

## Love and Hate

### Various proverbs

This week I conducted a bit of an experiment.

I asked a range of workers for their one bit of expert advice.

If these people could teach me just *one thing*, what would it be?

I asked a teacher, "What's the best thing a child can do to help their learning?"

And the answer was "Have a go at as many activities as possible"

I asked Tim, my barista, "What's the most important thing about running a café?"

He said, "training your staff".

I wasn't expecting that answer, but it's a good one, isn't it?

He's thought a lot about his job and how to do it well.

In the café was a doctor from Hornsby Hospital, and so I asked this doctor

"What the most important thing I can do for my health?"

She said "Maybe...eat well?" her voice went up at the end of her answer as if to say she wasn't quite sure? "Perhaps exercise?" she added.

I like a bit more confidence from my doctors, I've got to say!

Now in the NT we see someone decided to run a similar question past Jesus.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus answers very confidently, doesn't he? Not like the doctor in the café.

"Maybe ... love God with all your heart??" No. He knew the answer

And in his answer you'll notice that the most important thing

is something happening on the inside; it's love.

For Jesus the most important thing we can do is to address the heart.

This week we continue our series in the OT book of Proverbs,

a series looking at those Proverbs addressing our inner life.

And this week we are talking about

what it is we are to *love* and *hate*.

What we'll see as we look at the Proverbs I've collected for you,

is that love is a *very broad emotion*.

But in general we're talking about a very forceful emotion

when our being is focused on someone or something,

either because it brings us pleasure or joy,

or because we think its important,

and that focus may come easily or it may involve hard work.

By way of contrast, hatred (in the book of Proverbs at least),

is when we desperately want to keep a thing or a person at some distance.

We're talking about an emotional proximity to something or someone else.  
Love moves us towards, hates moves us away,  
At least that's how I see these emotions at work in the book of Proverbs.

So, what and how are we to love? What are we to move towards?  
One of the big themes in Proverbs is that we are to love wisdom! 4:6  
Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

The Book of Proverbs belongs to a group of books in the Bible  
known as the *wisdom literature of the OT*.  
Ecclesiastes and Job are the another members of this group.

The wisdom books are all about how live life well in the world God has made.  
And the key to living life well, is to develop *wisdom*.

Wisdom consists of understanding how the world works,  
and then seeking to make good decisions in light of what you've learnt.  
So a wise person will keep his or her eyes and ears open,  
and will then make decisions accordingly to achieve a good outcome.  
(Working out what is good is another part of wisdom,  
and that also requires learning and observation)

And the Book of Proverbs pleads with us to *fall in love with wisdom*;  
to fall in love with this process of learning and then acting accordingly.  
In fact the first four chapters are all about how wisdom is good for you.  
The book opens with a man instructing his son about wisdom and folly,  
and wisdom is described in feminine terms.  
Just a like a father might instruct his son  
on the type of partner he might choose as he grows older,  
this father is describing wisdom as a partner you want to commit to.  
She will protect and watch over you he tells his Son.

As it so happens I have married a wise woman.  
I told you recently that we've had our bathroom renovated  
There was a hiccup with a leaky pipe but that was fixed.  
We are very happy with our builder, and when he's in the house  
Jasmine has been insistent that we work hard to be in his good books.  
Every morning we have a hot cup of tea and a plate of biscuits ready,  
invoices are paid on time, he has full use of our driveway  
We are looking after him so that he looks after us!  
And it works, he's coming back to do the ensuite at a discount rate!  
Not only is that itself a wise way to deal with a tradesperson,  
but its also a good model of how we might approach wisdom.  
if we love wisdom, if we take the extra steps to seek out wisdom,  
if we put our focus on wisdom, then there will be a return.

Part of loving wisdom is to love discipline and correction  
12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,  
but whoever hates correction is stupid.

Wise people embrace learning from their mistakes,  
Wise people embrace the role others have in offering us correction.

Pride is often a big barrier that stops me from seeking out feedback.  
I feel that negative feedback will make me feel stupid,  
Someone will point out something I've missed and I'll be like  
"oh why didn't I see that, why didn't I address this issue earlier"

Proverbs tells me that I've got things the wrong way around.  
Avoiding feedback is actually the fast track to stupidity.  
Some of us are in workplaces where feedback and training happens  
but some of us will have to seek out such opportunities deliberately,  
and seeking them out is part of wisdom.  
Going to the doctor is another example.  
"I don't want to hear what the doctor is going to say!"  
Well, how smart is that, really? All the women are nodding their heads!

A love of wisdom will also mean we know the things we shouldn't love.  
 20:13 Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare. **And then** 21:17 Whoever loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be rich.

Proverbs has a lot of practical things to say about wealth.  
We're taught wealth isn't everything, or even the most important thing.  
We're taught that wealth is fleeting, that it can disappear,  
And we're taught that love of the wrong things  
can be an obstacle to wealth

What are those things we might love a little too much?

*Sleep*, by which I think the writer means laziness  
and an unwillingness to apply yourself to your work;  
the preference for *rest* rather than *sweat*.

And the love of *pleasure*, which could be a problem in a couple of ways.  
Maybe your pursuit of pleasure takes up time,  
maybe it dulls your capacity to work effectively  
(especially if wine is your pleasure like the proverb suggests),  
maybe your pleasures become sinkholes for money.

Proverbs tells us that people become poor for lots of reasons,  
some of which are unfair and are beyond people's control.  
But it is possible that poverty comes because we love the wrong things  
And this wisdom applies not only to wealth but also to health, doesn't it?  
A preference for rest and inactivity, a love of wine,  
these are loves that can be damaging in the long term.

And if wisdom is all about learning from the world and acting accordingly,  
then it makes sense to love the one who made the world as well!

Most of the proverbs we've been looking at are isolated sayings;

they don't really have an explanatory context surrounding them.

The verses from ch 3 are a bit different,

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

These verses come in a chapter about how we respond to God.

In fact Proverbs teaches us that if we are to discover wisdom, then a focus on God is an absolute necessity:

We're told many times that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And here in v3 love and faithfulness towards God is what's asked of us.

These verses have been a bit of a rebuke to me as your minister.

Whenever I speak of how we're to relate to God,

the language I'll most often use is the language of faith:

We are to *believe* God, *trust* God, to *have faith in* God.

I don't think I speak much about what it means to *love him*.

Perhaps that's because of my British ancestry, I'm not sure.

Maybe it's because in my mind

the first association that I have with love is that of the romantic kind

and I wonder how that can be applied to God.

But I need to remember that in the Bible (and in life), love is a broad concept,

Deuteronomy tells us that to love God is know his word

1 John tells us that to love God is to obey his commandments

In Proverbs *love and faithfulness* are spoken of together,

So to love God means many things, including placing our trust in him.

I wonder whether you could say that you've grown in your love for God recently?

Like any relationship, love grows with the time that's invested.

And I wonder whether the spending of time with God

—in prayer, in the Bible, with his people—

I wonder whether that is also a key to growing in your affection for God, which is another aspect of our love for him.

In Psalm 43 the writer speaks of God as my joy and my delight.

We will take more joy in him

if we get to know him better

and give him the chance to get to work in our lives.

And love for God moves naturally on to love for those people he has made.

In particular, love for family is a theme that is prominent here.

15:17 Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred.

The scene here is easily applied to a household dining room,

and the choice is this: a rich family at war with one another,

or a poor family where's there's love.

Proverbs says the loving poor family is much better.

Wealth means nothing if there's no love in the room.

If your idea of love is simply to provide material blessings to you family, then you'll need to rethink that and start loving in other ways too.

Proverbs speaks about love for children: 13:15

Whoever spares the rod hates their children,  
 but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.  
 Sometimes loving others, especially the young ones, involves saying 'no'.  
 [TSK MM story?]

The fact that love means saying *no* is a point lost on many people today  
 "God is love" they say "therefore you should be accepting of everything!"  
 Sometimes love means disagreeing, sometimes it means saying no.  
 God often answers our prayers with a *yes*, but not always.  
 Sometimes it's with a *no*, but that doesn't mean he doesn't love us.  
 We are his children, and the Father loves his children, even with a *no*.

Thinking further about the family unit,  
 we see that Proverb speaks about love for spouses as well.  
 5:18-19 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A  
 loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be  
 intoxicated with her love.  
 Two types of love in view here: erotic, sexual love, but also faithfulness.  
 These verses come in an extended section of Proverbs  
 that describes the wisdom of staying faithful in marriage,  
 of seeking sexual fulfillment from the one person, all of your days.

What if you were to forgo this kind of faithful love  
 and look for satisfaction elsewhere?  
 Proverbs says that path is like a highway to the grave.  
 I remember about 18 months ago meeting with a young father in my  
 office who'd been caught out in adultery. He was looking at losing his  
 wife, his children, his family home. It was a terrible thing to see a proud  
 and successful man whose life was shattered because of such foolishness.  
 There is wisdom in loving the people you are supposed to love.

Ch 6 vs 16-19 might also provide some motivation to love the right things.  
 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty  
 eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked  
 schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies  
 and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

We say 'God is love' so often  
 that we can overlook the fact that God also hates.  
 He hates sin, and if these verses are correct, he hates sinners.  
 He hates the false witness, and hates the person who stirs up conflict.  
 It seems to me God *simultaneously* hates and loves.  
 He's angry with the sinner to the point of hatred, but at the same time,  
 his love for the sinner enables forgiveness where there is repentance.  
 His hatred is easily dissolved when people respond to his love,  
 It's a hatred that's much more easily dissolved than human hatred.

What is it that God hates so much? Lies, unjust violence, pride (haughty eyes).  
 If God hates, then it's what you might call a *just and fair* kind of hatred;  
 these are the right things to hate. 11:1 The LORD detests dishonest scales,  
 that's a good thing to hate, but accurate weights find favor with him.

There is wisdom in aligning our hearts with the things that God loves and hates.

15:27 The greedy bring ruin to their households,  
but the one who hates bribes will live.

You can protect your families by hating what God hates.

I asked before whether you are growing in your love for God.

Another good question is to ask whether you are growing in your hatred  
of the things that God hates: greed, lying, impurity, violence.

We're not called to imitate God in our hatred *of sinners*,

I think that delicate balance of love and hate towards the sinner

is something we leave for God—we are just told to love our enemies—

But hating *sin* is something very appropriate for us,

ridding ourselves of sin and setting our hearts on things above,

as our NT reading put it.

If you turn aside from greed and anger

and turn towards compassion and gentleness

then not only will you please God but you'll benefit your family too.

It's hard work being wise, isn't it?

It's hard enough loving the things that are obviously good for us

let alone to love God and our neighbor.

Which is why any pursuit of this kind of wisdom

must be made knowing that we are secure in Christ.

I want to finish with 16:6 Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;

through the fear of the LORD evil is avoided.

As Christian people we cannot help but read that thinking of Jesus.

Through Christ's love for us and through his faithfulness to God's plan—a

love and faithfulness that look him to the cross—our failures to love

wisely and properly have been atoned for.

And forgiven people are also people with the Holy Spirit;

he is the one who renews our hearts, helping us form new desires.

Don't think that wisdom means becoming

some kind of cold wizard whose heartbeat is never raised.

Wisdom means loving and hating,

but loving and hating the right things.

Let's ask for God's help.