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**Proverbs 15:14 ESV**

*14 The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge,  
but the mouths of fools feed on folly.*

**Psalms 119:65–72 ESV**

*65 You have dealt well with your servant,  
O LORD, according to your word.  
66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge,  
for I believe in your commandments.  
67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,  
but now I keep your word.  
68 You are good and do good;  
teach me your statutes.  
69 The insolent smear me with lies,  
but with my whole heart I keep your precepts;  
70 their heart is unfeeling like fat,  
but I delight in your law.  
71 It is good for me that I was afflicted,  
that I might learn your statutes.  
72 The law of your mouth is better to me  
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*

**My name.**

I have a sister, Mary, who is less than three years older than me and was always four years ahead of me in school – and that difference is not because I was held back. All the way through school, I looked up to Mary. Each year when we got our Basic Skills test results, she tended to score in the top one percent of all kids

taking the exams. She got a Ph.D. in biochemistry, worked as a biochemist and as a Professor in a medical school, and is now a medical writer. The story I am about to tell has been pulled together from my own memories and from what my mother told me about this incident many years after it happened. When I was about four years old, Mary decided to teach how to write my name. So, she got me a marker, a permanent marker, as it turned out, and painstakingly taught me to write “Buzzy, B U Z Z Y”. Our father was off at work, selling tires, and our mother was in the kitchen. We were in the living room, and we were on the floor, with some scrap paper spread out around us. My sister slowly, patiently, took me through the process of forming each letter. She told me I was lucky because I only had to learn four letters to write my name, and I got to write one of them twice. After many attempts, I finally got it right and in large, clear letters, I wrote my name: Buzzy. I was very, very proud. Then my sister left the room, and somewhat tragically, left me with the permanent marker. I was excited and wanted to keep writing my name. But I ran out of paper. I immediately isolated another viable writing surface, however, and proceeded to write my name over and over and over – on the living room wall. I will get back to this story.

We’ve talked about the Proverbs and the Psalms. One of the reasons I wanted to use them in this message today is that they are a stunning example of

why so much of the world today follows faiths that have descended from the ancient Israelites. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all owe the foundations of their faiths to the story of a people who escaped Egypt, made their way to Canaan, and developed a culture that, despite being dominated by one colonial empire after another, managed to thrive and radically outlive their dominators. But why did this culture, to which we owe our knowledge of God, survive? It has to do largely with literature. They wrote down what they believed. They wrote about the astonishing loyalty of their God, about their struggles to survive, about the way they believed a child of God should live. They survived through their writings. We would know nothing about them without Scripture. They weren't busy trying to conquer their neighbors and live hedonistic lives. They were concerned about the future; they knew that the way to protect their future was by being educated, disciplined, and godly, and having a class of people who were very literate.

Consider our Proverb: *The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.* This was written by a Sage, a member of a special learned class of Israelite who codified in pithy sayings the rules by which a child of God should live. This Proverb, like so many of them, is attributed to Solomon, but we don't know if he wrote it, or if he simply supported the work of the Sages and collected their writings, or if his name was associated

with them long after they were written, as a way of honoring him. This particular Proverb is within a group that promote order in society, and suggest that a peaceful, thoughtful approach to life is the best approach. This group of Proverbs compares the fool to the wise person – and draw the obvious conclusion about which of the two is living the way God wants us to live. This Proverb also says that a person who wants to learn has an amazing advantage over the person who seeks foolish ideas instead of true knowledge. Now, wouldn't you say that when I was blessed by my sister with the power to write my name, I was indeed following this Proverb? I'm not sure that my parents saw it this way. You see, a couple of hours later, they came into the living room. My sister was gone. I was gone. But "Buzzy" was written all over the walls in giant letters, in permanent marker. I don't remember what my father said, and if I did remember, you wouldn't want me repeating these words during a sermon. But I do remember my mother holding the marker and asking me if that is what I had just used on the walls. I said yes. She said that it couldn't be washed off. I said, "Look, I can write my name!" I'm sure I had a huge, proud grin on my face. That is, until I caught on to my parents' obvious disapproval. I will get back to this.

Consider our Psalm. The overall message of the Psalm is that God has a moral law we need to follow. Being a human does not mean we can simply do

whatever we want to do in the heat of the moment. God's moral code is absolute and eternal. Verses 65 to 72, the ones that we have in our passage today, say that knowledge of the law of God gives us new life, even if we are somehow afflicted physically or emotionally. Living the way God wants us to live isn't simply the best way to stay out of trouble; it is a healing, uplifting experience. I happen to love one of these verses a lot. It says: *Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.* It reminds me of my blessed experience of learning to write my name. My sister taught me knowledge, if not the best judgment on how to exercise my newly gained knowledge. Maybe she should have given me an erasable marker or more paper, or at least suggested that one should practice their name on surfaces that can be easily and cheaply disposed of. In truth, she heard my parents exclaiming their concerns in the living room. She came out of her room and entered the living room. I do remember her eyes opening wide, although I only have a vague memory of what she said.

I think, and I readily admit that my memory is extremely fuzzy at best, that my sister said that my parents should be proud that her little brother had learned to write his name. I probably added the helpful information that it was Mary who taught me, that she was responsible for my enormous intellectual advancement. I wasn't suggesting that they should look at her, not me, as the origin of the

trauma that the living room walls had just sustained. I believe that my mother said something to the extent of “You let him write in permanent marker all over the walls?” But here is the part I would most like to emphasize, and it is the only part of this incident that I actually remember with any clarity. My sister Mary suddenly became very emotional, realizing that our parents were angry. She said something like “But don’t you understand that he’s only four and he can write his name? Isn’t that great?”

My sister would have made a great sage. She understood intuitively, at a very young age, the beauty of using the minds that God gave us. She knew that it was what God wanted, for us to not be fools, to seek knowledge, to strive to honor what it means to be made in the image of God. I’d like to suggest that we have a gift that comes with an obligation, and an obligation that is an enormous gift. The gift is our minds, something that radically surpasses all other life forms on this planet. The obligation is to use our minds to learn the law of God. The enormous gift is the uplifting that we receive when we follow that law. That’s what the authors of Scripture knew. They knew that it was so important that subsequent generations remember this that they wrote it down – in great detail.

Consider the last two lines of our Psalm passage: *It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better to me*

*than thousands of gold and silver pieces.* The fool only wants gold and silver. The fool will never want anything more than more and more gold and silver. But the afflicted person, the one who has had troubles, who has suffered, who has been sick or poor or lonely, that person was forced to turn to God. Then after turning to God, after learning the way God wants us to live, that person discovered that they had found joy. You see, when we follow the example of Christ, when we assist the hungry and the sick, when we refuse to turn in anger to someone who lashes out at us, when we do our best to live with empathy and see things from the other person's perspective, we find harmony in our life. We discover that it feels good to be good. God lifts us up by letting us lift ourselves up. This is amazing.

One last thing. Many years later, when I was in high school, I believe, my mother repeated the tale of me writing my name all over the damned living room walls – yes, that is how she put it. I said that I could remember being very proud of myself. Do you know what she said? My mother said that years later, she regretted letting my father completely repaint the living room. She wished that she had made him leave just one instance of those six inch high letters that formed the word “Buzzy” on the wall. It would have given her something to look at, to be proud of, to laugh at, to be thankful to my sister for, to hold dear to her.

I of course offered to write my name all over the living room walls again. The only restriction was that I had dropped the Y from my name by this time, and so I would be writing “Buzz”, not “Buzz-E”. She declined my offer with a sad smile.

The culture of God survived because a people chose to write it down. The Bible isn't just some thick, hard to read document that somewhere in the past people used as a moral teaching tool. It is quite literally why we exist today. We would know nothing about the Old Covenant between the Israelites and God or about the New Covenant brought to us by Jesus Christ. We wouldn't know that there is a God. We would not know that we were made in the image of God. We would not know that we live in the Kingdom of God right now and that we will always live there. Try picking that Bible up and reading pieces of it. It's why we are who we are. Please pray with me.

*God, please guide us through this day, through tomorrow, through every day that we live on this planet. Do what you have to do to remind us that we need you. Let us never forget that in the absence of your law, we would be living only for the things of this world, mimicking the behavior of those who increase their wealth and power at the expense of other children of God. But Jesus came to this planet and taught us that by holding close to our hearts those who live at the bottom of this world, we lift ourselves up to the highest level of your world. Amen.*