

VIRTUE 6

PRUDENCE

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

—Ephesians 5:15-17 (ASV)

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

—Luke 16:10-12

In the time of the medieval knight, taking prudent action made the difference between life and death, wealth or poverty, health or illness, safety or turmoil, marriage or no marriage, and children or no children. And it is no different for today's knight. Making prudent decisions daily will help lead to a fruitful and effective life. So what is prudence? The Webster dictionary defines *prudence* as:

- the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason;

- sagacity or shrewdness in the management of affairs;
- skill and good judgment in the use of resources; and
- caution or circumspection as to danger or risk.²⁰

There is a “million dollar” word in the definition above—*sagacious*. Sagacious is defined as “keen in sense perception” and “of keen and farsighted penetration and judgment.”²¹ Take a moment to look at this part of prudence because it is truly a characteristic that can differentiate someone’s life. Many young men and women today are not living their lives by applying “farsighted penetration and judgment.” Rather, many live their lives by shortsightedness and poor judgment and allow impulses and desires to set their priorities rather than planning prudent and wise steps to develop their future. If you are a woman, please read Proverbs 31 for God’s definition of a prudent, godly woman. Prudence is by far the dominant theme in the entire chapter.

Acting out of prudence means basing your decisions on where your twenty-year-old self wants your thirty-year-old self to be in ten years, or the thirties to the forties, fifties to sixties, etc. Every day should be invested, not just lived. There are so many distractions in life that take us away from this reality, stealing our future by stealing our days with fruitless deeds and obsessions.

To help make one’s life as productive as possible, let’s explore three aspects of living a life based on prudence: (1) planning, (2) focus, and (3) hard work with perseverance.

PLANNING

Consider the following verses from Proverbs about the importance of planning:

Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly (13:16).

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception (14:8).

It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way (19:2).

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty (21:5).

Planning occurs when we take time before *doing* the work to *plan* the work so it can be done correctly and efficiently. Planning is where we apply the carpenter's rule: measure twice; cut only once. We honor God by intentionally and deliberately going about the work to which He has called us. Sometimes this means getting up a little earlier; sometimes it means working late. But planning is the way that we make sure the *right thing is done in the right way*.

A skillful modern knight goes before his or her team to plan a project in advance. By doing so, he or she honors the time of the followers by making sure their work is done effectively and efficiently. Perhaps the best example of this was Nehemiah. The walls around Jerusalem were broken down, and he had received permission from the king of Babylon to rebuild them. However, before he or anyone else fitted a single stone to the new wall, he surveyed the work to be done, and he did this quietly, prayerfully and deliberately.

I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night I went out through the Valley Gate . . . examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley

by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet *I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work* (Nehemiah 2:12-16, emphasis added).

Nehemiah did this planning work quietly and unannounced. He did it with only a few men and limited resources.

FOCUS

Focus is the next key element we will consider. The following verses from Proverbs speak to the importance of *focus*:

He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment (12:11).

All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty (14:23).

I have enjoyed the sport of archery throughout the years. For birthdays, family gatherings, and holidays, we typically have several children and adventurous adults try out their archery skills in a range in our backyard. After watching and training people over the years, I have formed the opinion that there are two types of archers: those who shoot arrows downrange, and those who *really aim* before shooting—those who want to pierce the bull’s-eye so badly they can feel it in their bones.

Our good family friend, Max, falls into the second category of shooters—the type who can almost feel the path of the arrow or bullet to the bull’s-eye. About a year ago, I took Max to the shooting range where we could try our focus using an old-fashioned buffalo rifle (an 1874 Sharps in 45-70 caliber). After we each warmed up

with several practice shots, we took aim at a fresh target set at one hundred yards. I was lucky enough to hit the bull's-eye on the first shot, making a clean hole right in the middle. Next, I handed the rifle to Max who then did the impossible—he shot a bullet *right through my bullet hole*, cutting it only slightly larger on all sides. Amazed, I later gave him the target set in a picture frame. Now that's *focus!*

Focus makes all the difference. It is the factor that converts your plans and perseverance into a successful outcome. Take for instance a floodlight, which casts light over a wide area. The same energy source used for a floodlight can be channeled into a laser beam that is capable of cutting through steel. That's how focus works.

HARD WORK WITH PERSEVERANCE

Hard work without follow-through will only lead to wasted efforts for many projects in life that demand staying power. Indeed, a good plan is only as good as its follow-up. Consider the following Bible verses on hard work and perseverance:

Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth (Proverbs 10:4).

Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare (Proverbs 20:13).

A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing (Proverbs 20:4).

She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night (Proverbs 31:15-18).

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Perseverance is the hard part. That's when we push through the difficult times by sheer force of will, relying on God's promise: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). Pushing happens when we work *even when we do not want to*. This means getting out of bed when you do not want to and putting in another day—even after all the inspiration and enthusiasm is gone. My mother referred to perseverance as "stick-to-itiveness."

Working hard is actually the easy way of doing work because it takes less effort than being lazy in the long run. By "putting your elbows into it" rather than slowly mushing your way through the day's work, you will get your work done much faster and leave more time for rest and recuperation. The Lord knows what your best looks like, and He wants all of it.

THE WAYS IN WHICH A KNIGHT CAN APPLY PRUDENCE

A knight's love for others leads him to want to help others financially; his prudence guides him how to do so wisely.

A knight's strength leads him to help others carry their burdens in life; his prudence reminds him to rest at night rather than stay up late so his strength is renewed in the morning.

A knight's hope gives him expectation that a project or assignment will turn out just fine; his prudence makes him work even harder to make it come about that way.

A knight's call may lead him to battle; his prudence cautions him to seek counsel before battle (see Proverbs 20:18).

A knight's humility brings him honor; his prudence reminds him that his pride is just a thought away from dominating his heart and actions: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the

mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

A knight’s perseverance helps him start and finish a project; his prudence teaches him to carefully plan the project so that it can be done within a reasonable time.

A knight’s honor is earned by humility; only prudence can keep his honor by preserving his quality work product: “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men” (Proverbs 22:29).

A knight’s temperance in all things is only kept by his prudence in making daily decisions.

A knight’s faith gives him ambition and hope; his prudence helps him forge practical ways to accomplish his goals: “Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly” (Proverbs 13:16).

A knight’s belief in justice causes him to accept the penalty of a speeding ticket; his prudence keeps him from speeding again.

A knight’s charity understands that sometimes others have need; his prudence understands that to give a man a fish, he will eat for a day, but teach a man to fish, he will eat for the rest of his life.

A knight’s willingness to sacrifice himself in battle must be buffered with his prudent understanding that he must live to fight another day.

A knight’s compassion leads him to want to give money to the guy on the street corner; his prudence leads him to buy him dinner instead.

A knight’s loyalty to others opens his heart to friendship; his prudence gives him the understanding that friends come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime, and that he will only receive perfect loyalty from the Lord alone.

A knight’s belief in truth gives light to his every step; his prudence leads him to carefully confirm teachings or rumors to find out the truth for himself: “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great

eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

A knight’s purity gives strength and effectiveness to his ways in the same way that Samson’s vow to the Lord gave him power; his prudence leads him to understand that this strength can be sapped by walking off the path but can be restored by going back on the path.

A knight’s gallantry gives him power to charge in battle wielding only a sword; his prudence teaches him to always strap a backup weapon onto his belt.

A knight’s hospitality moves him to fill his home with friends; his prudence reminds him to prepare enough food.

A knight’s desire to be courteous to others must be governed by his prudence, which reminds him that some people may be offended by old-fashioned chivalry.

A knight’s gratitude teaches him to count his blessings; his prudence reminds him that some blessings must be earned: “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations” (Proverbs 27:23-24).

A knight’s grace and mercy gives him love, patience, and forgiveness with others; his prudence gives him caution regarding which relationships to cultivate.

A knight’s prudence leads him to prepare a lesson before mentoring others.

A knight’s strength will help him to overcome failure; his prudence leads him to not repeat the same mistakes twice.

REFLECT

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

—Proverbs 16:32

The customs of a knight are to arm himself and to fight, but that accords not so much to the office of a knight as does the use of reason, of listening, and ordained will. For many battles have been vanquished more by mastery, by wit, and by industry than by multitudes of horsemen and good armor.

—Ramon Lull

Real rewards await those who choose wisely.

—Walt Disney

RESPOND

1. Which part of prudence is most challenging for you? Planning? Focus? Hard work?
2. Why is it important to join perseverance with focus? With planning?
3. Where does your life need more planning? More focus?
4. How can prudence benefit us in the short term? In the long term?
5. How does living a prudent life set us up for God's blessing?

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