

It used to be that when couples got married, they would hire a photographer to take a few pictures. Now weddings are recorded by photojournalists. The chief photojournalist has one or more assistants, not counting the countless people with their own digital cameras clicking away. The paparazzi are everywhere.

Americans today don't seem to cherish the privacy that used to be sacred. Companies like "Celeb 4 a Day" will follow you around for a couple of hours or for a full day recording every move you make. Some people thrive on this attention. Others shrink from it and don't want to have anything to do with it. I get my picture taken enough at weddings, baptisms and confirmations. I don't ever want to be a "Celeb for a Day." Maybe you feel the same way.

But whether you know it or not, you are being watched. If you don't think so, Google your name and see what pops up. When I Googled my name I discovered that there are other "Larry Courson's" out there. I found a number of articles with name mentioned over a number of years from churches that I've served to organizations I've belonged to. I also discovered that everything recorded about me is not correct, confusing me with other Larry's.

But even if your name or face never shows up on Google, you are still being watched. People watch us all the time. Videos are taken of you everywhere you go. I found out this week that when I go into Snap Fitness when no staff members are on duty, that one of the staff members may be watching on their home computer. Knowing that you're being watched may lead you to always want to look good, to look your best. But remember, the cameras are not the only one watching you. God is watching over you and watching out for you.

Proverbs in the Old Testament is a collection of wise sayings for God's people. Proverbs offers advice for those who want to do more than just look good. Proverbs, along with the rest of God's Word, tells us how to live as God's people. It gives us wisdom to follow, assurance of God's love, and direction to help us find the good things in life to do.

One of the first things we are told in Proverbs 22 is to protect our reputations. Verse 1 (NLT) reads, **"Choose a good reputation over great riches; being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold."** Our reputation is important. Think about how many political carriers have been destroyed by a bad reputation. Barry Bonds is the greatest home run hitter in the history of Major League Baseball, but his carrier has been stained by steroid use. Some have suggested that an * be placed next to his name in the record books. One bad deed can ruin an otherwise good reputation. So it is a challenge to live in a way that no * is put by our name. We all know that one day we are going to die. What will happen when you die? Will the people who come to your funeral simply mark your passing or will they celebrate your life?

The best way for that to happen is for us to live by God's standards and not our own. We know that there are no real shared values, no moral standards for people to live by today. I heard the mistress of Bernie Madoff talking on radio last week saying that she thought he was a good, honorable man. Obviously neither she nor Madoff have very high standards. But God does. And since Christians represent Him in our world, we need to try to live up to His standards.

One of the things God is concerned about is how we use our money. Proverbs reminds us that we are all the same. **"The rich and poor have this in common: The Lord made them both."** (Proverbs 22:2 NLT) Despite what our culture says, God says that our reputations, our lives of Christian integrity, are more important than being wealthy. This is so counter culture. We have such a celebrity based culture. Everywhere you turn you hear about the rich and the famous. Our society thinks the rich are blessed. But that is not always the case. Ask Michael Vick or Plaxico Burress.

How much money we have is not near as important as what we do with our money. Proverbs tells us, **"Blessed are those who are generous."** (22:9 NLT) Proverbs also warns us about taking advantage of others, especially of the needy. We need to be aware of those around us that need our help, to care about them and to share with them. Sometimes caring shows in being with others to help them.

One thing we can't forget is our need to repent. When we act like we are perfect, like we've never done anything wrong, we are only fooling ourselves. None of us are perfect. We are all in need of God's love and forgiveness. 1 John 1:8-9 (NLT) tells us, **"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."** We all need God's forgiveness. We also need the forgiveness of others. Christians are not perfect. We all need to repent and to be forgiven by God. Knowing and relying on God's love and forgiveness is important, vital. Denying our sins is futile, even fatal.

We can turn to the Lord in repentance because the Lord is our Righteousness. Jesus forgives our sins and restores us to a right relationship with God. We can't do that ourselves. The prophet Isaiah warns us that our efforts to make ourselves look good don't work. Isaiah wrote, **"We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags."** (Isaiah 64:6 NLT) But Jesus is our righteousness. That means when God looks at us, He sees us through Jesus. Jesus good deeds become our good deeds. We are forgiven and free in Christ, free to live the new life of faith and faithfulness. You don't have to be a celebrity, but you do need God's love and forgiveness. You don't have to earn your way to heaven. Romans 6:23 (NLT) tells us, **"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."** But you do need to live in way that honors God. So as you think about other people watching you, take these words to heart. **"Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."** (Matthew 5:16 NLT) Be God's celebrity. Let others see Christ in you today and every day. Amen.