; the encouragement of their countenance felt; and the benefit of their conversation and example, in every way experienced. The interchange of thought augments its useful stores; and the interchange of true sympathy, and prayer, invigorates every right feeling, every pious and virtuous resolve” (Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures on Proverbs*, 2 vols., 1:352-353, original emphasis).

“It is not left to us to determine, whether there shall be any influence; only what the influence shall be. *Walking with the wise* – under their instruction, encouragement and example – *we shall be wise.*

Our principles and habits will be fixed, our interest excited, and the resolution formed” (Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, 164, original emphasis).

Proverbs 13:20 is not an isolated piece of Bible counsel:

- Millennial picture – <sup>22</sup> *So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.* <sup>23</sup> *Thus says the LORD of hosts, “In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’”* (Zechariah 8:22-23).
- Clement of Rome –
- Didache

“The pious examples of others should be the looking-glasses by which we should dress ourselves. He is the best and wisest Christian, that writes in the fairest Scripture copy, that imitates those Christians that are most eminent in grace, and that have been most exercised in closet prayer, and in the most secret duties of religion” (Thomas Brooks, quoted by C. H. Spurgeon in *Smooth Stones from Ancient Brooks*, 222).

## II. Lives Speak by their Own Examples in Reading

- A. Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843) – June 27, 1832  
“Life of David Brainerd. Most wonderful man! What conflicts, what depressions, desertions, strength, advancement, victories within thy torn bosom! I cannot express what I think when I think of thee. Tonight, more set up on missionary enterprise than ever.” The following day, M'Cheyne wrote, “Oh, for Brainerd's humility and sin-loathing dispositions!”

In a letter to William Chalmers Burns (September, 1840), M'Cheyne wrote, “Oh to have Brainerd's heart for perfect holiness, – to be as holy as God is holy, pure as Christ is pure, – perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect! Oh, what a cursed body of sin we bear, that we should be obliged by it to break these sweet gospel rules!”

- B. William Carey (1761-1834)

As a village pastor (1785-89) in Moulton:

“He read the lives of John Eliot and David Brainerd. He learned how the one had toiled with a scholar's patience and an apostle's grace for nearly sixty years among America's Indians, and had been the first to translate the whole Bible into a pagan tongue. The other, in three seraphic years, had burned himself out for those [different] Indians and the Lord. These two, with Paul, were hence forward his heroes and models” (S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey*, 48).

Carey re-read Brainerd a few years later [April 19 1794] as he settled into missionary life. His heart complaint had been, "My soul is a jungle, when it ought to be a garden. I can scarcely tell whether I have the grace of God or no. How shall I help India, with so little godliness myself?"

His biographer records, "In rereading Brainerd, [Carey] says, he soonest 'caught fire' (Carey, 147). "I was much humbled to-day by reading Brainerd. O what a disparity betwixt me and him! He always constant, I inconstant as the wind."

### C. Henry Martyn (1781-1812)

November 13, 1803. "I thought of David Brainerd, and ardently desired his devotedness to God and holy breathings of soul."

September 23, 1804. "Read David Brainerd to-day, and yesterday, and find as usual, my spirit greatly benefited by it. I long to be like him; let me forget the world, and be swallowed up in a desire to glorify God."

November 20, 1804. "My heart was not in visible disorder, but it is not the spiritual life that Brainerd led."

November 23, 1804. "In the afternoon read D. Brainerd, and passed a half an hour in prayer . . . ."

January 13, 1805. "Found much edification at night in reading some parts of the sermons of that great man, Jon. Edwards, as I did of quickening in the morning from David Brainerd."

July 30, 1805. "Read some chapters of the Acts, to see how the apostles addressed ignorant heathens; and afterwards Brainerd's descriptions of the difficulties which attended his mission."

September 5, 1805. "I read an account of Brainerd's death, and some hymns, which so much refreshed me, that I could hold up my head again."

September 12, 1805. "I have no doubt of the usefulness of separate seasons of fasting and prayer, though my flesh seemed to shrink from it at present, as if it were too much for my strength; yet past experience encourages me, and David Brainerd's advice. What a quickening example has he often been to me, especially on this account, that he was of a weak and sickly constitution!"

May 8, 1806. "Read . . . some of D. Brainerd's Letters. Blessed the memory of that holy man! I feel happy that I shall have his book with me in India, and thus enjoy in a manner the benefit of his company and example."

May 14, 1806. "I was most abundantly encouraged by reading D. Brainerd's account of the difficulties attending a mission to the heathen. Oh, blessed the memory of that beloved saint! No uninspired writer ever did me so much good."

D. Jim Elliot (1927-1955)

October 18, 1949. “In this recent urge to pray for revival among the Lord’s people I have naturally been asking myself, ‘How?’ ‘What is my part’. Two things have come to mind: the first in David Brainerd’s account of the Forks of the Delaware awakening. The Holy Spirit began evident conviction at a time which surprised Brainerd, for he was sick, discouraged, and cast down, at the time little expecting that God had chosen the hour of his weakness for the manifestation of His strength. [quoting Brainerd] ‘I visited these Indians. . . . I cannot say I had any hopes of success. I do not know that my hopes respecting the conversion of the Indians were ever reduced to so low an ebb. . . yet this was the very season that God saw fittest to begin His glorious work in! And thus He ordained strength out of weakness . . . *whence I learn that it is good to follow the path of duty, even when in the midst of darkness and discouragement*’” (Elisabeth Elliot, *The Journals of Jim Elliot*, 169).

E. George Dana Boardman (1801-1831)

February 5, 1829. Overtaken by a surprise shower during the dry season. “A considerable part of our baggage was wet, but, providentially my papers and books consisting of a Bible, Brainerd’s Memoirs, and a few portions of Scripture, were preserved” (Alonzo King, *Memoir of the George Dana Boardman: Late Missionary to Burma*, 211).

February 8, 1829 – After preaching on a Lord’s Day morning to about 50 Karen people, he read in Brainerd’s life, “And felt condemned and humbled,



from the consciousness that I had so little fervor of devotion, so little spiritual-mindedness, so little, in fine, of all those qualities that required in a missionary to the heathen. . . . Lord, increase my faith, my love, my zeal for thy glory, and for the salvation of sinners” (King, 214).

F. David Brainerd (1718-1747)

“Tuesday, June 15, 1742. Had the most ardent longing after God that ever I felt in my life. At noon in my secret retirement I could do nothing but tell my Lord, in a sweet calm, that He knew I longed for nothing but Himself, nothing but holiness; that He had given me these desires and He only could give me the thing desired.”

Lord’s day, Sept. 6. [1747]. I began to read some of my private writings, which my brother brought me; and was **considerably refreshed** with what I met with in them.

Monday, Sept. 7. I proceeded further in reading my old private writings, and found they had **the same effect upon me as before**. I could not but **rejoice and bless God** for what passed long ago, which without writing had been entirely lost.

Monday, Sept. 21. I began to correct a little volume of my private writings. God, I believe, remarkably helped me in it; **my strength was surprisingly lengthened out**, my thoughts were quick and lively, and **my soul refreshed**, hoping it might be a work for God. Oh, how good, how sweet it is, to labor for God!

Tuesday, Sept. 22. Was again employed in reading and correcting, and had the same success as the day before. I was exceeding weak; but it seemed to **refresh my soul** thus to spend time.

Wednesday, Sept. 23. I finished my corrections of the little piece before mentioned, and felt uncommonly peaceful: it seemed as if I had now done all my work in this world, and stood ready for my call to a better.

Reading about others . . .

Saturday, Nov. 3 [1744]. I read the life and trials of a godly man, and was much warmed by it: I wondered at my past deadness; and was more convinced of it than ever. Was enabled to confess and bewail my sin before God, with self-abhorrence.

Lord's day, Nov. 27 [1743]. In the evening I was greatly affected in reading an account of the very joyful death of a pious gentleman; which seemed to invigorate my soul in God's ways. I felt courageously engaged to pursue a life of holiness and self-denial as long as I live; and poured out my soul to God for his help and assistance in order thereto. Eternity then seemed near, and my soul rejoiced, and longed to meet it. I trust that will be a blessed day that finishes my toil here.

## Concluding Observations:

In this small sampling, we have seen others bear testimony to the value, in fact, a wide variety of values of such a discipline.

- They looked to Brainerd for an example
  - Of specific Christ-like virtues
    - “he always constant”
    - “humility and sin-loathing dispositions”
  - Of certain devotional practices
    - Fasting and prayer
  - Of holy aspirations
    - “a heart for holiness”
    - “devotedness to God”
    - “his holy breathings of soul”
    - “I long to be like him . . . to forget the world and be swallowed up in a desire to glorify God”
  - Of a particular kind of ministry
    - Missionary labors
    - Pioneer missions to unreached peoples
    - Translation work
  - Of persistence in ministry
  - Of endurance in physical extremity
  - Of passion in ministry
- They looked to Brainerd to glean lessons about God Himself
- They looked to Brainerd for advice and companionship – “enjoy the benefit of his company and example”
- They looked to Brainerd for spiritual and ministry encouragement
  - “greatly benefitted”
  - “quickenings”
  - “abundantly encouraged”

- “refreshed me . . . that I could hold up my head again”
- They looked to Brainerd for brotherly rebuke
  - “not the life Brainerd led”
  - “felt condemned and humbled . . . so little devotion, . . . little spiritualmindedness”
- They looked to Brainerd as an impetus to further devotion
  - Read Brainerd, then 30 minutes in prayer
  - “no uninspired writer ever did me as much good”

“We learn . . . that godly literature has an inestimable value. By godly literature I am far enough from meaning all the books that are called religious. Many of the so-called religious books, on account of the feebleness of their conceptions, the sickliness of the sentiments, the exclusiveness of their spirit, the flippancy, the coarseness, the irreverence with which they treat the most momentous subjects, are of all books the most to be contemned and avoided. By godly books, I mean books that treat of the great questions of the duty and destiny, not only with the highest ability, but with a spirit of Divine reverence and devotion” (David Thomas, *Book of Proverbs: Homiletical and Expository*, 206-207, original emphasis).