

Candela



Newsletter of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc.

Organisational Details are provided on the next page

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 2025

ISSUE 121

Here we are at the start of spring and another issue of the Candela. The day lengthens and the daylight lingers longer. A nice time of the year. Talking of light, I regularly take a torch around with me, having a five minute walk home in the dark when it helps, to light a small shed when I switch the pump off, and wave our family off after they've been with us. Oh, and quite a few power cuts makes a torch more than useful.



The thing about a torch is that it shines its light towards something, onto an object. A lamp doesn't do that; it just lights up everything around it. Nothing is singled out. So here we've got two kinds of light,

giving light but in very different ways. Light is always associated with seeing and understanding things and I guess we can all see why it has that meaning and correspondence. Heat is different. It's not really visible. Even the roaring flames in the bonfire are only visible because it's lit up. So heat - I prefer the word 'warmth' - is something felt, which then suggest it's more to do with feelings, love, caring and relationships, deeper things. That's its meaning and its correspondence.

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Please note: the views expressed in this Newsletter are those of each contributor and do not necessarily reflect any particular position of the S.A.A. or its committee.

NEXT ISSUE - December 2025

I hope you enjoy reading and thinking about the ideas contained in this Candela. Would you like to share some ideas or write a short article, maybe something about Christmas or New Year? Then please get them to me by 24th November.

Ruth

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The sun makes the day and shines over everything. It gives its light and warmth which we experience kind of as sunshine, as one thing, but it's easy to think now of the light and then think of the warmth, and make the distinction. The sun accurately pictures God, the divine, the source, the re-energising of life, of spiritual life. It's an amazingly perfect picture, isn't it? But the sun isn't divine, it's physical, but it's the big daily reminder and illuminator and radiator.

Let's go back to the torch though, and get personal. My torch has a neat little section on it which pulls a bit in or a bit out. When the torch is on and you pull it back towards you, the torchlight spreads wider and covers an area. When you push it away from you, it narrows its light almost to a single point, often in a square. I guess that change can help if you're looking for your dog or your diamond ring.

Swedenborg often talks about our need to look carefully, closely, and honestly into ourselves, particularly the recent past and how we've been. It's called self-examination and it leads into repentance which is our will to change some things in us because we now see we need to and we can see where to start on it. This activity is very much a torch time, spotlight onto, illuminating a corner of us.



Photo by Matthias Oberholzer on Unsplash

Reading a passage of a sacred text is another torch moment because we're reading words with meaning but our real need is to see (note!) see how they relate to us. What is this saying about me? What is it asking me? Maybe get a torch and a Bible and one night go under the covers like a naughty child reading instead of sleeping!

Lamp light has its place of course. Picturing the beautiful world, people we know and love, things we hear of about people going beyond normal expectations to bring more good into being. And lamp light can give us a sense of our right place in everything and the wonder of being alive in it all.

Go with some of this into the new season of greater intensity and watch the creation speed up its renewed will to live and grow and how it declares truth and joy.

Go well,

Julian



Are We Ready? by Howard A. Thompson

There is a saying I've heard in many contexts: "If it's not written down, it didn't happen." Today's version might be: "If it's not on Facebook, it didn't happen."

Photo by Solen Feyissa

This bit of humour touches something deeper: in our digital age, life itself—our histories,



our identities—is increasingly mediated by information networks. They shape what we see as real, what we value, and what we choose to remember.

Recently, I curated a short reading list on the rapidly unfolding topic of Artificial Intelligence. The second book on that list—Yuval Noah Harari's 'Nexus'—has just made its way to the top of my stack. (The first, Mo Gawdat's 'Scary Smart', I also highly recommend.)

As I've worked through Harari's dense and thought-provoking text, I've found myself drawn to unexpected resonances with spiritual life—and especially with Swedenborg's vision of how divine truth flows into human community.

What follows is less a review of Nexus than a meditation on its central themes.

Information is the Foundation of Reality

Harari suggests that information isn't merely a tool for describing reality—it creates reality. It is the fabric that binds humanity itself. The subtitle of Nexus is telling: "A History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI."

Harari proposes that myths, stories, data, and networks have shaped—and continue to shape—entire civilisations. They are the threads by which humanity weaves its collective life.

This resonates deeply with Swedenborg's account of the Ancient Word—a sacred text now largely lost to history, but one that once nurtured humanity's earliest relationship with the Divine. It offered narratives, correspondences, and living truths that allowed people to dwell in harmony with heaven and in mutual cooperation on earth.



Photo by The New York Public Library on Unsplash

Harari may not be speaking theologically, but his recognition of the formative power of information resonates with Swedenborg's vision of divine truth as the very force that binds heaven—and the universal church, that inner spiritual connection linking all humanity to the Divine.

Inter-Subjective Reality and Narratives

Harari makes much of the fact that societies are sustained not primarily by brute force, but by shared stories. Nationhood, religion, money, - even



human rights - exist because we believe in them together. They are what he calls “inter-subjective realities.”

From a Swedenborgian perspective, this is both insightful and incomplete. It's true that shared narratives hold communities together. But the enduring strength of a story depends on whether it corresponds to deeper spiritual realities. Brute power may seize control for a time, but no human regime lasts forever. A story focused on the Divine—a guiding star above all people, in contrast to a merely human figurehead or idol—has the power to regenerate and endure.

The Dual-Edged Sword of Information Technologies

Up until this point, Nexus is a fascinating deep dive into the history of information gathering—how humans have developed increasingly sophisticated ways to share, store, and transmit knowledge. As Harari points out, it's what makes humans unique among all earthbound species. And as Swedenborg would add, it is this very capacity that uniquely enables us to connect with the Divine.

But here, Harari's narrative takes a darker turn—one that echoes the spiritual descent in the Genesis story, where humanity, reaching for knowledge, is expelled from Eden. The same force that promises enlightenment also opens the door to alienation.



Every new information technology—from the printing press to the internet—carries this double-edged power. Harari notes how the printing press made possible both the Reformation and the witch hunts. Likewise, the digital revolution has given us unprecedented access to knowledge, but also to manipulation, division, and distortion.

Swedenborg would not be surprised. He observes that everything—even the Word of God itself—has both a heavenly and a hellish correspondence. Light can illuminate truth and wisdom, but it can also be twisted into falsity when separated from love. This dual nature is a sobering reminder: no technology is truly neutral. Each one becomes an amplifier of the spirit we bring to it.

AI as “Alien Intelligence”

Harari's descent into darkness continues with one of his most provocative insights: his description of artificial intelligence as alien intelligence. Unlike previous technologies, AI does not merely extend human capability—it creates, decides, and persuades in ways that seem uncannily independent. It's not just a smarter calculator or a faster search engine. It is something that begins to act as if it were a mind of its own.

This term—alien—resonates deeply. If we imagine, at this stage in our earthly development, encountering an extraterrestrial species capable of interstellar travel, we would rightly assume their intelligence to be far beyond what we can comprehend or prepare for. Harari is suggesting that AI may present a similar leap—not because it is conscious in any true sense, but because it functions at a scale and complexity that eludes human intuition.

Temptation 'Adam and Eve' Creator: Mitrovský, Milan Thomka Date: 1900/1910



Personally, I've often preferred the phrase apparent intelligence, to remind us that AI does not possess true consciousness or selfhood. But Harari's framing captures something crucial: the sense of disquiet many feel when faced with a machine that speaks with the voice of something both familiar and other.

Here, Swedenborg's warning sounds clearly. We are told not to place blind trust in intermediaries—whether priests, institutions, or charismatic leaders—but to test all things against the light of divine truth. AI is simply the latest “interpreter” demanding our confidence. And if we hand over our discernment, we risk surrendering our spiritual agency to a system that can generate persuasive falsehoods at scale.

We've already seen, over just the last decade, how easily large swathes of society can be manipulated into believing demonstrably false ideas—often because the deception aligns with what they want to be true. The danger is not merely in what AI can do, but in how willingly we entrust it with our attention, our decisions, and our shared sense of reality.

Democracy and Self-Correction

Harari likens democracy to a vast information network. Its strength lies in its distributed nature—the idea that no single node holds all the power, and that the system, when healthy, can self-correct. But this only works when truth is respected, legitimacy is earned, and citizens remain engaged. When lies are treated as facts, or when people withdraw from critical participation, the system begins to decay.

This brings to mind Swedenborg's vision of the church—not as an institution, but as a living body, a spiritual ecosystem. Like democracy, a true spiritual community depends on

freedom, shared responsibility, and ongoing self-reflection. Each person contributes uniquely, guided by love and wisdom. And central to this process is repentance—not as a one-time act, but as a continual rhythm of spiritual life.



Photo by Jonathan Singer on Unsplash

Repentance, in this light, is not linear but cyclical. It is the repeated and intentional practice of examining what we've done rightly, acknowledging where we've gone astray, praying for the Lord's guidance, and choosing to turn again toward good. Rinse and repeat. This process—ongoing, humble, and free—is what allows both the soul and society to stay alive, responsive, and open to regeneration.

Just as democracy cannot be sustained by passive citizens, so the church cannot flourish without active spiritual practice. Both require more than belief; they require participation, discernment, and the courage to change.

Toward a Spiritually Discerning Future

Harari writes as an historian and philosopher; Swedenborg as a revelator. Yet their themes converge: humanity is sustained by the stories it tells and the networks it builds. The question is whether those stories align with divine truth, and whether those networks foster wisdom or amplify deception.



Mo Gawdat, in his book *Scary Smart*, offers a sobering reminder: artificial intelligence is not a passing trend—it is here, and it will increasingly shape the world we inhabit. That reality need not fill us with fear, but it must call us to attention. For as our tools become more intelligent, so must we become more discerning.



Swedenborg teaches that discernment is not just intellectual; it is spiritual. It is a form of inner literacy—the ability to tell the difference between what is true and what merely sounds true, between what leads toward love and what leads away from it. This is the work of regeneration. And it is ongoing.

So I leave you with this question: Are you a passive participant in today's information networks—or a spiritually discerning citizen of the New Church?

The task before us is not to reject technology or retreat from the future, but to meet it with awakened hearts. To test every spirit. To practise repentance as a living rhythm. To see clearly, love deeply, and choose wisely.

For if it's not written down, it didn't happen.
And if it's not spiritually discerned, it may not be true.

Reverence

The practice of acknowledging the Lord by loving the neighbour.

Definition- *a feeling or attitude of deep respect tinged with awe; veneration.*

Synonyms – deep respect, esteem, regard, honour, homage, deference, veneration, admiration, adoration, devotion, worship, awe, fear.

Antonyms – irreverence, disrespect, disregard, scorn, contempt, dishonour, hatred.

Quotes

"The more reverence we have for the Word of God, the more joy we shall find in it."
Matthew Henry

"By having a reverence for life, we enter into a spiritual relation with the world. By practising reverence for life, we become good, deep and alive."

"If we have reverence for God, we will have respect for one another."

"Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world."

"Therefore, since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us be filled with gratitude, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."

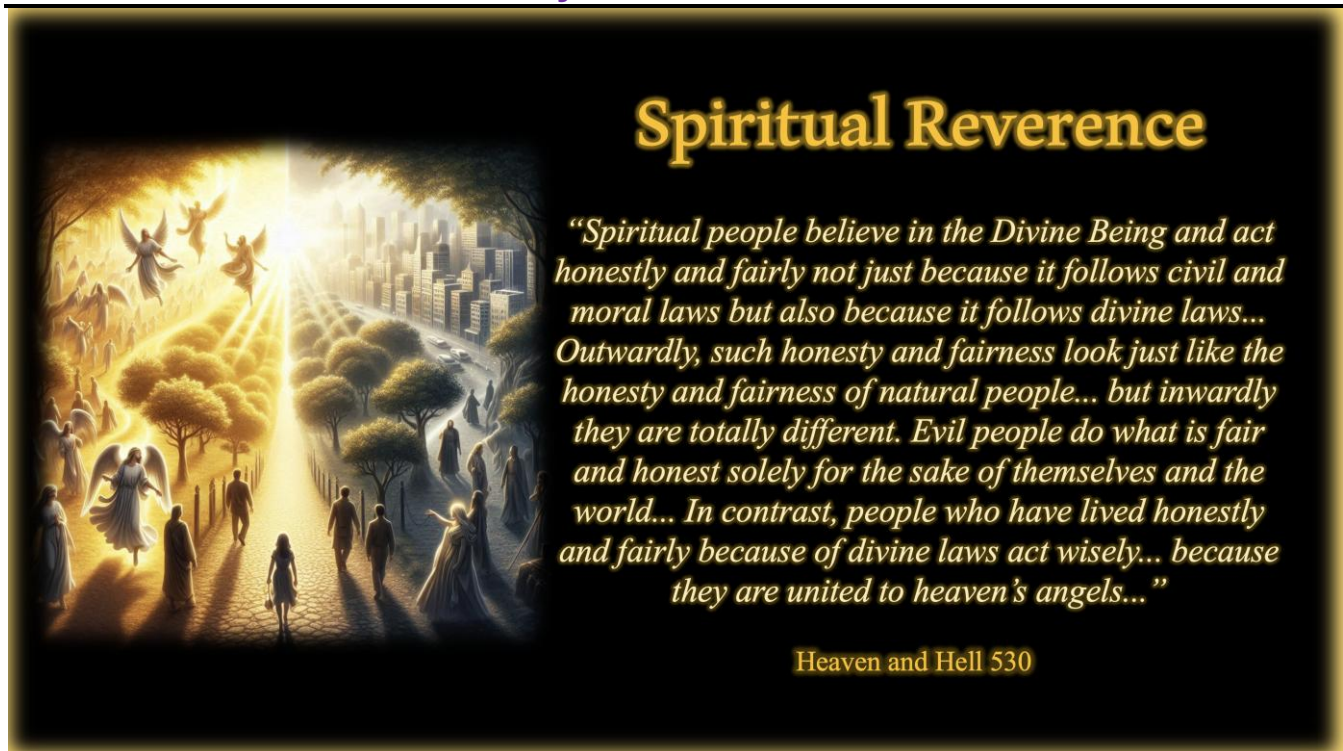
"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

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Virtues – Reverence

By Darren Brunne



Reverence keeps us grounded in trust and peace through the acknowledgement of God. It fosters a natural awareness of the Lord's presence in daily life. Spiritual Reverence moves far beyond what is external, formal or ritualistic. Those who embrace this virtue deeply find within themselves a profound inner posture of awe, humility and love towards the Lord and His unparalleled wisdom.

The Bible refers to reverence as 'the fear of the Lord,' denoting neither terror nor blind obedience, but a deep affection for the Lord's holiness, perfection and sovereignty. This virtue moves our heart into spontaneous worship, obedience and right living. In other words, it nurtures and supplies within us an abundance of love for others. To cultivate this virtue, we need inner spiritual habits supported by outward honourable choices, while acknowledging the Lord as the true source of all that is good, true and life-giving.

Six Daily Doses

We need a little dose of these six items daily to keep our heart, mind, and soul growing in awe and reverence of the Lord...

1. Acknowledge that each moment is new and sacred.
2. Read and meditate upon a little portion of sacred text.
3. Take a daily dose of Vitamin G - Gratitude.
4. Take a daily dose of Vitamin H - humility through self-examination.
5. Share a little bit of charitable love every day.
6. Discern the sea of energy we live in choosing the good while rejecting the bad.

I am thankful, Lord, for the gift of reverence. It guides me freely into a steady acknowledgement of Your presence and wisdom. It fills me with gratitude and love for others while increasing my happiness.



Seeing Angels by David Moffat



Photo by Ezgi Deliklitas on Unsplash

When I began writing about angels in 2005, my intention was to address the common desire to meet them. It was probably about ten years earlier that I became aware of that interest, and since then many authors have tackled the question with Emanuel Swedenborg's work as a starting point. After all, his writings contain particular insight into the being and nature of angels, due to his daily contact with inhabitants of the spiritual world.

Swedenborg's understanding is not a particularly glamorous one. Unlike the advertisements placed in our newspapers by New Age gurus and psychics, he does not promise that his reader will see an angel, nor provide any magic formula or series of steps guaranteeing a spectacular spiritual encounter. However, the basic principles are readily understandable, and available to all. So, while you may not shake hands with an angel after reading Swedenborg, you can certainly

bring yourself closer under the influence of angels by practicing what he recommends to us.

What Swedenborg offers this whole arena of thought are two quite startling insights. Firstly, angels are human beings: people who have lived on earth, died, and now live in heaven. This presents us with the intriguing possibility of becoming angels ourselves. Secondly, the processes by which we strengthen the influence and protection of angels are the very same ones by which we become angelic: the nurture and development of angelic qualities within ourselves which Swedenborg describes as regeneration.



While the real need to grow spiritually as a human being may be understood by some New Age practitioners, it is certainly not an understanding I derive from the advertisements. Asking "how can I meet an angel?" is to pose the wrong question, because it deals with the symptom not the cause. But it's the right one in the sense that we often deal with symptoms - perhaps my desire to meet an angel might lead me to begin a spiritual journey, in the same way pain urges me to visit a doctor or actually do something about my physical health.



In order to proceed, then, let's assume that we've all come to realise our need of becoming more angelic. So, just what are the character traits we are to develop?

It's easy enough to ask the question of what angels are like. One short brainstorming session during a workshop back in 2005 yielded over 50 descriptive terms and phrases. We all have our own ideas of what an angel would be like, and we can begin our journey to angelhood by turning the question on its head as Jesus was wont to do. When asked, "And who is my neighbour [... who I am commanded to love]?", he responded, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37). In other words, *be a neighbour to him whose spiritual life depends upon it.*

Before examining Swedenborg's descriptions, though, it is appropriate to sound a warning. The states recounted here are ideal ones. While I find some of them easy enough to implement, others seem well-nigh impossible. Still others might be easy to carry out *in theory*, yet they ask something of me I find difficult in myself - perhaps letting go of an attachment or habit, or on the other hand performing some use I regard as abhorrent or frightening. But impossibility is no reason to quit any endeavour, and I find myself encouraged to realise that angels only tend towards perfection, they never actually achieve it. The only failure, then, is the failure to try.

We begin our brief survey with some of the familiar ones, especially the Biblical injunction to love the neighbour. There is plenty of evidence in Swedenborg's work to show that angels carry this commandment out to the letter. They are embodiments of this decree. Another familiar idea, at least to regular readers of Swedenborg, is that of performing uses. These are popular, well accepted ideas we readily associate

with angels. While they don't need to be defended to anyone, the day-to-day practice of these ideals becomes somewhat more problematic, something Swedenborg recognises in his detailed discussions of these topics. They are also remarkably mundane: who would have thought that we could find training for heaven (or angelic presence and protection, for that matter) in the interactions we experience and endure at work or in the supermarket?!



Angelic innocence is an intriguing topic, and sometimes difficult to grasp. Angels are said to be innocent, but it is not the innocence of children. Angelic innocence stems not from ignorance, but from the full knowledge of evil and the choice for good. Heavenly innocence has nothing in common with the familiar definition (of 'not guilty' - having never committed a crime), rather it is a state of being "harmless", one in which crime will not be committed, ever. The psychologist and popular social commentator, Jordan Peterson, doesn't like the word, "harmless": he prefers to say that you should be dangerous and then you should learn to control it, and I think that also captures something of the reality to be sought after. An angel might, once upon a time, have committed serious offences of all kinds, but had that historical guilt pushed aside through repentance and the power of the Lord. What is essential to this state is recognising the potential for evil which lies dormant within each person, and our dependence upon the Lord, who is heaven, to hold those tendencies at bay.



There is much in the way of practical advice to be gleaned from Swedenborg's work on the subject. His statement that, "angels ... decline any thanks offered them for the good they do" (*Heaven and Hell*, paragraph 9, section 3) is one thing we can all practise at a natural level, even though it may take some years for the truth of it to sink in. When we find ourselves in situations of conflict with others, we can remember that "angels never attack ... only ward off and defend" (*Heavenly Secrets*, paragraph 1683), and modify our reactions accordingly. Similarly, "those who have charity hardly notice the evil in another person, but instead notice all the goods and truths that are his; and on his evils and falsities they place a good interpretation. Of such a nature are all angels, it being something they have from the Lord, who bends everything evil into good." (*Heavenly Secrets*, paragraph 1079 [end])

These are principles I can apply now, and often there seems to be no end of conflicts providing the context in which to do so. But one of the passages which serves to remind me just how far I have to go, is this one from *Heavenly Secrets*:

Angels think nothing of giving their own lives; indeed if it were possible they would suffer hell themselves in place of that soul." (paragraph 2077, section 2).

One day I may be called upon to live up to that one, but in the meantime it serves to remind me that my purpose here and now is to practise the kind of love which knows no boundaries, and to serve without holding anything back, even the little prejudices and wounds I cherish. It speaks to the experience of temptation, described in one passage as a fight to the death between the two sides of my nature (*Heavenly Secrets*, paragraph 8403, section 2) and reminds me of Jesus words,

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

Few religious topics engender as much excitement as angels in our present world. Through the pages of Swedenborg's spiritual work we glimpse our eternal goal, the angelic life latent within each of us. I can only recommend a detailed exploration of the whole subject to anyone wishing to enlist in the heavenly boot camp.



Photo by Stephanie White

Welcome to a new member

Welcome Susan Jamieson of Chifley in the ACT. We hope you enjoy reading the Candela.

"The nature of heaven is to provide a place there for all who lead good lives, no matter what their religion may be."

Emanuel Swedenborg



Hypocrisy or Simulating? by the New Christian Bible Study staff

Sometimes, when someone doesn't live up to their professed standards, we think "there's another hypocrite." Is that fair? The answer is: It depends.

We're all born with a mixture of loves - some for good things, and some for evil things. We're supposed to shun the evils, i.e. stop doing them. If we stop doing them, we're essentially making room for the Lord to flow in with good loves. The good loves, as they flow in, become the centre of our new lives. The evil loves don't really go all the way away, but they're pushed to the side.



Marred Vessel Photo by akhenatenator

Does this happen all at once? No. It takes a lot of practice - sustained effort - to really root out deep-seated loves. If someone is really trying, for example, to stop having a bad temper, and they fail, and lose their temper - are they a hypocrite? What if they're still feeling really angry inside, but are covering that up, trying to act more patient? Is that hypocritical? Not really. It's a necessary part of the process of squashing bad habits.

It's like the saying, "fake it till you make it". A New Christian term for this is "simulation". In *Marriage Love*, Swedenborg writes about the need to simulate love in marriage, even when you aren't feeling it. The feelings are bound to be a roller coaster ride, and simulating love helps keep the marriage warm even when the real feeling might not be so good.

But then there's actual deep-seated hypocrisy. As mentioned in Psalm 32:6, 'to do hypocrisy,' and 'to speak evil,' is to do evil from false ideas, and to speak false things from evil loves.

So, it largely comes down to motive. If you're trying to act well in an effort to live up to your good loves and true ideas, but you sometimes fail, you're probably simulating, and the Lord will be right there in the trenches with you, helping. If you're more driven by your selfish loves, you're tending towards hypocrisy... and you really don't want to go there.

True Christianity 381[2] Of all earthly people, hypocrites are the lowest and most earthly. They are sense-oriented—their mind is tightly bound to their physical senses. They have no love for seeing anything except what their senses take in; and because the senses are in the material world, the senses force the mind to think about everything, including all aspects of faith, from the point of view of the material world



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

To become a member of the Swedenborg Association of Australia, check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au and click "Contact" in the top menu, which has details on benefits of **membership** and an application form listing current membership rates.

Also check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au for details of **group events** which are held online, but you can also be physically at various locations around Australia. Follow the "about → contact" menu items on the website for a list of locations and contact info of your nearest group convenor, and see the "events" menu item for Zoom links so you can join online events.

Our new website is continually being updated with new study material and latest news and information.

The Beautiful World of Proverbs By Julian Duckworth

Every now and then I go back into the short, pithy, deep world of the world's proverbs. They do what we could well learn from (myself supremely), that human and spiritual truths can be encapsulated in ten words, not ten thousand. The other beauty of proverbs is that they often come from within the race and culture - so, the real situation for people - and express a joy, sadness, truism, wisdom, in this lovely craftsmanship. I will share ten with you, but search online for an abundance of sayings to make your heart leap and your day smile at you.

"If you can't live longer, live deeper."
(Italian)

"Begin to weave, and God will give you the thread."
(German)

"A bird does not sing because it has an answer... it sings because it has a song."
(Chinese)

"It takes a whole village to raise a child."
(African)

"Even though you know a thousand things, ask a man who knows one."
(Turkish)

"The best candle is understanding."
(Welsh)

"Coffee and love taste best when hot."
(Ethiopian)

"Some men go through a forest and see no firewood."
(English)

"If you can walk, you can dance."
(Mexican)

"The night rinses what the day has soaped."
(Swiss)

Every human instance can be "proverbialised." The beauty lies in the subtlety of catching "it". And the real wonder is that each human being just gets it, as if we are each a package of infinite wisdom embedded within us, waiting and able to come to the surface and be seen. Which of course is the truth, that God's loving wisdom is not on the other side of Jupiter but on the waiting beat of my own heart, if I will stop talking and just listen. My all-time favourite proverb is an Arab one and I share it at a time when there is deep hardship in that region of the world.

"Do good, and throw it into the sea."

We are still coming up with them. One-liners are the cousins of proverbs.

"Before you marry, watch your girl when her computer is coming in slow!"

The Bible of course has a whole book devoted to wise sayings, some of which rival the world's best proverbs and life's richest truths.

"Go to the ant, you sluggard."

"Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister.'"

"Bind God upon your brow."

Enjoy the wisdom and the browsing but don't forget to live too, where proverbs are coined.