

# **Proverbs**

## **Practical Advice on Life**

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# Overview of Proverbs

Text: Proverbs 1:1

## Authorship

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of writings, mostly written by Solomon, but not entirely written by him.

1. Proverbs 1:1-9:18 is the first set written by Solomon.
2. Proverbs 10:1-22:16 is the second set written by Solomon.
3. But Proverbs 22:17-24:34 are called the words of the wise. It could be Solomon from the collection he mentioned in Ecclesiastes 12:9, or it might possibly be an unnamed prophet.
4. Proverbs 25:1-29:37 are a collection of Solomon's proverbs which were collected in the days of Hezekiah, long after Solomon died.
5. Proverbs 30 are the writings of the prophet Agur.
6. Proverbs 31 were written by a non-Israelite king name Lemuel who acted as scribe to his prophetess mother who is unnamed.

Depending on how you read Proverbs 30:1, Agur, the son of Jakeh, is called an oracle, giving an oracle, or it is saying he is a descendant of Massa (Genesis 25:14; I Chronicles 1:30) who was a founder of one of the Arab tribes. In Hebrew, the word *massa* means a burden and is often used in prophecy to indicate sayings of doom. Proverbs 30:1 and Proverbs 31:1 are the only two places where this word is translated as "oracle." It was done because neither Proverbs 30 or 31 are condemnations. However, this makes the possibility that the country of Massa is being indicated more likely.

If the country is the proper translation, then Proverbs 31:1 is saying that Lemuel is king of Massa. Since Lemuel's name means "belonging to God" in Hebrew, it is generally believed that Lemuel's mother was likely an Israelite; thus explaining how he ended up with a Hebrew name.

We know that there were prophets in other countries. Israel did not have an exclusive lock on communications with God. Job was from Uz (Job 1:1) the region where the nation of Edom later arose (Lamentations 4:21). Balaam was from Pethor in upper Mesopotamia (Numbers 22:5). That there were prophets found in Massa would not be unusual.

Of course, ultimately, the true author of Proverbs, like the rest of the Scriptures is the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:19-21).

## The Name of the Book

The book gets its name from the first two words in the Hebrew text: *mishie shelomoh*, which means Proverbs of Solomon. In the Latin translation of the Old Testament, it was shortened to the name "Proverbs," which means "for words," and that how it become the English name for the book.

A proverb refers to statements which contain few words but contain a wealth of meaning. The book mostly contains a collection of proverbs, though there are other forms of writings in Proverbs as well.

## Its Placement

- Proverbs is a part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.
- Job teaches us how to suffer.
- Psalms teaches us how to pray.
- Proverbs teaches us how to act.
- Ecclesiastes teaches us how to enjoy life
- Song of Solomon teaches us how to love.

## Its Style

Proverbs focuses on the practical issues in life. It is primarily directed toward young men, but it isn't exclusively for them. Everyone can learn wisdom from this book. But since young men are the primary audience, we find the style of the book well suited for its audience. Young men tend to have short attention spans, so we find the book is a series of short topics which can be put down and taken up at any time. Yet, the statements are deeper than they first appear, so it gives the reader something to think about and puzzle over even when the book isn't opened in front of them.

No topic is dwelt on for long, rather it rapidly changes topics, so a young man doesn't get bored and drift off. But even in the change of topics there is a purpose and pattern. You will notice that the same idea or close to the same idea is repeated several times in the book. Yet if you look closely you will realize that the repeats are not always exactly the same. Because they are presented in different context, the series of ideas causes you to connect ideas that you would not normally think of as being related. Fascinatingly, each time you read Proverbs different statements capture your notice. I'm constantly finding myself seeing a truth being presented that I didn't notice before, but that is because my life, the context that I bring to Proverbs when I read it, is different so new connections are being made. This is why Solomon said, "*A wise man will hear and increase learning*" (Proverbs 1:5).

Even with the rapid change of topics, you can tell that Solomon realizes that his audience will have a tendency to daydream. Frequently there are admonitions to pay attention, such as, "*My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother*" (Proverbs 1:8). These statements always precede a particularly important point that Solomon doesn't want you to miss. Think of it as the teacher rapping on his desk or shaking the drowsing student – "Wake up! Pay attention! You really don't want to miss what I'm about to say."

Proverbs is written in poetic style, but Hebrew poetry is not like English poetry. We rhyme ending sounds and strive for rhythms. Hebrew poetry rhymes ideas, if you would allow to say it this way. Knowing the various poetic styles helps you pull out deeper ideas.

## Synonymous

An idea is expressed twice in different words. The use of varying words helps define ideas that some might not understand by showing a relationship between two thoughts. It also conveys a more precise thought since words in a language carry a range of implied meanings. Giving two ideas helps the reader to narrow down the meaning.

Wisdom shouts in the street,  
She lifts her voice in the square;  
At the head of the noisy streets she cries out;  
At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings

Proverbs 1:20-21

The parallels make us realize that Wisdom is trying hard to get people's attention by the variety of ways Solomon says she is attempting to make herself heard. We also see that she isn't found hidden away in some school. She is everywhere in town where she cannot be missed.

### **Antithetic**

Instead of the same idea being compared, the opposite ideas are contrasted. This is probably the most often used style in Proverbs. We are invite to examine two things to see how they are different.

The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked,  
But He blesses the home of the just.

Proverbs 3:33

Notice that a mixture of poetic styles can be used together. "Lord" and "He," along with "house" and "home," are synonymous comparisons while the highlighted words are antithetic contrasts. Thus the same God treats two groups of people in similar situations differently based upon how those people behave. But there is even more subtly. The wicked have a place to live (a house), but the just have a home where they are connected to the other people who dwell there.

### **Synthetic**

In a synthetic relationship one idea leads to another or is derived from the prior. It can be cause and effect, an explanation, or a condition followed by a consequence.

They would not accept my counsel,  
They spurned all my reproof.  
So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way  
And be satiated with their own devices.

Proverbs 1:30-31

The first and second pairs of lines are both synonymous comparisons, but the first pair of lines is the cause that leads to the effect expressed in the second pair of lines.

### **Progressive**

A progressive is simply a list of ideas in no particular order.

These six things the LORD hates,  
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

A proud look,  
A lying tongue,

Hands that shed innocent blood,  
A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that are swift in running to evil,  
A false witness who speaks lies,  
And one who sows discord among brethren.

Proverbs 6:16-19

The “six ... seven” set up the progression and tells us how many items are in the list. It isn’t just a list of sins. We also have a list of six body parts: look (face), tongue, hands, heart, feet, mouth and seven actions: look, lying, shed, devises, running, speaking, and sowing.

### **Climatic**

A climatic is a list with a conclusion. Often the order is important as it is building toward the conclusion.

A worthless person,  
a wicked man,  
Is the one  
Who walks with a perverse mouth,  
Who winks with his eyes,  
Who signals with his feet,  
Who points with his fingers;  
Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil,  
Who spreads strife.  
Therefore his calamity will come suddenly;  
Instantly he will be broken  
And there will be no healing.

Proverbs 6:12-15

Sometimes there will be a repetition of a word or phrase that act as bullet points in a progression or a climatic. Here we have a synonymous comparison of a evil person, followed by a list of behaviors. This person has a perverse mouth, winks, signals, points, devises evil, and spreads strife. We start with twisted words by one person and build up to hostility between people. Again there is also a list of body parts: mouth, eyes, feet, fingers, heart, and by implication hands.

The list is followed by the consequence of his action – sudden disaster, which further emphasized by pointing out that the consequences cannot be undone.

### **Emblematic**

A comparison between two sets of things where the relationship between the first set helps you understand the relationship in the second set. It is usually in the form of “A is to B as C is to D.”

Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool,  
And so is wisdom to a man of understanding.

Proverbs 10:23

We might not realize that many foolish people think that doing evil is a game that is fun to play. But then learning and applying wisdom is fun to a man who is able to reason.

## Introverted

An introverted list is a nested series of ideas in the form of A B C C B A, where each letter represents a similar idea. Sometimes the nesting is obvious with the terms being almost a repeat in their complementary section.

“Then I was beside Him, as a master workman;  
And I was daily His **delight**,  
    **Rejoicing** always before Him,  
    **Rejoicing** in the world, His earth,  
And having my **delight** in the sons of men.”

Proverbs 8:30-31

Proverbs 8:6-9 forms an introverted (nested) list of two styles. The outer levels are synonymous comparisons. The inner levels are antithetic comparisons.

“**Listen**, for **I will speak noble things**;  
And the opening of my lips will reveal **right things**.

For **my mouth will utter truth**;  
And **wickedness** is **an abomination to my lips**.

All the utterances of my mouth are **in righteousness**;  
There is **nothing crooked or perverted** in them.

**They are all straightforward to him who understands**,  
And **right to those who find knowledge**.

## Chiastic

A introverted series with the main point being a single idea in the center. It gains its name from the Greek letter chi (X).

Turn to **my reproof**,  
Behold, I will **pour out my spirit** on you;  
    **I will make my words known to you**.  
    Because I called and you refused,  
    **I stretched out my hand** and no one paid attention;

And you neglected all my counsel  
And did not want my reproof

Proverbs 1:23-25

### **For Discussion:**

1. What topics about life do you think a young man would need to hear about?

# Monologues

## The Objectives of Proverbs

Text: Proverbs 1:2-7

Not many books in the Bible clearly state their purpose, though each have a reason for being written. The book starts out with a list:

**To know** wisdom and instruction,

**To discern** the sayings of understanding,

**To receive** instruction in

wise behavior,

righteousness,

justice and

equity;

**To give** prudence

to the naive,

to the youth knowledge and discretion,

a wise man will hear and increase in learning,

And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,

**To understand**

a proverb and

a figure,

the words of the wise and

their riddles.

Proverbs 1:2-6

## **Define the Terms:**

**Knowledge**

**Understanding**

**Wisdom**

**Instruction**

**Discernment**

**Prudence**

**Discretion**

The terms knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are used repeatedly throughout the book of Proverbs. **Knowledge** is your basic facts and truths about the world. Small children start with facts: Two apples plus two more apples gives you four apples. Facts, then are the foundation for everything else. **Understanding** is your ability to take separate facts and join them together to understand more truths. It is your ability to reason or think logically about the world around you. Generally understanding comes into play strongest during the teenage years. Thus, I have four apples and apples are used in making pies; therefore, I could forgo eating my apples and bake an apple pie instead. **Wisdom** is being able to look at a situation and know what facts and reasoning apply to solve a problem. A wise person realizes that he has four apples that could be made into a pie, allowing him to share slices with seven of his friends and giving them a reason to put aside their differences while they enjoy something in common.

“**Instruction**” is translating the Hebrew word *musar*. This word combines the ideas of discipline, warning, correction, and instruction. In other words, learning takes effort and it may involve hardship. To learn, a person must realize that he is missing something he need, which usually involves being told he is wrong and what he must do to be right. Therefore, instruction is both the positive and negative aspects of learning.

Therefore, the primary purpose of the book of Proverbs is to teach the reader both wisdom and how to learn. It will involve discovering how little you really do know and that at times you were wrong. Instead of waiting until you are old, Solomon will be showing you how to properly apply what you have learned to many different situations.

“**Discernment**” is the ability to see things accurately. It requires a person to pay careful attention to his environment and to consider the implications of what he observes. Thus, Solomon is also going to teach you how to pay careful attention so you don’t miss important facts and be able to see the logic behind what you observe.

In learning, the reader will be told what kinds of behavior is wise. He will also learn righteousness; that is, what actions are correct and good in the sight of God. He will also learn about justice – making correct decisions. “Equity” involves a level playing field. It is treating all people in an equal manner. But it goes beyond this to also encompass the idea of making decisions that make life easier or smoother for all people involved.

Solomon then says he will give four things to four types of people.

A naive or simple person is someone who lacks experience. Such a person can be easily seduced into going the wrong way, so to him Solomon is going to give prudence. “**Prudence**” is the ability to see ahead. It is seeing beyond what is immediately happening and understanding where events will lead to in the future.

To the young man, Solomon offers to give knowledge and discretion. “**Discretion**” is the ability to make good decisions. When offered multiple choices, the person with discretion knows which choices are right in God’s sight. Young people haven’t had the time to learn all the important facts or to always know which choices are good and which are bad.

But what Solomon is offering is just for people who are ignorant in the ways of the world. Wise people will be able to read Proverbs and become even wiser. And a person who thinks logically and clearly will gain good advice for future decisions.

## How We Will be Taught

Solomon states he is going to use four styles of writing to instruct his reader.

A **proverb** is a short teaching that contains far more than it might appear on the surface. For example, there is an English proverb: “A bird in the hand is worth more than two in the bush.” This isn’t a statement about the value of birds. What it is saying is that what you currently possess is more valuable to you than a greater amount that you don’t possess. Too many people will let go of what they have in hopes of getting something greater only to learn they’ve lost everything.

A **figure** refers to a type of speech that taunts the hearer in the sense that it has a hidden secondary meaning that takes some thought to interpret. Puns are one form of this type of speech. “I couldn’t remember how to throw a boomerang, but eventually it came back to me.” Generally this form of speech uses symbols to represent something else. An example would be “*Drink water from your own cistern and fresh water from your own well*” (Proverbs 5:15). At first glance this is just good practical advice, but read in context it has a far deeper meaning that what it is apparently saying. You have to wait until we get to chapter 5 to find out the explanation.

**Words** of the wise are the most straight forward teachings. Here we learn how to apply the knowledge and reasoning that Solomon is imparting to us. This is in contrast to the riddles of the wise. “**Riddles**” is also translated as enigmas. My favorite translation of this word is “dark sayings.” These are statements that at first doesn’t make any sense; yet, you know they are supposed to be understandable. In the process of puzzling over the meaning you actually learn how to reason and think better, so while the statement teaches you something, the very act of trying to understand the statement teaches you something greater. An example of this is: “A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

## **Where Do We Start?**

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).*

In order to gain knowledge, you must first start with fear. Now there is a puzzle. What does being afraid have to do with learning facts? If a person thinks he knows everything, then there is no motivation to learn because he is confident that he knows all that he needs to know. Usually it is not until a person realizes he is in danger and that he doesn't have sufficient knowledge to get out of that danger does a person swallow his pride and is receptive to learning. Schools provide this type of motivation with tests. “If I don't pass this test, I'm going to flunk the course, then mom and dad will kill me!” Suddenly a fire is lit for learning. Colleges do something similar, knowing that there is a final exam which will determine my grade and knowing that if I don't pass the I wasted the money I spent on this course, the fear of not passing makes me inclined to learn.

Solomon's point is that until people realize that there is a final judgment by God and that each person is fully accountable to God for his own actions, there is no motivation to learn. *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).*

Love eventually supercedes that fear. *“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (I John 4:17-18).* Yet, it remains that the initial start to learning is fear.

In contrast, we are introduced to a character trait that will be discussed at length in Proverbs. A fool is someone who refuses to learn. They hold wisdom and being corrected in contempt. Implied in the contrast is that a fool has no fear of God.

## **For Discussion:**

1. How would being able to see the consequences of your actions (prudence) benefit your life?
2. What advantages would you gain if you knew which choice was the right one to make?
3. Why must there be negative aspects to instruction (rebukes, warnings, corrections, and hard work)? Can't you learn without these?
4. Why do you suppose some people don't want to learn?
5. Why doesn't Solomon just come out and tell us what we need to know? Why does he bury the information in puzzling words?

# Gangs

Text: Proverbs 1:8-19

## **Pay Attention, This Is Important!**

(Proverbs 1:8-9)

Throughout Proverbs, Solomon inserts an admonition that it is essential for the reader to listen to his parents' teaching – both the negative and positive aspects of their instruction. Parents have more experience in the world. We should make use of their knowledge, so we don't repeat the same mistakes they made in their lives and replicate the successes they have had. These warnings to listen always precede a section that contains a particularly important lesson.

Imagine, if you would, a young man listening to his father drone on. It isn't that what his dad is saying isn't important or useful, but the young man doesn't see an immediate use of what is being said to his life, and so he begins to drift off. Yet, a good teacher won't let a particularly important thought be missed. He shakes the young man's shoulders, "Now pay attention to this point, son. It is very important to your life!"

We aren't just told to pay attention, we are also told the benefits to listening to this point. Having your parents' wisdom available to you is like having a pleasant or graceful ornament on your head and around your neck. In other words, Solomon is comparing the instruction of parents to jewelry. People wear jewelry to make themselves look better and in the same way, your parents' teachings can make you look better.

## **The Appeal**

(Proverbs 1:10-14)

Don't ever allow yourself to follow the encouragement of people you know are doing evil. "Entice" translates the Hebrew word *pathah*, which literally means to open a way or make room for someone. If sinners invite you into their society, refuse the invitation!

Such would seem obvious, but so many people allow themselves to be pulled along by people they know are not good. Why? What is the motivation? Solomon illustrates the allure of a gang inviting some young man to join them.

## **Power**

The first invitation doesn't sound at all appealing to most people. But then, most people have some respect for the life of others. The gang offers the opportunity to sneak up and kill innocent people.

This appeals to people who feel powerless or helpless because of the circumstances of life. Young people who grow up in the poorer sections of town and who are constantly on guard against members of various gangs. Here is an opportunity to no longer feel helpless! You can have ultimate power over other people.

This isn't revenge. The people being targeted are innocent of causing you or others in the gang any harm. This is being done solely because it can be done. It makes a person feel stronger while not risking as much because innocent people are not as likely to be on guard or defend

themselves.

Many of your translations refer to “*Sheol*” in verse 12. *Sheol* is the Hebrew word for the realm of the dead. In Greek it is called *hades*. It can also be translated as “the grave.” “The Pit” is the section of *Sheol* that is reserved for the particularly wicked (Revelation 20:2-3; Job 33:22-28; ). In the New Testament it is referred to as “torments” (Luke 16:23).

Alluded to is what God did to Korah and his followers when they rebelled. God caused the earth to open up under their feet, they fell alive into the pit, and then the earth closed back over them (Numbers 16:28-34). In other words, the gang is claiming that they have power like God to kill whoever they please.

### **Wealth**

Wicked people are often interested in gaining money, regardless of how it is accumulated. The offer here is that young man can get wealthy by robbing others.

Again, it wouldn't sound appealing to someone trying to live righteously, but for someone who has little moral teaching the chance for quick wealth for seemingly little effort is appealing, especially if that person has grown up poor. Many will blame the successful for their own personal lack of success, as if success only comes by exploiting other people. Ironically, the robber, despite such reasoning, is definitely exploiting other people. Thus, he blames others for what he himself does.

### **Family**

The final appeal is that if the young man joins the gang, they will share everything. Likely this is a lie. The leader of the gang will control the gains in order to control the members and make them beholden to him. Still, the offer has its appeal to someone who doesn't have a stable home life and few friends.

### **The Trap**

(Proverbs 1:15-19)

In each appeal, the focus is on the immediate gains and not the long term results. That is why the means of gain is not emphasized, only the potential rewards.

Sometimes a person thinks he can join but just not participate. Solomon parallels this to someone who thinks he can walk the same path as the wicked, but not get caught up what they are doing. It never works. The tendency is to accept what is being done over time (I Corinthians 15:33). The only safe solution is not to even go with them.

Most evil involves making rash decisions. People, who don't take time to think about the consequences, will tend to follow where other people are pushing them. This is why salesmen will tell a client, “This is on sale today! I can't guarantee that it won't go up tomorrow.” When people start pushing for immediate decisions, that is when the warning flags should go off.

To emphasize the point, Solomon uses the illustration of hunter trying to catch birds. If he spreads out his net where birds can easily see them, he won't catch anything. Every self-respecting bird is going to see the trap and think, “Ha! I'm not flying there!” In contrast though, these violent gang members are laying out a trap and then walking into it themselves. In other words, Solomon is saying birds are smarter than these men!

The core problem is that violence tends to be met by violence. As Jesus told Peter, “for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). People are naturally protective of what their lives and what they have; thus, a violent man is likely to encounter violent resistance. Also, the community won’t put up with violence for long. Someone will eventually track down the criminals.

Power, wealth, and family are all useless to a person who is dead.

### **For Discussion:**

1. What other motivations might cause a person to want power, wealth, or family?
2. What other immoral activities might contain the same basic appeals?
3. Why do people tend to blame other people for things that they do themselves (see: Romans 2:1-3)?
4. Why do people think they can go where evil is being done and think that they can resist joining in?
5. Can power, wealth, and family be gained without evil? How?

# Wisdom's Offer

Text: Proverbs 1:20-33

## Wisdom Cries Out (Proverbs 1:20-21)

Solomon introduces us to the personification of wisdom. Wisdom is portrayed as a chaste, single woman. She isn't hard to find, she is in the street, in the market square, in the busy streets, and at the gates of the city. Where people can be found, she is there. Since all traffic into and out of a city had to go through the gates, Wisdom isn't hiding. Nor can you pass her by without notice. She is shouting at everyone who comes close.

## Wisdom's Message (Proverbs 1:22-25)

Her approach doesn't sound all that appealing. She calls the people naive, scoffers, and fools. A **naive or simple-minded** person is inexperienced and gullible; thus, susceptible to being seduced by evil. A **scoffer or mocker** is someone who disbelieves anything he doesn't already accept. Where the naive lacks teaching, the scoffer is certain there is nothing he needs to be taught. He is proud of what he thinks is right and makes fun of anyone who presents a differing idea. As mentioned before, a **fool** is someone who refuses to learn. Where the naive can potentially be taught, the fool refuses attempts to teach him.

The common frustration for Wisdom among these three groups of people is that they like things just as they are.

Perhaps it is the contents of the message:

Turn to **my reproof**,  
Behold, I will **pour out my spirit** on you;  
I will make my words known to you.  
Because I called and you refused,  
I **stretched out my hand** and no one paid attention;  
And you neglected **all my counsel**  
And did not want **my reproof**

Proverbs 1:23-25

Wisdom's message is packaged inside of scoldings. A person cannot truly learn without realizing there is a need for the information. Therefore, Wisdom is not scolding because she is haughty; she is stating facts that are not comfortable to face. Once a person is willing to accept his need, she is offering an overwhelming flood of information.

Going down into the chiasm is what Wisdom offers, coming back out of the chiasm are the people's rejection of her offer: they refused it, they didn't pay attention to it, they neglected it, and they did not want it. The center point, "Because I called and you refused," summarizes the entire series.

## The Consequence of Rejecting (Proverbs 1:26-30)

Life is full of good and bad events. While I cannot predict when a disaster might strike, I can be confident that disasters will happen to me during my life. It might not sound polite, but Solomon tells us that Wisdom laughs as disasters strike those who would not listen to her. Like most disasters, it comes with little warning, but it comes with overwhelming power – like a huge thunderstorm or a tornado.

Think about it. When is the time to dig a tornado shelter? During your spare moments during the years, or do you wait until you see a tornado on the horizon? For the same reason, Wisdom realizes the sad humor of anyone who thinks they can learn wisdom right before they need wisdom. It doesn't matter how badly they want it right now, it just can't be taught instantly.

**You Get What You Wanted** (Proverbs 1:31-33)

Paul warns, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Galatians 6:7-8). You get back out of life what you put into it. But you also get back more than you plant. *“They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind”* (Hosea 8:7).

Logically, therefore, ignoring or scorning the offer of wisdom has a consequence far greater than you might expect. Too often it leads to death and destruction. But listening to wisdom in advance gives security and a freedom from worries about future problems.

**For Discussion:**

1. What other reasons might people not seek out wisdom in advance?
2. What kind of laughter are we talking about when Wisdom laughs at the foolish people's disaster? See Psalms 2:1-5 and Psalms 37:12-15 for hints.
3. Does wisdom prevent disasters?
4. How might wisdom help in times of disaster?
5. Why would wisdom cause you not to worry about the future?

**Compare and Contrast**

<b>Proverbs 1:10-19</b>	<b>Proverbs 1:20-33</b>
Sinners are portrayed as a group of unnamed young men	Wisdom is portrayed as a single woman
The offer is a private enticement	The offer is loudly broadcast to everyone
The offer appeals to immediate gratification	The offer seems insulting
What is being offered harms other people	What is being offered can bring safety to the individual
What is being offered is a trap	What is being offered is an escape

The long term result is death	The long term effect is security and peace
The gang's offer involves actions to take	Wisdom's offer involves words to heed

Both offers give the person back what they put in, but in greater quantity.

# Wisdom Guards

Text: Proverbs 2:1-22

## **Wisdom has to be sought** (Proverbs 2:1-5)

You don't learn wisdom merely by being around wise people. You have to accept the teachings and treasure them. You have to apply what you learn to your life (James 1:21-25).

How badly must you want wisdom? You have to cry out for it or search for it as you would treasure that you know is hidden nearby. Only then will you understand the fear of the Lord and discover the facts you need from God.

### **For Discussion:**

1. In Proverbs 1:7 we noted that knowledge starts with what?
2. Why does it take effort to understand the fear of the Lord?

## **Wisdom comes from God** (Proverbs 2:6-9)

Job asked, "*But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?*" (Job 28:12). He goes on to point out that it can't be found among men or anywhere in the world. Wisdom isn't something that can be purchased. The conclusion is that God alone understands the way of wisdom (Job 28:23).

Solomon makes the same point. You can't find wisdom by looking under rocks. If you want wisdom, you have to look for it from its source (James 1:5-8).

Nor is wisdom distributed to everyone. God's wisdom is for the righteous. Just as we are to treasure or store up Solomon's teachings, God is storing up wisdom for His followers. The reason it is only for the righteous is simple – the wicked have no interest in learning anything from God. God guards the path of justice so that His people can follow it safely.

When we gain our wisdom from God, then we are able to discern what is righteous, just, fair, and good; just as Solomon promised to teach us back in Proverbs 1:3.

### **For Discussion:**

1. If the wicked refuse wisdom, can they know what is right, just, and fair?

## **Wisdom will protect you** (Proverbs 2:10-11)

Because of our strong desire to learn wisdom and because we learn it from the correct source, wisdom will become a part of us and we will find the facts of truth to be pleasant. The result is that our **discretion** (the ability to make good decisions) will guard us because our decisions will be based on truth and made with wisdom. Our understanding (the ability to think logically) will keep watch over our lives.

### **For Discussion:**

1. Why would some people find knowledge unpleasant to learn?

### **Protection from the evil (Proverbs 2:12-15)**

Solomon gives two examples of what wisdom can protect us from. The first is the way of evil. This way is promoted by men who speak perverse things. “Perverse” is someone who twists his words. He opposes what is right and promotes what is wrong. Thus, such a person makes life the opposite of what it should be. “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*” (Isaiah 5:20).

Such people are not doing this accidentally. They purposely leave righteousness to follow sin. They find evil a game to be played and enjoyed and they delight in turning righteousness upside down. What they will do next is hard to predict because they don’t walk a straight path and they delight in hiding their intent. Even sadder, they might not even understand just how lost they are (Psalms 82:5; I John 2:11).

### **For Discussion:**

1. What is the difference between evil and the **way** of evil? When wisdom protects a person from the way of evil, what does it mean?
2. What would the danger getting involved in people like this?
3. How is wisdom going to protect us from this type of people?

### **Protection from the seductress (Proverbs 2:16-19)**

While there are some who delight in doing evil, there are others who want to seduce people into sin. Here we are introduced to a woman who is the opposite of Wisdom, who we met in Proverbs 1:20-33. This woman is given no name. Though some translations call her an adulteress, the terms are literally that she is strange and foreign. This woman is not the close friend and familiar woman who could become a man’s wife.

The evil man uses twisted words to accomplish his ends. This woman uses flattery to accomplish her goals. The Hebrew literally says “smooth words.” These are the slick words of a salesman that slip past your guard before you realize what happened.

This woman does not honor her commitments. She might be married, but she doesn’t honor her marriage vows to husband (Malachi 2:14). Nor does she respect God who states that sex outside of marriage is a sin (Hebrews 13:4). She is willing to use sex to gain her way and it doesn’t matter if doing so breaks her relationship with God and her husband.

The difficulty in dealing with such a woman is that the immediate pleasures get in the way of seeing the consequences. Her way leads to death for both her and those who bed her. So many men who get involved in sexual sin think that they are in control. They see themselves as the aggressor and are convinced that they can stop any time they want. Such men don’t see that they are being manipulated through their desire for sex. Yet Solomon warns that the seductress’ way is a trap that is near impossible to extract yourself from. Men who go into the seductress (literally speaking of sexual intercourse) rarely are able to return to righteous living.

### **For Discussion:**

1. What would make many men susceptible to flattery?
2. How is the seductress different from Wisdom?

3. Is the consequence of death brought by the seductress physical or spiritual death?
4. Why would sexual sins be so hard to stop?

**The benefits** (Proverbs 2:20-22)

Therefore, the benefit to desiring wisdom and learning it from God is that you will stay on the way of righteousness. The righteous have stability and staying power. The wicked tend to be unstable and don't live as long.

# Wisdom's Benefits

Text: Proverbs 3:1-26

## Benefits of God's Teachings (Proverbs 3:1-12)

Solomon presents a list of benefits to heeding the teachings of God. It starts out with an admonition to pay attention because this list is important. God's laws are not arbitrary, they are given to benefit the follower. *"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"* (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

### Long Life (Proverbs 3:1-2)

Remembering the teachings of God comes from sincerely keeping the commandments. Learning doesn't remain with a person until it is put into practice (James 1:21-25). The keeping is not ritual obedience, but a desire to do from the heart what God asks of us.

The result is a longer life. While we could talk about eternal life, it is clear that earthly life is primarily being considered. People who sin, breaking the laws of God, tend to live shorter lives because sins causes harm in people's lives. However, it is more than just a length of life, it is also a more peaceful life (Psalms 119:165; Isaiah 32:17).

### For Discussion:

1. Does this mean that all people who have troubles or die young are not following God?
2. Why would following God's commandments result in a peaceful life?

### Favor in God and man's sight (Proverbs 3:3-4)

The Hebrew word *chesedh* is translated as kindness, mercy, loyalty, or steadfast love. Different translations pick a preferred English word to translate *chesedh*, but none completely capture the meaning. When *chesedh* is used in combination with truth, it refers to legally binding oaths or covenants (Psalms 25:10; 40:10-11; 61:7; 85:10). Thus, this is another way of saying to not lose sight of God's covenant or laws.

Carry God's laws with you like a necklace so they are always with you. Make them a part of your thoughts. The result is favor and respect from God because you are living to please Him. But it also will bring you favor and respect from men because God's laws make you a better person (Acts 2:47; Romans 14:18; Galatians 5:22-23).

### An Easier Way (Proverbs 3:5-6)

There is a strong tendency to believe anything we believe must be right. After all, it is our own thoughts on a matter. But if we learn to fully and sincerely trust God, decisions become easier as God directs us in our choices. We have to learn not to depend on our understanding of right and wrong, but acknowledge that God knows best. *"Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass"* (Psalms 37:5).

### **Health** (Proverbs 3:7-8)

There is also a tendency for people to think they fully understand matters and whatever they think is the best answer to any problem. It is a false pride because no one knows all (Romans 12:16). The counter is a healthy fear of God and the realization that we must leave evil behind.

Instead of suffering the consequences of our own poor choices, following God will keep us out of trouble and make us healthier.

### **For Discussion:**

1. Give some examples of how sin causes a person to have poor physical health.

### **Success** (Proverbs 3:9-10)

Beyond following God's laws and gaining the benefits from His direction, we need to give honor to God with the possessions. All that we have is truly from God. "Firstfruits" are the initial harvest when crops come in. The firstfruits is the best of the harvest and it is from this that we honor God and not the leftovers that no one wants. Nor is God expecting you to give what you don't have. It is the firstfruits of a person's increase or profit (I Corinthians 16:2).

It may seem odd that giving away a portion of what God gives results in more, but that is what God has promised His people (Malachi 3:10-11; II Corinthians 9:6-8). God will be generous to those who are generous.

### **God's Love** (Proverbs 3:11-12)

None of us knows everything. There are always things that we each need to learn. That implies that there are things that I am currently doing wrong because I haven't learned better ways yet. If I'm going to learn God's ways, that means I have to be accepting of being told that I'm wrong and that at times I will face the consequences of my faults. God corrects and disciplines us, not because He desires to be mean, but because He loves us and wants us to improve (Hebrews 12:5-14).

It is the same type of love fathers are supposed to show their own children. It is because fathers want their children to grow up into people they can be proud of, they will correct and discipline when they go wrong.

Therefore, we have to see that even the hard times in life are evidence of God's love for us. He is molding us into stronger and better people.

### **Benefits of Finding Wisdom** (Proverbs 3:13-26)

When a person finds the wisdom taught by God, he has found happiness. He has gained all the benefits God has promised.

Wisdom is more valuable than riches. Wealth is unstable. It may be here today and gone tomorrow. But with wisdom a person can gain wealth. Thus, it doesn't matter if I lose everything, with wisdom I can rebuild. But wealth is just about things. Wisdom makes us rich things that cannot be purchased: friends, love, righteousness, and long life; Therefore wisdom is more valuable than money because it gains things that cannot be purchased (I Timothy 4:8).

Following wisdom actually makes life more pleasant and peaceful (Matthew 11:29-30).

Wisdom keeps us from making mistakes that can ruin a life.

Wisdom is powerful. The universe was created by the wisdom of God. Having a portion of that great wisdom is valuable.

Therefore, we need to hold on to sound wisdom and good decision making because they will give us life and make us look good. Wisdom also protects us. Not just in our daily life, but even when we sleep. Knowing that we have made good choices, we can sleep peacefully and not have to worry about future problems. This doesn't mean problems won't come, but wisdom gives us the tools for which to deal with problems. We can take steps now to minimize future problems and know how to deal with big problems when they come.

Let me give a minor example. I could live, spending all that I make. I'll survive up until the car breaks down or the roof develops a leak. Then I would be panicking about how to pay for these unexpected expenses. Or I can be wise and know that problems are bound to happen. Therefore, I spend *less* than I make and save some aside as an emergency fund. Then when the car breaks down, it is not a panic only an annoyance. I pay for the repairs from the emergency fund and then return to rebuilding the funds. Wisdom didn't stop the problems from happening, but it made them problems that are workable.

My confidence then is not in my abilities, but in God who both teaches me and watches over me.

**For Discussion:**

1. How can wisdom benefit you in the work place?
2. How can wisdom protect you in relationships with people?
3. How can wisdom protect you spiritually in dealing with sin?

# A Sample of Wisdom

Text: Proverbs 3:27-35

A series of proverbs is given to demonstrate what can be learned from wisdom. A first it might appear that each proverb is independent, but an idea present in one proverb is picked up by the next proverb to make a new application. This chaining of ideas becomes a subtle form of poetry in a list form.

When good is owed to someone and you have the ability to do that good, then we are told not to hold back from doing good (Proverbs 3:27). A simple example is a boss who owes his employees their wages (Leviticus 19:13). But it can also be applied to knowing someone needs help. *“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?”* (James 2:15-16). God isn’t expecting you to do the impossible, but when you have ability to do good, we are not to refrain. *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17).

The next proverb extends the principle further (Proverbs 3:28). Delaying to do good is just as bad as not doing it all. Again, delaying to pay wages is a clear example (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). The reason is simple. An opportunity passed to do good may be an opportunity lost. We don’t know if we will be around tomorrow. *“Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away”* (James 4:14).

We’ve talked about doing good, so next we consider the opposite – doing evil (Proverbs 3:29). Doing evil should be clearly wrong by itself (Micah 2:1-2), but it becomes particularly foolish when a person decides to harm a neighbor. Whether you live in an apartment complex or a village, it is natural to put some trust in the people around you. You all have some interest in the safety of the area in which you live. Thus, any harm to your neighbor is harm to yourself. *“Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies; nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause. For they do not speak peace, but they devise deceitful matters against the quiet ones in the land”* (Psalms 35:19-20). Harm that comes from someone you thought you could trust is particularly hurtful.

Again we extend the concept. It is more than just outright plotting of evil (Proverbs 3:30). Making yourself an enemy of someone who has done you no wrong is also foolish. This most often comes about when a person makes accusations before all the facts in the matter are gathered. Whether we are talking about being over quick to sue a person in court or just being quick to expect the worse out of everyone around you, the results are equally poor (Romans 12:18-21; Proverbs 18:6; 25:8).

Turning it around, a person who is under attack by another should not allow him to envy his oppressor (Proverbs 3:31). It doesn’t matter if it appears that he is getting away with it for the moment or that he is profiting from it (Psalms 37:1, 7-9). Wrong is wrong regardless of the apparent outcome. If you envy the oppressor, you are believing that what he is doing is right.

But when a person thinks an evil, like oppression, is good in some circumstances, he has

become perverse (Proverbs 3:32). Perversity is the twisting of morality. *“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”* (Isaiah 5:20). God finds such warped views of good and evil to be particularly disgusting. An abomination is literally something that makes you sick to your stomach. In contrast God is intimately close to the upright (Psalms 25:14). An upright person is the opposite of a perverse man. The upright man is uncomplicated and straightforward. Right is always right and wrong is always wrong to an upright man.

We shouldn't assume that God just doesn't like the wicked. The next proverb (Proverbs 3:33) tells us that God actively works against the wicked while helping the just (Proverbs 21:12; Psalms 1:3, 6).

Nor is this limited to actively wicked. God considers the attitude of people and repays in kind (Proverbs 3:34). The scoffer or the scornful are those who don't believe what others believe and mock others for believing differently from themselves. In other words, scoffers are driven by personal pride. Thus, God doesn't believe in those who refuse to believe in God (Proverbs 19:29). But to people with a humble attitude are extended grace by God (Isaiah 57:15; James 4:16).

The conclusion is that the wise who heed God will inherit glory (Psalms 73:24), but the legacy of those who refuse to learn will be shame (Proverbs 3:35).

*“Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed; behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and wail for grief of spirit. You shall leave your name as a curse to My chosen; for the Lord GOD will slay you, and call His servants by another name””* (Isaiah 65:13-15).

*“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever”* (Daniel 12:2-3).

#### **For Discussion:**

1. Pick two or three the proverbs in this section. Find examples from the news or your own personal experience that illustrates the truth of what Solomon is teaching.

# A Choice of Paths

Text: Proverbs 4

## **Acquire Wisdom!** (Proverbs 4:1-9)

Once again Solomon admonishes his readers to pay careful attention so that they will be able to reason well. What he is offering is good, sound teaching that should not be carelessly discarded. These teachings are the same ones Solomon's father, David, had taught him when he was young. He also told his son to hold on to the teachings, to keep the commandments of God, and live.

Of great importance is to acquire wisdom and reasoning. Effort must be made toward this goal.

Then he taught me and said to me,

"Let your heart hold fast my words;

Keep my commandments and live;

Acquire wisdom!

Acquire understanding!

Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

Do not forsake her, and she will guard you;

Love her, and she will watch over you.

The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom;

And with all your acquiring, get understanding.

Prize her, and she will exalt you;

She will honor you if you embrace her.

She will place on your head a garland of grace;

She will present you with a crown of beauty."

Proverbs 4:4-9 form a small chiasm given by King David. The outer set emphasizes holding on to wisdom because it will give you life and honor. The second level is an emphatic command to gain wisdom and reasoning. The inner three lines then form the core point which is a list: don't forget or turn away, don't forsake, love. The two lines at the end form a secondary conclusion: Wisdom gained and retained will bring you grace and beauty. A crown is an honor that makes the recipient look good.

Recall that Proverbs 1:7 told us that the beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord. Now we learn that the beginning of wisdom is to acquire it.

## **The Upright Path** (Proverbs 4:10-13)

Again there is a call to pay attention so that the reader may live long. Solomon has

directed us to the way of wisdom which is illustrated as an upright path. “Upright” translate the Hebrew word *yosher*, which means straight, true, or honest. This is a path that goes where it appears to be going. There are no hidden turns or meandering ways. Such a path is easy to follow. You can walk it without hindrances (Psalms 18:36). You can run down it without stumbling (Proverbs 3:23).

This is what true wisdom is like. It is straightforward, honest, and without any hidden agenda or subtle traps. It tells you the direction you need to go in life and then takes you there at the speed you are most comfortable.

With such an advantage, you are best off holding on to Solomon’s teachings (Proverbs 3:18). Keeping those teachings true protects your own life.

## **The Path of the Wicked** (Proverbs 4:14-19)

The illustration of a path continues. The path of the wicked is one we should not follow. We should not even start going down the path. Even better avoid the path and not get close to it.

Why? Those on this path are looking for someone to prey upon. Doing evil and causing others to sin is how the wicked find rest and relaxation (Psalms 36:4; Isaiah 57:20; Micah 2:1). Wickedness and violence is their food and drink; it is what the wicked feast upon (II Peter 2:14).

The way of righteousness is compared to the light in the early morning. At first it is barely seen, but it gradually grows brighter until eventually it full daylight. Those striving to be righteous are the same way. A person’s righteousness starts out weak, but it grows stronger as he continues to follow God’s teachings.

In contrast, the way of the wicked is always dark, so dark that those walking can’t even see what they are stumbling over. In other words, the wicked don’t understand right and wrong. They don’t know why their actions causes them trouble.

## **Take the Straight Path** (Proverbs 4:20-27)

Pay attention again and don’t lose what you learn. Make them a part of you. What Solomon is teaching will give you life, both now and in eternity. It will even improve your physical health (Proverbs 3:8). What follows is a list of how to stay on the straight path, involving the heart, mouth, eyes, and feet.

The heart is where the blood of the body is pumped from and life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). We cannot live without it. So is it with our hearts -- the things we desire – as the heart goes, so goes our life (Matthew 12:34-35; Mark 7:21-23). We have to guard against wickedness or we will lose our life. In other words, avoiding sin is more than not committing wicked actions. It is a battle of what we desire. If we wait until the action to stop sin, we have already lost because the impulse to sin will constantly be there.

Along with protecting our heart, we must also control our mouths. Lying has to stop (Ephesians 4:25). Not just the outright lies but also the twisting of truth that makes other people make the wrong conclusions. Just as we tread a path is straight and clear, our speech has to be honest and straightforward as well. As James 1:26 points out if we can’t control our tongue, we are not just deceiving others, we are deceiving ourselves.

Next we have to control our eyes. You eyes have to be fixed on where you are going

because where you look is the direction you follow (Hebrews 12:1-2). “*The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*” (Matthew 6:22-23).

Finally, we have to control our behavior. We cannot engage in sinful behavior and think we can easily get back on the path (Romans 12:9; Ephesians 5:15; Hebrews 12:13). We cannot deviate from the straight path (Deuteronomy 5:32; Joshua 1:7). Therefore, we need to think about where we are going. Proverbs 4:26 begins with the Hebrew word *palac*, which means to make level or even. Following the path of righteousness is hard enough with putting obstacles in our way. Our steps need to be placed on the firm ground of righteousness (Psalms 37:23; II Thessalonians 3:3).

**For Discussion:**

1. How are the paths of wisdom and wickedness different?
2. Why such strong warnings to stay away from the path of the wicked?
3. Sometimes new Christians get discouraged. They see older Christians and think they will never be strong like they are. Is this true? What is the answer?
4. Explain Job 31:1 in light of Proverbs 4:25.

# The Seductive Path

Text: Proverbs 5

## Preserving Discretion (Proverbs 5:1-2)

There is a third path that must be considered in addition to the upright path and the path of the wicked. Thus, Solomon once again tells us to pay attention so that we might see how to make good choices and hang on to the truth (Malachi 2:6-7).

## Look Where the Offer Leads (Proverbs 5:3-6)

The seductress is portrayed as an immoral woman. The word used is for a stranger who practices different customs (example: Job 19:15) – in this case practices that are against God’s Law. Many translations render the word as an adulteress because sexual seduction is what Solomon is describing. However, the advice is not limited to just fornication or adultery, it applies to seduction into any form of immorality. Nor is a seducer limited to women.

The prime weapon of the seductress is her words. They sound sweet to the ear. They flow by smoothly. You get caught up in the words, focusing on the moment, and forget to see where things lead. Therefore, the primary defense against seduction is to think about the end results.

Solomon warns that immorality leads to bitterness. Bitterness is a caustic attitude toward life or other people. Wormwood<sup>1</sup> is a shrub whose oil is use as a topical antiseptic, but it extremely bitter in taste.

Immorality is also as sharp as a two-edged sword. A two-edged sword is a dangerous weapon in battle because the wielder can cut in both directions of his swing. But it is also danger to the one using the sword because it can just as easily cut the wielder as he winds up for a blow. Thus sexual immorality is not only generally dangerous, but it can hurt the person who thinks he is in control of the situation.

Ultimately her way is the way of death – both physical and spiritual.

The first part of Proverbs 5:6 can be translated referring to a female (“she”) or a masculine (“you”). The King James and New King James took the route of the masculine (“you”) and it results in “Lest you ponder her path of life.” This then explains why it is important to listen to the warning. The problem the last half does says that her ways are unstable and she does not know them. The King James and New King James changed the female in the last part to “you” to match the first part. Most other translations take the route of the female (“she”) in the first part. “She does not ponder the path of life.” The result is that even the seductress doesn’t understand where she is heading, she doesn’t even think about it. Because her



Wormwood

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<sup>1</sup>Wormwood - "Artemisia herba-alba" by רבוטקואב - www.biolib.de and Hebrew Wikipedia. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Artemisia\\_herba-alba.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Artemisia\\_herba-alba.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Artemisia_herba-alba.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Artemisia_herba-alba.jpg)

direction through life is unstable, she doesn't see where she is heading.

**For discussion:**

1. What is meant by “a smooth talking salesman”?
2. In the case of the seductress, what product is being sold?
3. What is it about fornication that leads a person to be bitter?
4. How can fornication hurt the person who is committing fornication?
5. How could fornication lead to an early physical death?

**Stay Away (Proverbs 5:7-8)**

Even knowing where things will ultimately lead, there are always some who think they can come close without actually getting caught in the trap. Hence, Solomon again urges his readers to listen and do as he instructions. It would be foolish to follow someone who doesn't know where they are going. Far better is to stay as far from them as possible, just as you would the path of wickedness (Proverbs 4:15).

**The Consequences of Fornication (Proverbs 5:9-10)**

People who don't listen to Solomon's warning to stay away will eventually get caught up in fornication. Fornication involves a lot of waste that you might not notice until it is too late.

You will end up giving your honor to others. The Hebrew word is *hodh*, which refers to a person's splendor, majesty, vitality, glory, or honor. People respect a man who has self-control. Fornication is rightly seen as a selfish act, which lowers the reputation of the fornicator in the eyes of others.

You give your years to the cruel one. Years that could have been filled with joy and productivity are lost. Instead, you waste your time with people who don't love you or care about you. Satan holds you ensnared for longer than you realize was possible.

Your strength and efforts go to foreigners. The Hebrew word *koach* refers to a person's strength, power, fitness, or virility. Many translations render this word as “wealth,” the result of a person's hard work. Prostitutes, of course, demand payment. Hard earned money is lost for mere moments of pleasure that gains you nothing. Even in the case of adultery or fornication, there are demands for gifts and money – nothing is truly for free.

**Avoid Having Reasons to Regret (Proverbs 5:11-14)**

You mourn over the destruction of your body. Promiscuous sex is almost always accompanied by sexually transmitted diseases, many for which even today we have no cures. How sad to realize that the moments of pleasure were not worth it after the consequences are irreversible.

Those who refused to learn, especially from their mistakes, are the ones who fall into the trap of seduction. A lack of knowledge makes you gullible to cons. What becomes particularly maddening is to realize after the fact that you had the resources to avoid the trap but did not make use of them. Instead, you refused to listen to those trying to teach you and warn you. Recall what Wisdom said in Proverbs 1:20-32.

The man here finds himself on the edge of total ruin while in the midst of God's people.

Help was on every side; yet, help was not sought out. Now his sins become a public spectacle.

Yet the situation is not completely without hope. Though ruined, it is not a total loss because the person is still alive. *“But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion”* (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

**For discussion:**

1. Why does a refusal to admit you are wrong make you more susceptible to seduction?

**The Reasonableness of Sex Only in Marriage** (Proverbs 5:15-20)

A parallel is made between thirst and the desire for sex. Before the advent of municipal water supplies, and still true where such does not exist, where would be the best place to get a drink of water? The clear answer is from the water at your own home because that is the water you are accustomed to drinking. You know that water is safe.

If you have a trusted source for water, it makes no sense to throw that clean water out into the streets. Back in those days they did not have closed sewer systems. When you were finished washing the dishes, you opened the window and tossed the water out into the street where it would flow into the gutter and then out of town. Finished washing the kids? The bath water would go the same place. Now if you were really thirsty, would you take your glass out to the gutter to get a fresh cup of sewer water? Of course not! The very idea should make you squirm and think how disgusting! You have no idea what is in that water or where it has been.



For the same reason sex belongs in a marriage, exclusively between a husband and his wife. Sex with your spouse is with someone you trust and you know it is safe. Having sex with anyone else ought to make you disgusted. You don't know who else they have had sex with. You don't know what germs they have been exposed to or are carrying.

In contrast, sex within marriage should be fun, exciting, and satisfying. It simply does not make sense to find pleasure with someone you can never trust.

**God Sees Everything** (Proverbs 5:21)

Sex is understandably a private matter. People who are involved in sexual sins go to great lengths to hide what they are doing from other people. Thus, they assume they have gotten away with a sin if they believe no one else knows about their sin. But what is forgotten is that nothing is hidden from God (Jeremiah 16:17; Hosea 7:2). For the righteous, this is a source of comfort, but the wicked would rather forget that God is always present.

**For discussion:**

1. If you could actually see God watching you, would your behavior change?

**Men Are Caught by Their Own Sins and Foolishness** (Proverbs 5:22-23)

People who sin also forget that sins are wrong because there is innate harm in the action. People fool themselves into thinking they have gotten away with a sin when they believe nothing bad has resulted from their sin. Yet, eventually something unforeseen happens: someone walks in and catches the adulterer or a pregnancy occurs, as happened to Judah and David.

What people also overlook is that the temptation to sin involves pleasure and chasing that pleasure can be addictive. People will typically tell themselves that they will only do it once or that they can stop at any time. However, those same people don't stop. They are snared by the pleasure and they can always come up with a reason why it would be acceptable to continue for just a little while longer. They continue until it is too late: either they die because of their sins or their foolishness is revealed to everyone. Sin becomes the trap (Psalms 7:15; Jeremiah 2:19).

Seductive sins involve cycles. A person has a problem or desire. The sin appears to offer a relief from the problem, but the relief is only temporary. Either the problem remains or it gets worse. Sometimes trying to stop the sin actually adds to the problem. Therefore, the person returns to the sin to get relief, only to find himself caught in a never ending cycle.

**For discussion:**

1. While Solomon focuses primarily on adultery, this isn't the only sin promoted by seduction. What other sins involve seduction?
2. List out the cycles created by these seductive sins.
3. What are ways that a person could solve the problem without getting involved in a seductive sin?

# Four Things that Lack Forethought

Text: Proverbs 6:1-19

## **Don't Guarantee Some Else's Loan** (Proverbs 6:1-5)

It initially sounds like you are doing a good deed. Someone can't secure a loan on his own, so he asks you to cosign. Yet, Solomon warns that it isn't as good as it might seem. If a person isn't able to get a loan, then it means the banks and other people have already determined that he isn't likely to pay back the loan. If he doesn't pay and you are the cosigner, then the banks will expect you to pay the remaining amount. Thus, you will be paying for something you never have use of; yet, it will impact your future.

If you are in this situation, the best thing you can do is get out of it as quickly as you can. Ask yourself what will happen to you if the debt comes due tomorrow?

### **For Discussion:**

1. Notice the urgency that Solomon places on getting out of a cosigning situation. Why is he so adamant?
2. If being surety for a neighbor is so bad, what about with someone you barely know?
3. Is cosigning always bad?

## **Don't Be Lazy** (Proverbs 6:6-11)

When you are feeling lazy, you need to consider the ant. Ants are constantly working at storing food. Even though each ant doesn't move a large quantity of food, he is able to accumulate a large amount over an entire season. And the ant does it all without anyone making it act with forethought. It sounds so good to put off some effort for a later, more convenient time, but the lack of effort also accumulates over time. Before you realize it, the effect of small periods of laziness strikes.

### **For Discussion:**

1. Apply this lesson to studying for a class. Which is better: to study in small chunks as the class progresses or to cram your efforts for the night before the final exam?
2. Where else could you apply this lesson?

## **The Fate of the Worthless Man** (Proverbs 6:12-15)

A worthless person,  
a wicked man,  
Is the one  
Who walks with a perverse mouth,  
Who winks with his eyes,  
Who signals with his feet,  
Who points with his fingers;

Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil,  
Who spreads strife.

Therefore his calamity will come suddenly;  
Instantly he will be broken  
And there will be no healing.

Proverbs 6:12-15

The repetition of the word “who” serves as bullet points in a list describing the behavior of a worthless, wicked man. We start with twisted words by one person and build up to hostility between people. Each item is a form of misleading. Perverse words say the opposite of what is actually true. People wink when they wish to signal to a few that they don’t really mean what they are saying. As Jesus points out in Matthew 7:15-20, when a person’s words don’t match his actions, then the actions are closer to the truth. Then there always those who are quick to accuse others of what they themselves are doing (Romans 2:1). Finally, the wicked are constantly devising evil because their very thoughts are twisted (Psalms 36:4; Isaiah 32:7).

Notice that there are two lists, one of body parts and one of actions. One list is shorter than the other, but it leaves an implication that the absent part is the hands because hands spread things; yet, strife isn’t spread by hands. Strife is spread by the accumulated affect of prior actions. This technique makes it easier to memorize lists

Despite the trouble the wicked creates, what we need to realize is that it will not last. What a person does comes back to him and in this case the fall is almost always a sudden reversal of fortune that can’t be undone (Psalms 73:18-20; I Thessalonians 5:3).

Notice that once again a lack of forethought is being demonstrated. Here is a person who thinks to cause problems for other people, never realizing his actions will come back to him as personal disaster.

#### **For Discussion:**

1. Is this a warning against being wicked or an assurance that the wicked will not escape the problems they cause?
2. What are some indications that you are dealing with a wicked person? What should you look for?

#### **Things the Lord Hates (Proverbs 6:16-19)**

These six things the LORD hates,  
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

A proud look,  
A lying tongue,  
Hands that shed innocent blood,  
A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that are swift in running to evil,  
A false witness who speaks lies,

And one who sows discord among brethren.

Proverbs 6:16-19

The “six ... seven” sets up a list, telling us how many items are in the list. This is a list of things the Lord hates – more than hates, it is a list of things that God finds particularly disgusting. “Abomination” literally means something that makes you sick to your stomach. It is actually two lists packed into one. We have a list of six body parts that are connected to seven sins. The body parts are: look (face), tongue, hands, heart, feet, mouth. The seven sinful actions are: pride, lying, murder of the innocent, planning evil, rushing to do evil, speaking lies when you are a witness, and sowing discord.

What is particularly strange about this list is that only the murder of the innocent is something universally seen as very bad. There is more wrong with these sins than it first may appear (Isaiah 59:1-4).

**For Discussion:**

1. Why do you suppose lying is mentioned twice? What is the difference between the two? Aren't some lies acceptable? (Revelation 21:8)
2. What is so bad about personal pride? (Psalms 101:5; James 4:4-10)
3. Can shedding innocent blood include more than murder? (Proverbs 1:11)
4. Why is planning evil horrible? After all nothing has been actually done. (Psalms 36:1-4)
5. What does being in a rush to do evil say about a person? (Isaiah 59:7; Proverbs 1:16)
6. What danger lies in dividing brethren? (I Corinthians 1:10; III John 9-10)

# Consequences of Sexual Sin

Text: Proverbs 6:20-35

## Pay Attention so You Can Be Guided (Proverbs 6:20-23)

Another critical section is coming up. It is really the fifth thing that is done without proper forethought. Yet, this one is so prevalent, it deserves a fuller discussion and you can't sleep through this discussion. Emphasis is given by using "bookends." It starts with discussing commandments and instruction in verse 20 and ends with commandments and instruction in verse 23.

Retaining teaching takes constant effort. Almost nothing can be learned just once and then always remembered (James 1:21-25). You have to work at holding on to the teachings, no one can just give them to you. The word "bind" in Proverbs 6:21 is the Hebrew word *qasherem*, the same word used in Deuteronomy 6:8-9, which also discusses remembering the Law.

The reason to hang onto the commandments is given as a list:

*"When you roam, they will lead you;*

*When you sleep, they will keep you;*

*And when you awake, they will speak with you."* (Proverbs 6:22).

This again is similar to Deuteronomy 6:7, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." Deuteronomy 6:7-9 presents the role of the teacher in instructing, while Proverbs 6:21-22 presents the role of the student in learning.

The teachings of your father and mother are personified as nursemaid to a young child, guiding, guarding, and reminding the child. The Law is a guide, protector, and companion to those who hold to the Law.

Proverbs 6:23 forms a climatic list with the conclusion in verse 24:

*"For the commandment is a lamp*

*And the teaching is light;*

*And reproofs for discipline are the way of life*

*To keep you from the evil woman,*

*From the flattering tongue of a seductress."* (Proverbs 6:23-24).

Commandments tell us what to do – positive instruction if you would. Teachings are both positive and negative instruction. Reproofs are negative instruction – telling you what you are doing wrong. A lamp is a single source of light, but it isn't as bright as light found in the day time, but neither are as figuratively bright as following God's way (Proverbs 4:18). It takes a balanced approach to learning in order to grow and there is no getting around the fact that disciplinary reproofs are necessary for the greatest gains.

When followed, these forms of teaching will keep a person from the seductress and the dangers she presents.

**For discussion:**

1. What are the differences between commandments, instruction, and reproof?
2. Not all parents are good parents? Does this apply to the teachings of a bad parent?
3. When is light most needed?

**How an Immoral Woman Operates (Proverbs 6:24-25)**

As mentioned before the seductress uses words to encourage her victim to commit immoral acts (Proverbs 2:16; 5:3). They are words that appeals to a man's ego and since he believes they must be true, he accepts what he is being told without questioning it.

Another a method is to allure through physical beauty. Men tend to be visually stimulated, so getting them to focus of physical beauty gets them sexually aroused. And when a person is aroused, they stop thinking clearly.

The third method is to capture a man's attention with her eyelids. People automatically focus on things that move, so by fluttering her eyelids, he instinctively focuses his attention on her.

If a man is aware of how the trap operates, there is a better chance that he won't be snared.

**For discussion:**

1. While Solomon uses the immoral (strange or foreign woman) and the adulteress as parallels, are there differences in the two?
2. John says there are three avenues for lust in I John 2:15-17. How does the seductress use these three avenues against her victim?

**Why an Immoral Woman Offers Sex (Proverbs 6:26)**

Ego, or personal pride, tells a man that he is sexually appealing and it is no wonder a woman wants him. But in reality men who have sex with a prostitute are nothing more than a way to make money and put bread on the table. Despite her words, she cares nothing for the men she allows to have sex with her. Instead, she is a hunter seeking out prey so she can profit.

**For discussion:**

1. Is money the only motivation for sexual immorality? What other ways might a seductress see sex as a means to an end?
2. In both the case of the prostitute and the adulteress, who are they concerned about? Who are they not concerned about?

**It Isn't Love or an Accident (Proverbs 6:27-29)**

Many people think they can go part way, toying with sensuality but avoiding fornication. Have you thought about the things that lead up to sex? God warns against lewdness. Lewdness refers to shameless behavior, particularly in regards to sex. It is behavior that is involved in pure self-enjoyment or behavior characteristic of an animal. So things like foreplay or behavior that arouses sexual desire would be lewd. *"Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,*

*and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts"* (Romans 13:13-14). Lust is thinking about doing something that is wrong and justifying that it would be all right at least in this case. The reason lewdness and lust is forbidden is because they lead up to sex. You don't start something that you can't morally finish.

Solomon points out the problem when he asked, "*Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?"* (Proverbs 6:27). You can show a hot coal all the affection you want. You can cuddle it and dote on it and it will still burn you. Your kindness to it doesn't change its nature. How often do you hear someone say, "But I love her!" Solomon's point is that a man's feelings toward a woman won't change the fact that they both have built-in desires and capabilities for sex. Trigger those desires and they will follow the instincts built into them.

Solomon also asked, "*Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?"* (Proverbs 6:28). Using the same example of a hot coal, if you walk on it, it will burn you. You can apologize and say you didn't mean to step on it, but you'll still be hurt because your intentions doesn't change what it is. Thus, the excuse, "But I didn't mean for it to go this far!" becomes an empty one because a man's intentions doesn't change his body's drive.

This is why Solomon concludes, "*So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent"* (Proverbs 6:29). Though he is talking directly about adultery, the same point is true about fornication. When you start intentionally stirring up sexual feelings, you are never innocent when things go further than you wanted. This is also why Paul said, "*Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman"* (I Corinthians 7:1). By that he means touching a woman in a sexual way.

### **No Sympathy for Sexual Sinners** (Proverbs 6:30-31)

Adultery is compared to a thief who steals because he is hungry. People have sympathy for the thief, yet he must still face the consequences of his sin, even if it means he loses all that he has. The implied contrast is that there is no sympathy for the adulterer. While the urge for sex is strong, it cannot be argued that it had to take place. No life is ever in jeopardy when the temptation to have extra-marital sex is turned down. But like the thief, when adultery is discovered, the consequences must be faced (Deuteronomy 22:22).

### **For discussion:**

1. Why did adultery carry such a harsh punishment?

### **Sexual Sins Lead to Harm** (Proverbs 6:32-35)

The man who commits adultery shows a severe lack of judgment. He is engaging in something that carries large risks and severe penalties all for moments of pleasure (I Corinthians 6:18).

- The most serious consequence is the damage it does to a person's soul. An unrepentant adulterer will not reach heaven (I Corinthians 6:9) and adultery is a hard sin to leave (Proverbs 5:22). In essence, the adulterer is committing spiritual suicide.
- There are physical consequences as well. People who do not respect marriage covenants rarely stay with one sexual partner. This leads to a rapid spread of diseases (wounds) (Proverbs 5:11).

- There are social consequences. People understand that adultery is a selfish act that destroys families. Even in societies where adultery is not illegal, the adulterer is treated with contempt. And people have a tendency not to forget this sort of thing since it is fodder for gossip.

Finally, there is danger from the rightfully jealous husband (Song 8:6). He is likely to take vengeance, even though that is wrong (Romans 12:17-19). If people feel no sympathy, the husband of the woman will feel even less. There is nothing that can be given to him to repay the damage the adulterer has done. The very attempt to pay him back will only make his anger worse.

# An Illustration of Seduction

Text: Proverbs 7:1-27

## **Hang on to the commandments and wisdom** (Proverbs 7:1-5)

This begins another important section, so Solomon again encourages us to keep his words and treasure them. We should keep the commandments as if our lives depend upon it – and it does. We should see Solomon’s teachings as “the apple of your eye.” The phrase literally refers to the pupil or black of the eye. We are very protective of our eyes (Psalms 17:8; Zechariah 2:8), and so we should guard the teachings we learn from God.

We still talk about tying a string around our finger as a reminder, and so we are to constantly remind ourselves of the commandments and teachings of God.

In those days lessons were learned and practiced on clay tablets. Much like a chalk board, you can erase old lessons by smoothing out the damp clay. However, if the writing is left there, the tablet hardens down and becomes permanent. Solomon urges us to write on the tablet of our heart, to make the lessons we learn from him a part of our permanent memories.

Our relationship to wisdom should be close – someone we are familiar with and see often. Because wisdom will keep us out of danger, such as the danger that comes from seduction.

## **Wrong place, wrong time** (Proverbs 7:6-9)

The story is not an actual event, but the elements are all things that could happen. Solomon illustrates the danger by telling us of a young man he saw from his window. He calls the young man naive and lacking sense. You might wonder how Solomon could draw such a conclusion from just seeing a man from his window. But it isn’t a great mystery. Solomon saw the young man walking in the neighborhood known to harbor criminals, such as prostitutes. Many large cities have such areas – red light districts, places where the criminal element frequent.

Worse, this man is heading into this neighborhood as twilight is falling. A range of time is being given: twilight, dark, and the "pupil of the night" -- that is deep darkness. Before street lamps, this was the time of day prostitutes came out looking for men to solicit. There is just enough light to be noticed, but not enough light to be identified or for details to be seen. It is easier to give the impression of being attractive in dim light than to be attractive in bright light.

Perhaps the young man wasn’t thinking of what happens in that neighborhood at that time of day. Perhaps he was in a hurry and this was a shorter way. We really don’t know. But the fact is that young men have strong sex drives and little experience in controlling it. Whether he realized it or not, he was setting himself up for temptation that need not have occurred if he had just used greater caution.

## **For discussion:**

1. What could the young man have done instead of walking through the bad part of town at twilight?
2. Why do people, like this young man, seem to not think of these alternatives?

### **Pushing him off balanced** (Proverbs 7:10-13)

Surprise! Well, not really. The young man just happens to run into a seductress who appears to be coming directly to him. Her dress indicates that she is a harlot. What constituted a harlot's dress varied by era and culture. For example, in the days of Jacob, harlots wore veils so that they would not be easily identified (Genesis 38:14-15).

We are told she is cunning. Everything she does isn't happen-chance. She has a goal in mind and she cleverly manipulates the young man toward her goal. Her direct approach is just the beginning causing confusion. He will be left wondering why is she walking up to a man she doesn't know.

But she is loud and acts in a rebellious fashion. The loudness calls attention to herself. A prostitute who isn't noticed doesn't get clients. The loudness and her rebellious actions go against social norms. They not only call attention to her, but they hint that she would be willing to break other rules as well. It adds a bit of excitement because he doesn't know what she might do next.

We shouldn't be lulled by this story into thinking that such women are only found in certain parts of town. Another range is given. Seductresses can be found on any street or in any part of town. They are more likely to be found in certain areas, but no area of town is free of such women.

Suddenly the woman grabs the young man and kisses him. She purposely violates the space everyone keeps around himself. Though they are strangers to each other, her behavior is that of intimate friends. Again, the goal is to get the young man confused and keep him confused. A confused person doesn't think clearly and doesn't analyze the situation. The intimate behavior of touching and kissing are designed to stir up passion because a person who is aroused also doesn't think clearly.

Once he is mentally off balanced she begins her enticement, speaking with a brazen or impudent face. The Hebrew word '*azaz* means to harden or strengthen. A hardened face refers to someone wearing a mask. She hides her true feelings and her true intent behind a false, determined look.

### **For discussion:**

1. The woman is clearly a harlot because of the way she dresses. Why would such a woman dress to say she is a harlot?
2. Why are young people particularly attracted to rebellious people?
3. How is a man not thinking clearly an advantage to the seductress?

### **“Come on” lines** (Proverbs 7:14-20)

A series of lines given to convince the young man to have sex is given. These are just samples of the general tactics used to seduce a person to sin. Understanding the methods should give us a stronger defense.

**I'm a good, religious girl** (Proverbs 7:14). The first attack is to get the young man to lower his guard. She presents herself as a devote religious girl who has just completed her sacrifices. We expect problems from wicked people, so we keep our guard up, but when we are

dealing with someone we believe to be religious, we tend to be more relaxed. However, we need to remember that people lie and a person who acts religious may not actually be religious (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

One reason for giving a peace offering was because a vow had just been completed (Leviticus 22:21). Unlike burnt offerings which were wholly given to God, peace offerings were shared between the one making the offering, his family and friends, and the priest (Leviticus 7:32; Deuteronomy 12:6-7). The offering had to be completely eaten within 48 hours (Leviticus 19:5-6). Thus, implied is that she had plenty of food at home.

Another implication is that since she has done her religious duties, she has nothing pending that might prevent her from being a little bit sinful. Here the view is that righteousness and sin is like a balance sheet. So long as you have more righteous than bad, then you are all right before God.

**I've been looking for you** (Proverbs 7:15). This attack is aimed at the young man's ego. She tells him that she had been looking all over for him, implying that he is important to her. Of course, she tells every guy she runs into the same line, but since this is what he wants to hear, he will not stop to think why a complete stranger claims to have been looking for someone she doesn't know. This is why there are warnings that pride can lead to a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

**I'm all prepared for you** (Proverbs 7:16-17). The mention of her bed is artfully designed to bring up thoughts of what might happen there without directly broaching the subject.

Egyptian linen was among the finest cloth in the world at this time. It conjures images of something desirable to touch. She also brings up thoughts of pleasant scents. The conversation is moving toward sensual pleasures.

**Let's make love all night** (Proverbs 7:18). Sex is called "love" as if the physical action means the people involved are in love with each other. It is true that married couples are in love and that they have sex, but the sex isn't the love, nor does it cause the love. Love is how you regard the other person (I Corinthians 13:4-8). Sex between strangers can never be love.

To say that the acts of sex will go on all night is again appealing to the young man's ego. In reality, a prostitute wants to deal with as many men as possible in a night to make the most money. More likely she will toss the guy out as soon as she is done with him.

**We won't be caught** (Proverbs 7:19-20). She waits until she is certain that she has him trapped to mention that she is married. She tells the young man that her husband is gone on a long trip. Since he has taken lots of money with him, she knows he won't be home early. She doesn't expect him back until the next full moon.

Even though he is assured the husband won't be home, there is still a small element of risk. That extra excitement enhances the thrill, and it hints at opportunities to have sex additional times.

The very fact that she mentions a husband ought to have been an additional warning. Under the Old Law, adultery carried a death penalty for both people involved (Deuteronomy 22:22). The fact that it doesn't dissuade him shows just how far he has gone into her trap. She has his mind fully focused on sex and that is all he can think about.

#### **For discussion:**

1. How might these seductive lines be presented in our era?

2. Could this be played out in reverse with a man seducing a woman?
3. Men usually think of themselves as the aggressor in sex, so why the strong emphasis on a woman seducing a man?

### **The capture (Proverbs 7:21-23)**

These seductive lines are not the only ones presented. We are told that with many words and flatteries he is convinced to follow her. His yielding is vividly described as a ox being lead to the slaughter house. Oxen are extremely large animals, they can easily resist going anywhere they aren't inclined to go and a slaughter house with its smells of blood and death would definitely not be a place to go. Yet, farmers can grab an ox by its nostrils and it will follow the farmer, even into danger. The young man is described as being the same. It doesn't matter that he is young and strong, or that no one can make him do things he doesn't wish to do. Like the ox, he has a weak spot that can override his reason. He can be manipulated through sexual desire.

He is also compared to a fool trapped in the fetters. The fool rarely thinks that his current actions will lead to consequences that he cannot avoid. The young man is trapped by his desire for immediate pleasure.

But he takes an arrow in the liver. In a battle, such a shot hurts, but it doesn't stop a person immediately. Yet it is a fatal shot that will eventually kill the person painfully. Promiscuous sex can be the same way. It causes problems immediately, but not so great that a person has to stop. Yet, it can kill the person spiritually and physically over time.

The fourth illustration is that the young man is like a bird flying into a snare. The bird travels so fast that it doesn't have time to realize that it is in a trap. In the same way a young man who is strongly aroused is in such a rush to have sex that he doesn't see that he was manipulated into a trap until it is too late.

### **For discussion:**

1. What are the consequences of fornication that people don't think about while they are focused on sexual gratification?

### **The lessons to be learned (Proverbs 7:24-27)**

Though the story is gripping, Solomon asks us to pay attention to the conclusions we should draw from this account.

First, if you don't want the end result, don't start down the path. The only safe place is well away from the things that cause sexual arousal.

Second, don't ever think that it won't happen to you or that you are strong enough to resist. Sex is a powerful desire and women who know how to manipulate a man's sexual desire have destroyed many morally strong men's defenses.

And finally, no matter how appealing and fun sex appears to be, fornication always leads to death. The end result cannot be changed by your desire.

### **For discussion:**

1. What should the young man have done to avoid being trapped by the prostitute?
2. Can a person gain forgiveness for fornication? How?

3. Can a person avoid the consequences of fornication?

# Wisdom Calls

Text: Proverbs 8:1-36

## **Wisdom can't be missed** (Proverbs 8:1-3)

We return to the same points introduced in Proverbs 1:20ff. In chapter 1 we saw a juxtaposition of Wisdom and the seductress so we might notice the difference in their operations. Here, too, is juxtaposition, but this one is between the seductress and Wisdom.

Wisdom isn't easily overlooked. She is doing everything she can to be noticed (Deuteronomy 30:11). The teachings of truth are spoken openly (Hebrews 12:25).

## **Wisdom teaches straight forward truth** (Proverbs 8:4-11)

Wisdom's message is for every human being. The simple are invited to learn to think ahead (prudence). The fools are invited to learn. Notice that in order for the simple to think ahead, they must give up being simple minded. In order for a fool to learn wisdom, he must stop being a fool.

Proverbs 8:6-9 forms an introverted (nested) list of two styles. The outer levels are synonymous comparisons. The inner levels are antithetic comparisons.

“Listen, for I will speak noble things;  
And the opening of my lips will reveal right things.

For my mouth will utter truth;  
And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;  
There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.

They are all straightforward to him who understands,  
And right to those who find knowledge.

What wisdom has to offer are noble things worthy to hear. She teaches what is right and true, and never what is evil because those things are disgusting to her. These are things Christians are commanded to speak (Ephesians 4:25, 29). This should be expected since the source of wisdom is God (Proverbs 2:6).

Interestingly, what wisdom offers is not complex. Truth is plain and understandable when the person makes an effort to learn (Psalms 119:98-100). Wisdom is straightforward and not perverse or crooked.

The conclusion is that instruction, knowledge, and wisdom are more valuable than wealth, so much more valuable they can't be compared.

**For discussion:**

1. Why do some people find truth hard and difficult to understand?
2. What can you gain with wisdom that you can't purchase with money?
3. Can you use wisdom to improve your financial situation?
4. Does having wealth make you wise?

### **What comes with wisdom** (Proverbs 8:12-21)

Wisdom is not an isolated subject. Those who learn wisdom naturally also pick up prudence -- the ability to think through situations in advance. They also gain knowledge and insight to truth. Those who are wise show discretion – the ability to make good choices. Thus, wisdom is a package deal.

In Proverbs 1:7 we learned that the fear of the Lord was the beginning of knowledge. In Proverbs 8:13 we are presented with its antithesis: The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. This is because there is no evil in God (I John 1:5). Therefore, the things wisdom teaches contain nothing that is wrong: pride, arrogance, evil ways, or perversion. Wisdom hates these evil things, thus it is implied that wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

Wisdom has advice, solid and substantial wisdom, reason, and power. To prove her point, it is by wisdom that government operates and justice is served.

But to have wisdom, you have to desire it and diligently seek wisdom. She isn't impossible to find, but you have to put in effort to gain wisdom.

And it is worth the effort because with wisdom comes riches and honor. It isn't like the wealth of the wicked whose plunder may disappear at any moment. This is wealth that endures (Matthew 6:19-21). This is because wisdom is the way of righteousness and justice. Those who follow wisdom gain true wealth in abundance. It is an inherited wealth and not an earned wealth.

### **Wisdom is old and powerful** (Proverbs 8:22-31)

Wisdom has always been one of God's tools, even before His works were started. Thus, wisdom is eternal. She is older than the world and was present when the universe was created. Wisdom was used to create the world. And wisdom continues in God's joy of the world He made. Thus, this section shows a progression of time. This section forms a poem of great complexity with several ideas interwoven. A key point to take from this section is that the world is not random – it was carefully designed and that design reflects the wisdom of the Maker (Psalms 19:1; Romans 1:20-21).

Proverbs 8:30-31 forms a short introverted poem:

“Then I was beside Him, as a master workman;  
 And I was daily His **delight**,  
     **Rejoicing** always before Him,  
     **Rejoicing** in the world, His earth,  
 And having my **delight** in the sons of men.”

### **The benefits of listening and the dangers of not listening** (Proverbs 8:32-36)

Having proven that wisdom is worth listening to, she points out that those who follow wisdom are blessed. We need to learn from wisdom and become wise. Learning cannot be

passive, we have to want it and look for it patiently.

Proverbs 8:32-36 forms a complex poem of synonyms and antonyms, lists and introversions.

"Now therefore, O sons, listen to me,  
For blessed are they who keep my ways.  
    Heed instruction and be wise,  
    And do not neglect it.  
Blessed is the man who listens to me,  
    Watching daily at my gates,  
    Waiting at my doorposts.  
For he who finds me finds life  
    And obtains favor from the LORD.  
    But he who sins against me injures himself;  
All those who hate me love death."

The first line sets the theme: "O sons, listen to me." The next three lines define what it means to listen. Listening is:

- Keeping Wisdom's ways
- Heeding instruction
- Not neglecting it

The next three lines tells us the proper attitude and behavior:

- Listening
- Watching
- Waiting

The result of listening with the proper attitude are blessings.

Finally Proverbs 8:35-36 forms a small introversion. You either find wisdom, thereby gaining life and favor from God or you hate wisdom, thereby gaining death and injuring yourself. There is no middle ground you are either for God or against Him (Matthew 12:30).

**For discussion:**

1. Contrast the seductress and wisdom.

# Wisdom Versus Folly

Text: Proverbs 9:1-18

## Wisdom's Invitation (Proverbs 9:1-6)

Wisdom is personified as a woman preparing to receive guests. She has even built a house for this occasion and has hewn seven pillars to uphold the second floor portico around the inner courtyard. Most houses in these days used four pillars, so seven would indicate a large home. But seven is also the number for perfection – this home is perfect for receiving a large number of guests.

Food has been prepared, the drinks have been mixed, and the places have been set. In days before refrigeration, grape juice was boiled down to a syrup to preserve it. Prior to serving it was reconstituted by adding water.

All that remains is to invite the guests. She sends out her maids and calls out herself from the highest points of the city. Once again the emphasis is on a invitation that can't be missed. It is a public affair. She is looking for those who need her most: the inexperienced and those who lack heart (the literal meaning of the word often translated as understand or discernment). Yet, to accept this invitation would be to admit your weaknesses.

She freely offers her bread and drink to any who will give up their simplicity. If they do so, they will truly live and travel the way of understanding.

## Response to the Invitation (Proverbs 9:7-12)

He who corrects a **scoffer** gets dishonor for himself,  
And he who reproves a **wicked man** gets insults for himself.  
Do not reprove a **scoffer**, or he will hate you,  
Reprove a **wise man** and he will love you.  
Give instruction to a **wise man** and he will be still wiser,  
Teach a **righteous man** and he will increase his learning.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

For by me your days will be multiplied,  
And years of life will be added to you.

If you are **wise**, you are wise for yourself,  
And if you **scoff**, you alone will bear it.

Two people are contrasted. A scoffer is a person who refuses to believe anything that does not match what he already believes. Any contrary opinion is attacked. A wise person is the opposite. He loves learning.

The first two lines in this section equates the scoffer to wickedness. Anyone who cannot

see his own faults is not following God (I John 1:8,10). But these lines also contain a warning, when you try to teach a scoffer or rebuke the wicked, they will attack the person trying to change them (Matthew 5:10-12).

The second set of lines contrasts the scoffer and the wise man. They have the opposite reaction to reproof. A scoffer will hate you for telling him he is wrong. The wise man love you for the same message.

Thus, the third set of lines equates a wise man with righteousness. When you teach a wise man he learns and becomes wiser.

The fourth and fifth sets of lines become the core point. The fourth set explains why some reject wisdom and others do not. Returning to the theme established in Proverbs 1:7, learning requires fear. To gain wisdom, you must first fear God. When you know the truth about God, then you are able to reason well. The result is that your life will be lengthened.

The final set of lines establishes that whether you become wise from or scoff at wisdom's offer, you alone are responsible for the choice and what results from it (Ezekiel 18:20). The wise man is wise because he put the effort into it. The scoffer bears the consequences because he refused openly offered invitation to learn.

#### **For discussion:**

1. In Acts 17 Paul preaches the Gospel to three communities: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Using what you learned about the response to wisdom, categorize the type of people present in these cities and briefly state why.
2. Mark these verses: Proverbs 1:7; 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10. What role does the fear of the Lord play?
3. Mark these verses: Proverbs 1:7; 4:7; 9:10. Where do you have to start?

#### **Folly's Invitation (Proverbs 9:13-18)**

Folly is portrayed as a seductress. She is loud, so as to draw attention to herself. She behaves as someone naive and without knowledge. This can be taken as a fact or it could be a cultivated act. Men tend to want to be the knight in shining armor rescuing the damsel in distress. Thus, being a distressed damsel is a lure used by some seductresses. What men miss is that while it feels good to rescue someone, it doesn't make the foundation of a good long term relationship. She isn't improving him and likely she will want to be rescued repeatedly.

Folly makes no preparations for guests. She is shown to be seated while looking for prey. She is found in humblest places to high places of government, but her invitation is not generally broadcasted. She specifically targets those who are trying to avoid her while improving their own lives. Her invitation is to the inexperienced and those who lack heart, just like Wisdom, but since she is targeting those who are making their paths straight, her goal is different. She knows these people want to learn, so her invitation sounds like she has something to offer them – but she has nothing to offer but distractions. Not that Folly turns down the naive or those lacking heart, but these easy prey for her.

Where Wisdom offered bread and drink, Folly whispers that stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. Notice both the opposite order and the opposite offer. Wisdom is giving a meal, while Folly is suggesting that food should be stolen and shared with her. One of

dangers often overlooked is that the very excitement of sinning is a lure. It can make ordinary things seem more vibrant than reality.

The result of accepting Folly's invitation is very different from Wisdom's. Wisdom tells you what you will gain in life. Folly hides the fact that everyone who accepts her invitation dies. There are a lot of dead bodies in Folly's basement.

**For discussion:**

1. Is it possible to reject both Wisdom and Folly's offers? Why?

# Short Proverbs of Contrasts

## Benefits of Moral Choices

Text: Proverbs 10:1-32

### **Wise or Foolish Son** (Proverbs 10:1)

Chapter 10 begins the second section of Proverbs. You will notice that the writing style changes dramatically. In this section we are presented with a series of two line proverbs to consider. Each proverb is independent, yet they are interrelated through the topics addressed. The proverbs from chapters 10 to 15 are mostly contrasts.

The earliest relationship each of us have is with our parents. How a person behaves in life impacts his parents because the person's behavior is a reflection on his parents' ability to train him. How a parent raises a child cannot be treated lightly because it impact the parent later in life.

### **Financial Profit** (Proverbs 10:2-5)

Wealth gained through wickedness is not beneficial because wealth cannot bring true security. Why this is true is not directly addressed, but we do know that righteousness brings about eternal security (Psalms 49).

But righteousness isn't just about our eternal reward. God watches over the righteous (Psalms 37:25). Notice that God feeds the *soul* of the righteous. God sees that righteous are satisfied spiritually (Psalms 23; James 1:17) – He answers their prayers (I Peter 3:12). But God ignores what the wicked wants (Psalms 34:16; John 9:31).

Yet the difference between the righteous and the wicked extend beyond God's aid. Their attitude toward work distinguishes them. The wicked tend to be lazy. They want to gain wealth quickly and without much effort; yet, that same laziness keeps them from gaining much. Their expenses tend to exceed their income. In contrast, a righteous person understands the value of hard work and it is the steadiness of effort that wins over time. You can make more at a seemingly low paying job by steady hard work than by a job that pays well, but erratically.

Effort has to be given steadily, even in seasons when it seems too hot to work or when you would rather play. Worse though are those who are lazy even during the times when effort is necessary in order to gain.

### **For discussion:**

1. Can Proverbs 10:4-5 be applied to non-agricultural situations? Give a few examples.
2. Can these same verses be used regarding spiritual matters? How?

### **Interaction with Others** (Proverbs 10:6-13)

Blessings, or happiness, come to the righteous. Whether we talk about the blessings from God or from men whom the righteous deals with, the result is the same. With the wicked the

interaction is going in the opposite direction. The wicked speak words that conceal his desire for violence. Thus, the wicked causes problems for those around him.

How we act has greater impact than we might suspect. Even after we are dead our behavior is remembered. The memory of the righteous brings happiness or blessings to people (Psalms 112:3,6,9). The reputation of the wicked gets worse and decays over time (Ecclesiastes 8:10).

Wise people obey commands. They know that they need to learn from others to become wiser. However, fools babble or prat. They are too busy talking and questioning to listen to what they are being told (II John 10). The end result is that they will be ruined.

There is security in integrity. The Hebrew word *tom* refers to having a sincere, honest, and moral character that is innocent of purposeful wrongdoing. This is a person with a clear conscience (Isaiah 32:17; 33:15-16). In contrast, the person who twists or perverts his way can't keep it hidden. There is no security because his perversion will be discovered.

You see a person tell another a tall tale, suddenly he winks at you, signaling that he wants you to not say anything or go along with the gag. Winking then becomes a part of deception and the person who does this is a trouble maker. Again it is repeated that the fool who talks too much will come to ruin. The combination leads to the question: Which is worse a person who slyly causes problems for many people or the person who destroys himself with his own words?

Since we are talking about words, Solomon notes that words from the mouth of a righteous person are like a spring bringing life to many. But the wicked's mouth brings forth words concealing violence leading to the harm of many. It might not be easily noticeable, but it is there. Where Proverbs 10:6 focused on the response to a person's words, this verse focuses on how word affect others.

Related to this is the attitude within a person. Hatred for others causes people stir up trouble. Love for others leads to a desire to cover or forgive sins. This should not be taken as acceptance of people in their sins, but wanting to put sins behind you so the relationship can move forward after the sins are forgiven. It is a refusal to speak ill of people you love. Love "*does not take into account a wrong suffered*" (I Corinthians 13:5 NASB) or "*keeps no record of wrongs*" (NIV). Love, therefore, is a peace maker while hatred is a trouble maker (Proverbs 12:16; 17:9; Luke 17:3-4; James 5:19-20; I Peter 4:8).

Notice that both Proverbs 10:11 and Proverbs 10:12 involve coverings. The wicked cover up their intent of violence, while love hides past errors that have been forgiven.

A person of understanding (reasoning, logic) has words of wisdom to tell others. They aren't always imposed on you. You have to find them by talking with him. The person without reason receives punishment.

**For discussion:**

1. Why would integrity give a person security?
2. Which is worse a person who slyly causes problems for many people or the person who destroys himself with his own words?
3. Can you really cover sins that are on going?

**The Value of Wealth (Proverbs 10:14-15)**

The wise store up a treasure of knowledge; thus, always having it readily available. However, the words from the mouth of the fool brings ruin close. There is a pun being played in this verse. The Hebrew word *mechittah* means both ruin and terror. Both meanings are intended here. They are brought to anguish by their poverty of knowledge.

A rich man finds security in his wealth. It protects him from many problems because he has something to draw on when needed. But the ruin and terror of the poor (same word used in Proverbs 10:14) is their lack of resources to overcome problems. As we will see later while resources are needed, putting trust in wealth is dangerous because wealth is an unstable commodity. But it doesn't change the basic point that having wealth brings some security to life.

**For discussion:**

1. Is wealth or the lack of it good or bad morally?

**The Result of Behavior** (Proverbs 10:16-17)

The efforts of the righteous yields life. The crop produced by the wicked is sin. Both righteousness and wickedness produce results, but only one is desirable (Matthew 7:16-20; Galatians 6:7-8).

The person who heeds instruction (both the positive and the negative) is walking the path of righteousness. A person who refuses to be corrected strays off into wickedness. Thus, the goal of correction is to keep a person on the right path through life, but it only works if it is heeded.

**Communication** (Proverbs 10:18-21)

Some people hide their hatred under lies, pretending nothing is wrong or perhaps flattering the person they hate while planning his destruction. Equally bad is a person who tries to destroy another person's reputation through lies.

We already noted that fools tend to babble (Proverbs 10:8,10). A simple rule of thumb is that the more words you use, the more likely you are to say something that is wrong; therefore, wise people keep their words to a minimum. The less you say, the more time you have to consider your words before you speak.

What a righteous person says is valuable but even the thoughts of a wicked person has almost no value. Therefore, it matters to whom you listen. The righteous benefits other people with his words, but fools end up killing themselves because they lack understanding (literally, lacking heart).

**For discussion:**

1. Is a fool mentally deficient or morally corrupt?
2. Why is slander foolish (a refusal to learn)?

**Consequences** (Proverbs 10:22-30)

We noted in Proverbs 10:4 that hard work tends to lead to riches, but real riches are the blessings of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). When God blesses the gift comes without sorrows. The Hebrew word *'etsev*, translated as "sorrow," can also be translated as "labor," probably due to the curse on Adam (Genesis 3:17-19). We cannot increase God's blessings on us by

overworking (Psalms 127:1-2).

Fools think doing evil is a source of fun. A reasonable man sees gaining wisdom as enjoyable. Thus, what a person pursues for enjoyment reveals his inner nature. Over time, what a wicked person fears tends to happen to him. For the righteous, it is the opposite. What a righteous person desires tends to happen to him (Psalms 37:4). A big difference between the righteous and the wicked becomes apparent in times of hardship. The wicked have no foundation and so disasters tend to destroy them (Psalms 37:9-10; Job 27:19-21). The righteous have God to lean on, so they survive.

People who are dependent on a lazy person will quickly find him to be irritating, just as like tasting vinegar or getting smoke in your eyes.

When a person fears God, he tries to do as God directs. God's laws tend to keep people safe from harm and so the follower of God tends to live longer. Sin tends to cause a person harm, so they tend to have shorter lives.

There is also a difference in outlook. Righteous people expect things to get better in the future – if not in this world, then definitely in the next. But what the wicked people expect in the future is rarely achieved. They don't have God's help in gaining things and they don't survive (Psalms 112:10). (Look back at Proverbs 10:3.)

God's way through life strengthens and encourages those following Him. There is security in following God. Those who reject God's authority end up ruined and in terror (the Hebrew word *umechittah* means both). Proverbs 1:27 is a repeat of the same theme of Proverbs 10:25 in reverse order. The righteous last and the wicked disappear (Psalm 37:22; Matthew 5:5).

**For discussion:**

1. What would a wicked person fear?
2. Are the riches in Proverbs 10:22 physical or spiritual wealth?
3. Why are lazy people irritating?

**Speech** (Proverbs 10:31-32)

The righteous teach wisdom to others (Psalms 37:30). The verb *yanuv* literally means to be fruitful, thriving, or yielding produce. The wicked use twisted words which are rejected. Using the agricultural metaphor, they are weeds that are cut off. See Isaiah 5:1-6.

The righteous also considers what others are willing to hear to further their teaching. The wicked uses twisted words to make evil appear acceptable. Thus, the words of a person reveals their inner character (Matthew 12:37).

# Impact of Moral Choices

Text: Proverbs 11:1-31

## **Honesty and Humility** (Proverbs 11:1-2)

A merchant can be dishonest in two ways. He can use a scale that reads balanced, when the two sides are not truly level; or he can use weights that are not accurate. High precision was not available in these days, but there is a level of tolerance that should have been met. Inaccurate weights is a form of lying. It is subtle because no words are actually said, but a person is none-the-less deceived. Given the number of times it is mentioned, it clearly was a widespread problem (Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:13-16). While men may be deceived, God takes note of a person's honesty in his dealings with others.

Notice in Proverbs 11:2 that we have an incomplete contrast. Pride and lowliness are opposites, but shame and wisdom are not – at least not directly. The intent is to fill in the opposite side with the unstated opposites. With pride is foolishness that leads to shame. With lowliness is wisdom that leads to honor. The technical term for this style of figurative writing is called an ellipse, where the reader is expected to fill in the unstated terms.

Personal pride leads to personal shame. A lowly attitude gives wisdom. The contrast then implies that pride prevents a person from becoming wise, most likely from a refusal to learn because the person is certain he knows everything he needs to know. However, a person with a lowly attitude knows he needs to learn, and the wisdom he gains leans to honor.

## **For discussion:**

1. Why leave out words or phrases? What advantage is it in communicating ideas?

## **Future Expectations** (Proverbs 11:3-8)

We mentioned before that “upright” refers to a person who is straightforward and direct. He is the opposite of the perverse or crooked person. The integrity of the upright person serves as a guide making decisions in life, thus keeping them safe. However, the twisted thinking of the treacherous cannot let them see the outcome of their actions; thus, it cannot guide them safely, with the result of the treacherous being destroyed.

In the same way, wealth is of no use in the day of wrath. When God comes in righteous judgment, you cannot buy your way to safety (Psalms 49:6-8; Ezekiel 7:19). But safety can be found in righteousness (I Timothy 4:8).

Because the upright follow righteousness, God's teachings guide him in making good decisions and keep him safe. The wicked, however, are brought low by their own sins. They have no guidance from outside of themselves (Proverbs 1:31; 5:22-23).

Proverbs 11:6 is like the verse before, but here the focus is on what the person desires as oppose to what he does. While righteousness delivers the upright from problems, the deceitful (or treacherous) are trapped by their own lusts. The problem of sin reaches all the way to the heart.

Wicked people are focused only on things in this world. When they die, that is the limits of what they expect from life (Proverbs 10:28). The wicked are compared to “strong men,” that is

wicked people tend to use force, power, and violence to get their way, but such cannot survive their death.

The righteous avoid trouble by carefully considering the results of their choices and always applying God's wisdom in their decisions. But the wicked don't care about the morality of their choices. Thus, the problems avoided by the righteous are the same problems into which the wicked run headlong.

**For discussion:**

1. Proverbs 11:4 is a near repeat of Proverbs 10:2. What is different?
2. After a long series of contrasts, Proverbs 11:7 suddenly speaks only of the wicked? Why? What being implied about the righteous?

**Impact on Neighbors** (Proverbs 11:9-12)

The wicked destroys the people around him with his words. However, the righteous can be saved from that destruction through knowledge. Everyone is happy when things go well with the righteous because the righteous is generous with his blessings (I Timothy 6:17-19). When the wicked die, it also brings happiness because the source of problems is removed. The words of the righteous a blessing to people, building them up and encouraging them. The words of the wicked tears people down.

A reasonable man keeps silent when he doesn't have something good to say about the people around him, but the wicked man isn't reasonable. It doesn't make sense to hurt the people around you, whom you depend on because you live among them.

**For Discussion:**

1. How can knowledge defeat the ruinous words of the wicked?

**Advice and Guidance** (Proverbs 11:13-14)

People who gossip won't keep your secrets, so don't trust your secrets with them. A trustworthy man always protects the secrets told him.

Without good advice people make mistakes in decisions and they collapse. With many advisors, you are able to see problems from different viewpoints and are more likely to avoid disasters.

**For Discussion:**

1. All advice is not equal. The more people you ask, the more likely you'll get bad advice. Is this helpful?

**Kindness** (Proverbs 11:15-17)

Being a co-signer on a loan for a person you don't know is just asking for trouble. You would be taking on large risks with no assurance the loan will be paid. Therefore, never co-signing a loan gives greater peace of mind. (See Proverbs 6:1-5).

A kindhearted or gracious woman holds on to her honor – it is what she values. Men who operate by causing fear in others hold on their wealth – it is what they value. Notice also the

contrast: a single gracious woman and many ruthless men. Graciousness is more rare than ruthlessness. Graciousness doesn't cause others to fear. Men tend to use strength to get their way more than women do.

When a man is merciful to another person, he is actually doing good to himself spiritually. A cruel man causes trouble to his own flesh. "Flesh" can refer to a person's physical body or figuratively to a person's descendants.

#### **For Discussion:**

1. Does kindness justify a poor financial decision?
2. Give examples of how mercy benefits a person.
3. Give examples of how cruelty harms a person.

#### **Future Gains or Losses (Proverbs 11:18-31)**

Wickedness can gain a person wealth, but it is deceptive because the wealth is unstable. However, spreading righteousness is a stable benefit (Hosea 10:12). However, righteousness is compared to sowing, which brings a delayed benefit, while wickedness is earned – it comes immediately, but can't be trusted. Notice that the reason why wicked gains are deceptive (that they are unstable) is derived from the implied opposite of the righteous. The statement is similar to Proverbs 10:2.

Launching off the idea of stability, life can only be gained by a steadfast pursuit of righteousness. In the literal Hebrew, you won't see a word for "steadfast," but depending how the word *ken* is used in the sentence, the meaning can vary. If it is seen as an adverb it can mean "true righteousness" but as a substantive it means "one who is righteous." The difference is not considered to be significant. In contrast, death comes to those pursuing evil, whether they constantly pursue wickedness or not. This is similar to Proverbs 11:5-6.

God finds those who are crooked (perverse) in their thoughts disgusting. He has delight in those who are straightforward (upright) in their actions. Notice the contrast not only between perverse and upright, but also between heart and ways.

There is assurance that the wicked will be punished. The idiom "hand to hand" only appears here and in Proverbs 16:5. There is a debate regarding its meaning. It could mean "though they join forces," but most translations see this as an expression of assurance or certainty. Yet, the idea of the wicked trying to join forces through deals and being defeated makes a strong contrast to the righteous whose family is delivered (Psalms 37:25-28).

Dressing up a pig with a gold ring doesn't make the pig better – it is still a pig. In the same way, beauty doesn't make up for a character flaw, such as the inability to make good choices.

The righteous wants what is good for himself and for others (Matthew 5:6), but a wicked person can only expect wrath in the future (Romans 2:8-9; Hebrews 10:26-27).

A farmer has to scatter seed into the ground in order to gain more in the future. A man stingy in what he plants will eventually have nothing. Likewise, generous people give of what they have and yet end up with more (II Corinthians 9:8-11; I Timothy 6:18-19; Psalms 112:9). Stingy people who don't even pay what is due end up in poverty (Proverbs 3:27). Proverbs 11:25-26 explains Proverbs 11:24. When a person is generous other people are inclined to be

generous to him in return (Ecclesiastes 11: 1-2). When a person has excess goods but refuses to sell to those who need those goods, people despise them. People bless the person who is willing to sell.

If a person greatly desires good, he will find favor. The word for diligently seeking (*shachar*) literally means to rise early to search something out. The word for favor (*ratsown*) means something delightful. The person who seeks (inquires after) evil will have evil come to him. The one who puts hard effort into looking for good, will through searching find his delight. But the one casually looks for evil will have evil searching him out (Psalms 7:15-16; 57:6).

Proverbs 11:28 is another example of an ellipses When a person trusts in riches, he will fall. By implication of the contrast, it is the wicked who trust in his riches. However, the righteous don't trust in wealth (again by implication) and as a result the righteous flourishes (I Timothy 6:17). Like a tree, they always leaf out again.

Speaking of falling, a person who causes trouble from his own family will inherit nothing but the wind. By implication with the second half, this person is a fool and will end up serving the wise. Since we are speaking of inheritance, the person causing the trouble is likely a teenager or young adult.

The results of righteous living is a tree of life (Proverbs 3:18). The tree of life gave those who ate of it eternal life (Genesis 3:22). Thus, the righteous teaches righteousness, wins souls for God and, thus, brings eternal life to others (Daniel 12:3; James 5:20). This is the ultimate gain.

However, it is too easy to slip into a pattern of thinking that rewards and punishments are all about the life hereafter. Proverbs 11:31 literally starts with "Behold!" which is translated more mildly as "if." There is rich reward for the righteous here on earth and given that is true the consequences for the wicked and sinners are even more certain to happen here on earth.

#### **For Discussion:**

1. Concerning Proverbs 11:21, given examples of descendants of a righteous man being delivered because of respect for their ancestor.
2. Concerning Proverbs 11:26, if there is a shortage of a product and a merchant happens to have it in stock, what should he do?
3. At the time of this writing pharmaceutical companies were being bought and the price of needed drugs were raised to astounding levels. How might Proverbs 11:26 apply?
4. List some rewards that happen to the righteous on earth.
5. List some bad consequences that happen to the wicked and sinners here on earth.

# Stability in Moral Choices

Text: Proverbs 12:1-28

## **Stability** (Proverbs 12:1-7)

It takes discipline, both positive and especially negative, to gain knowledge. Therefore, a love of knowledge requires a love of being corrected. But people, who hate being told they are wrong, are ignorant or brutish.

A good man gains favor from God, but a man who plots evil receives condemnation from God. "Good" refers to someone who intends to do good and acts upon his intentions. How we behave and think then determines how God chooses to treat us (Romans 2:5-11). Wickedness cannot bring about a stable life, especially when you consider that God is against the evil (Psalms 73:18). Only by living a righteous life will a person find stability (Psalms 1:3; Jeremiah 17:8).

An example of this is an excellent, strong or steadfast, wife. Not only would righteousness bring her strength but it reflects on her husband as well, making him look good in the eyes of others. In contrast, a woman who shames her husband ruins him to the very depth of his being and destroys his physical health.

The thoughts of the righteous focus on what is right and so, by implication, their advice is sound. However, the advice of the wicked is not trustworthy because their thoughts are on evil. They use words to cover up their intent. Thus, advice is only as good as the source. The wicked encourages others to commit acts of violence (Proverbs 1:11-19), but the righteous deliver themselves from harm by their words.

Proverbs 12:7 sums up this section: the wicked are unstable and will not last but the righteous will remain for generations (Psalms 37:35-37; Proverbs 10:25,30).

## **For Discussion:**

1. How can we determine if we are dealing with a righteous or wicked person?
2. How does Luke 20:20-21 illustrate these proverbs?
3. How does Esther 7:1-10 illustrate these proverbs?

## **Reputation** (Proverbs 12:8-12)

A man who shows wisdom and insight will receive commendation, but a perverse man will be despised because how he thinks is reflected in his words and actions. By implication the wise man is an upright or straightforward person. But just because a person is despised, it doesn't follow that he is crooked. We should not seek out being elevated in the sight of others. You are better off being overlooked and still have someone working for you than giving yourself honor but having nothing to eat. You can't eat praise. How others view you is insignificant compared to what you are actually able to do.

The righteous are concerned about others, including animals. How a person treats animals reflects how he will treat people. In contrast, the kindest deeds of the wicked are nothing but cruelties. In other words, even in apparently kind deeds there are sharp barbs of cruelties hidden within. They think they are being kind when they are not as cruel as they could have been.

A farmer does several steps before planting his seed. The fields have to be turned over after the harvest and then ground has to be tilled, breaking up the dirt into fine particles, before the seeds are planted. It might seem tempting to skip these steps, but without them crop yields would drastically drop. But because of his willingness to work diligently, he is able to produce food to satisfy himself. However, a person who prefers to chase after fantasies, idle pleasures, and things with no value and avoids work doesn't understand the impact it has on his life. He doesn't see that past idleness leads to future hunger. The difference between the two outcomes stems from two attitudes of heart. For example, you can put in a lot of effort and be the best surfboard rider in the world, but it won't put money in your pocket or feed the family. Yet, I can be a lowly but hard worker at some job and be well off. I had this discussion with a young man many years ago. He was always chasing get-rich-quick schemes because he didn't want to be tied down to a job. He never made any money to speak of; but once, for three weeks, he consented to work as a laborer at a daily job. He ended up with more money than he ever had, working what he thought was a poor paying job. Sadly, he never realized the point. Sure, he put in more hours, but he had a steady income and that counts more than a high pay but uncertain hours.

The wicked crave the plunder of other evil people. It is a greed, but rarely does it give the covetous what they want. What little the wicked do gain is by taking from others. However, righteousness is firmly rooted and yields produce in its time. The difference is between coveting and producing. The righteous are productive people.

### **Speech (Proverbs 12:13-23)**

Wicked people are often caught by their words, since words tend to reflect what is in their hearts (Matthew 12:34; Psalms 64:8; Proverbs 6:2). In contrast righteous people usually escape problems (Psalms 34:19). Implied is that the righteous are delivered by the wisdom of their words. Proverbs 12:14 continues the thought from the end of verse 13. A person finds satisfaction in what results from his words and his labor that are rooted in righteousness. When a man gives good advice to others he benefits himself and when he does good deeds for others, it too comes back in some way to benefit him.

Fools think that their way is right. Since they don't like to learn, they never stop to ask or consider what other people think. However, a wise person listens to advice, knowing that it is possible that he might have overlooked something or might even be wrong about a matter.

Fools also make no attempt to hide their anger. He has no patience. His emotions rules his thoughts and actions and it shows on his face. But a person who thinks ahead knows he has to keep his emotions in check. It isn't that he doesn't get angry for just reasons, but his emotions don't control his decisions or actions. When he is insulted or embarrassed by others, he suppresses it because in the long run getting angry will not improve things. Being insulted doesn't hurt him or change anything. A good example of this is found in the story of David and Nabal in I Samuel 25. This is why Christians are called to be longsuffering (II Timothy 4:1-5; Ephesians 4:1-3).

Proverbs 12:17 seems overly obvious: honest people tell what is right and liars tell lies. Clearly there is more here than what we see on the surface. The character of a person sets the value of his words and we should expect people to act in a consistent manner. This is especially important in a court where a perjurer could ruin a person's life with his false testimony, but it has

equal application in any situation where we must make decisions based on someone's words.

Words spoken without careful thought can cause serious harm, like a sword thrust. However, wise people speak words that heal another person's soul.

Truth doesn't change, so when a person speaks the truth stands firm. But the words of a liar always breaks down. The reason is simple: there are so many potential lies that the liar forgets what lies he's told.

People who plan evil tend to tell lies because they don't want their plans revealed. Those seeking peace with others give advice that leads to joy for the person giving the advice. Notice that first half tells use the source of lies while the second half tells us the outcome of advising peace. Filling in the implications: Those who devise harm tells lies and have no joy while those who seek for peace tells the truth and have personal joy.

When a person seeks to be righteous, he is protected from harm (Psalms 91:10), but a wicked person has his fill of trouble. A person tends to get back more than he sows (Hosea 8:7).

Most importantly, liars are an abomination to the God of Truth, but those who deal honestly with others are a delight to God. Notice the comparison between words and deeds. Words reflect what a person does, or does not, do.

Those who are thinking ahead do not reveal everything that they know. As an example, if you are negotiating a deal, you don't tell people what your limits are. Or, if you think someone is lying, you don't let the person know everything you know to see if what is say matches up with what you know. Thus, this is another reason to limit our words to only those carefully considered (Proverbs 10:19). In contrast, the very thoughts, or emotions, of fools loudly proclaim them to be foolish (Ecclesiastes 10:3). They have no restraint on their tongues (Proverbs 10:8,10). A fool thinks he will appear wiser by talking a lot but all he proves is how little he knows.

**For discussion:**

1. Apply Proverbs 12:17 to researching information on the Internet.
2. Using this section, what should I look for to know the type of person I'm dealing with?

**Diligence (Proverbs 12:24-28)**

Hard work leads to positions of leadership over time, but laziness causes men to be reduced in status until they are forced into laboring. Generally it is due to laziness leading to poverty and debt. Thus, the irony is that those seeking to avoid work end up being forced to work.

Anxiety leads to depression, but an appropriate kind word can counter the depression. This is a specific example of the healing mentioned in Proverbs 12:18. But such is the way of righteous people, they seek the good of the people around them while the wicked tend to lead people astray. Notice also the contrast between open-ended anxiety and a single good word.

The first line of Proverbs 12:26 is considered difficult to translate. Literally it states: *yahter* (let him search out) *mere'ehu* (from his fellow) *tsaddiq* (the righteous). The NIV translates it as "A righteous man is cautious in friendship." The NKJV renders it as "The righteous should choose his friends carefully." While the NASB sees it saying "The righteous is a guide to his neighbor." The problem is that there is not enough context to determine which is the correct translation and either translation matches similar points in the rest of the Bible and

can be seen as a contrast to the second half of the proverb.

If the NASB is correct, then the proverb is a contrast between the how the righteous and wicked behave. Righteous people are focused on helping those around them to reach further righteousness, while the wicked people lead people into further wickedness. If the NKJV and NIV are correct, then because wicked people lead people astray, the righteous are careful about who they select as friends because they don't wish to be lead astray.

Even when a lazy man catches game when he hunts, he is too lazy to cook it. The implication is that he doesn't value it. He hunts only for the sport. Thus, he gains no benefit from his efforts because he doesn't finish the task. But a man who is not lazy finds the very work that he does a possession to be prized. In turn what he processes by his efforts is also prized.

The very lifestyle of the righteous, the way he chooses to live in this temporal world, is life-giving and leads to eternal life. Most of the proverbs from the last three chapters are contrasts, yet suddenly this verse is a synonymous comparison. It makes the point stand out – summarizing the points made so far in Proverbs. Wisdom is the source of life (Proverbs 1:33; 2:20-21; 3:18; 8:35). It only benefits a person when wisdom is followed in everyday decisions.

# Evaluating Choices

Text: Proverbs 13:1-25

## **Choices have Consequences (Proverbs 13:1-6)**

Wisdom teaches us that we don't know everything and that we will make mistakes. While discipline is not pleasant, the wise person knows that it leads to learning (Hebrews 12:11). A scoffer does not think he is wrong – everyone else is wrong – so he rejects any rebuke (Proverbs 9:7-8). Notice that there is no verb in the first half. It is supplied by negating the second half.

A person enjoys (literally “eats”) the good results that come from his words (Proverbs 12:14), but a deceitful person thinks about violence and, so doesn't benefit anyone, including himself. Notice that here the second half has no verb, but is gain by paralleling the first line. The deceitful person feeds on violence in his thoughts.

When a person is careful about what he says, he preserves his life (Proverbs 10:14), but a person who says everything he thinks will end up destroying himself. Forethought prevents a person from saying things that can get other people angry or hurt.

Lazy people want things, but they are too lazy to actually do anything to gain what they want. People who are willing to work hard have plenty (Proverbs 10:4). This verse literally says “the diligent will be made fat.” “To be made fat” is an idiom meaning to be prosperous. It stands in contrast to the starvation lazy people face because they will not work.

A righteous man hates lies. A wicked man is not turned off by sin. He acts in shameful and disgusting ways and doesn't think about it.

Righteousness has benefits: it protects the practitioner of righteousness. When you do the right thing, you don't get into trouble. However, wickedness perverts (or twists) the sinner. It changes him for the worse. Thus, the wicked are feeding on poisons that are destroying them.

## **Wealth Isn't What It Appears to Be (Proverbs 13:7-8)**

The behavior of a person can lie. Some people act like they are rich but are not. Others may act like they are poor when they are not (Similar to Proverbs 12:9.) Both are liars but for different reasons. The man pretending to be rich wants the prestige of wealth, though he doesn't have the money; thus, he is driven by pride. The man pretending to be poor is trying to hoard his wealth; thus, the love of money has consumed him.

A rich man's wealth can be used to ransom his life in times of great danger, but a poor man is rarely in danger since he has no money to be demanded. Thus, wealth doesn't offer as much security as you might at first suspect, since it also makes you a bigger target.

### **For Discussion:**

1. Proverbs 13:7 is presented as a fact. Are the two people described sinning?
2. Why would someone pretend to be rich?
3. Why would someone pretend to be poor?

### **Value of Wise Living** (Proverbs 13:9-11)

The life of righteous people is an influence that shines out for all to see (Proverbs 4:18; Matthew 5:14-16; I Kings 11:36; 15:4). The influence of a wicked person is as short-lived as his life (Job 18:5-10; 21:17).

Pride leads a person to reject the views of other people, leading disagreements and strife. The insolent man assumes he can do whatever he wants. A humble person listens to other people's advice. Because he sees things from multiple viewpoints he can act with wisdom. Proverbs 11:14 makes a similar point.

When fraud (literally "vanity") is used to gain wealth, that wealth tends to diminish. That is because the motivation for fraud is laziness. A person willing to work for wealth tends to increase his wealth. Proverbs 11:18 makes a similar point.

### **For Discussion:**

1. What is the difference between Proverbs 11:18 and Proverbs 13:11?

### **The Need to Accomplish** (Proverbs 13:12)

When a person has expectations that are never fulfilled, he eventually despairs and gives up. It is only when expectations are met that joy and renewed life comes to a person. This point is often lost in the workplace. Managers set quotas with promised rewards and at first those rewards make employees work harder. But too often managers, trying to save money, will keep raising the bar resulting in the opposite effect. Why strive for something that becomes harder to obtain? But when what is promised is obtained, the impact on productivity will continue long after it was awarded.

### **Value of Listening** (Proverbs 13:13-16)

The verb *chaval* in Proverbs 13:13 can be translated as either "to take in pledge" or "to destroy or ruin." Some translations see this as being contrasted between owing and rewarding. Others see the contrast between destruction and reward. Thus, it is either: A person who despises God's word will find himself under obligation to keep it. Those who respect the commandments will find themselves rewarded. The other view is: Putting yourself against God's wisdom will result in your ruin. A seemingly small attitude toward God's wisdom can have strong repercussions.

God's law is wisdom and brings life to those who partake of it. It helps the listener avoid traps that can lead to death. Proverbs 14:27 uses nearly the same words; thus, "the teaching of the wise" is the same as "the fear of the Lord." This verse emphasizes the content while the other emphasis the attitude (Proverbs 15:33).

Faithfulness, by implication, leads to good reasoning (understanding), which results in favor (Romans 14:18). A life of unfaithfulness leads to poor reasoning, by implication, which results in a difficult life. The word translated as "hard" is the Hebrew word *ethan*, which means constant, strong, or rough. The implication is that the unfaithful have a continuing difficult or rough life.

Prudent people act from the facts that they have gathered to guide them in the direction they are seeking to head. Fools don't have facts to work with, nor foresight regarding what might

result, so their folly is placed on display for all to see.

### **Dealing with People** (Proverbs 13:17-20)

A unfaithful or wicked messenger ends up in trouble and, thus, causes more trouble to an already strained relationship. The use of “falls” means he causes trouble without really trying, it happens by neglect and seemingly by accident. An ambassador or envoy is more than a messenger. He speaks on behalf of the king and is able to act on behalf of the king. It is a position of extreme trust and a faithful ambassador heals strained relationships.

Neglect of discipline results in poverty and shame. Discipline teaches us the ways that don't work. It corrects us from making future mistakes. Thus, those who give heed to correction will ultimately receive honor, even though it seems embarrassing at the moment. The final word in Hebrew, *yekhubbadh*, can mean either honor or made wealthy.

Proverbs 13:19 returns to the thoughts in Proverbs 13:12. To accomplish what you desired is sweet and brings you happiness. But you need to be careful about what you are desiring. Fools find it disgusting to leave sin, nor is sin ever finished with them. By implication, fools would rather have unrealized hopes than to give up evil. In other words, if a person wants to sin, no offers of a better life will deter them.

A person who follows the same way of life of wise men will become wise. A person who associates with fools will come to ruin. Who we have in our lives will influence us (I Corinthians 15:33). In Hebrew, there is a play on words between “companion” (*weroeh*) and “destroyed or harmed” (*yeroa*). Notice, also, that there is more effort involved in walking with someone than associating with them.

### **Legacy of Our Choices** (Proverbs 13:21-25)

Difficulties chase after sinners, but good repays the righteous. In Hebrew, “good” is personified. The World English Bible captures this well, “Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous.” In both cases, the receiver is not directly seeking after the result (Proverbs 11:31).

The good leave a legacy that lasts for generations. It is not just wealth, but it is also his reputation and instruction on how to deal with wealth and in being righteous. The wicked's wealth tends to end up profiting the righteous, even when they hoard their wealth because eventually they die (Ecclesiastes 2:26; Job 27:16-17). See Psalms 37:18,22, 26. Also, the wicked's wealth typically doesn't last long enough to be passed down (Proverbs 11:29).

There is plenty of opportunity for the poor to improve their lot if they but work for it (Proverbs 12:11); however, injustices in society too often sweep away those opportunities (Ezekiel 22:29). It could also be a warning against personal injustice toward others (Jeremiah 17:11); thus, potential is not enough to benefit a person, he also needs good judgment.

Too often parents avoid punishment because they don't want to hurt their children, but Solomon points out that a parent who won't punish their child when it is deserved actually hates the child because he shows no concern for the child's future. To love a child is to correct him promptly when it will keep him on track. Those who don't like to punish their child will often wait too long before they feel they are forced to punish a misbehaving child. The “rod” refers to physical discipline but is not limited to just physical punishment. See: Hebrews 12:5-11. Life

isn't easy. You can't have everything you want. The sooner a child learns to live in a disciplined manner, the better off he will be in the long run. It is a lot of hard work on the parent's part, but that parent truly loves his child because he wants what is best for the child.

The righteous has enough to satisfy him, but the wicked never has enough (Proverbs 10:3). One reason was mentioned back in Proverbs 13:11, the wealth of the wicked doesn't last, but the righteous understands the need for hard labor, which results in profit. Besides, righteous people learn to be satisfied with what they have. Wicked people are never satisfied. They always want more.

# Character Matters

Text: Proverbs 14:1-35

## **Consequences to Character** (Proverbs 14:1-5)

Remember Proverbs 9:1? The home is the woman's domain. A wise woman is constructive. A foolish woman is destructive, and she'll have no one to blame but herself. For a young man looking for a potential wife, he needs to find a woman who has the ability to make things better. A woman who tears down everything around her won't make a good wife.

Those with integrity (uprightness) follow this path because of his fear of the Lord. Those who follow devious (crooked) paths have no respect for God and will not be ruled by what God says.

What a foolish person says becomes his own punishment. He doesn't consider the effect of his words and, thus, leads to self-harm (Psalms 64:8). What a wise person says protects him from harm. Proverbs 13:3 made a similar point.

Ever grumble about chores: how awful it is to wash the dishes or clean your home? Of course, if you didn't have any dishes or a home, then you would never have to do those chores! Having oxen means having to clean up after them constantly. You could grumble about it, or you could realize that having oxen means you are able to accomplish a whole lot more and, thus, will prosper. It is all a matter of how you look at it.

A person who refuses to lie is someone you can trust as a witness, but don't trust a person who is willing to tell lies (Proverbs 12:17). You'll never know when he is telling the truth or giving another lie. This is a person who could be bribed or forced into changing his testimony.

## **A Lack of Wisdom** (Proverbs 14:6-9)

A scoffer is a person who doesn't believe anyone or anything easily. He would rather make fun of others. But when a scoffer tries to seek wisdom he can't seem to find it, but that is because he rejects everything he finds. In contrast, a person who is able to reason is easily able to find the facts he needs.

It is useless to try to learn anything from a fool since he has learned nothing and, therefore, has nothing to give. Hang around foolish people long enough and you'll also pick up the habit of not seeing the truth (Proverbs 13:20; I Corinthians 15:33). A wise person is careful about who he has as friends.

Because of wisdom, the prudent person seeks to understand the direction he is going. A prudent person thinks ahead, so he needs understand his options in order to make good choices. He anticipates the consequences of his decisions. However, fools are involved in lies, including lying to themselves. They think they understand the consequences of their choices without any consideration. Notice that the prudent is singular, while fools is in the plural. There are few prudent people and many fools in this world.

Fools mock at the idea of something being a sin (Proverbs 13:19). They don't see that "sin" means that something is intrinsically harmful in the action (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). The Hebrew word '*asham*' can mean either guilt or a guilt-offering. If it is "guilt," then fools mock at

the idea of feeling guilty for doing sin. If it is “guilt-offering,” then fools mock at the idea of making amends for sinning. In contrast, the upright have respect for each other and avoid sin or are willing to make restitution for their sins.

**For Discussion:**

1. Give examples from the gospels of people asking questions of Jesus, but leaving without having learned anything.

**Things are not as they might seem (Proverbs 14:10-13)**

Feelings are personal. Other people can’t really understand what you are feeling or why, whether it is bitterness or joy. Anyone, but yourself, is a stranger to your own heart. Only God truly understands our hearts (Psalms 139:23).

Notice that the wicked have a house, but the righteous only has a tent. Despite the advantages a wicked person might seem to have, his end is destruction. But even with disadvantages, a righteous man prospers. The apparent advantage or permanence of wickedness is an illusion.

Some choices seem good but when examined, they lead to death. This is an application of Proverbs 14:8. We desperately need to develop prudence, to see the consequences of our decisions.

The emotions that a person display may not be a true reflection of what a person is feeling. A person may be hiding his pain under laughter, but later the sorrow comes back to the surface. And even in true joy, sorrow will eventually come (Ecclesiastes 7:2-3). This is related to Proverbs 14:10, but brings out another insight. We can’t assume that the emotions a person currently shows will remain.

**For Discussion:**

1. Romans 12:15 and Proverbs 14:10 seem to conflict. Explain how they are compatible ideas.

**Consequences of the heart (Proverbs 14:14-19)**

You receive the results of your character. The unfaithful man will be satiated (have his fill of) what results from his faithless ways. The good man will find satisfaction from his ways. “Satisfied” in the second half is implied, but notice that we have both negative and positive fillings depending on a person’s heart.

The inexperienced tend to believe everything they are told. The prudent man is cautious because experience tells him that people lie and things may not be as they appear (see Proverbs 14:10-13). Notice the use of “steps” instead of “way.” A prudent man considers every decision and not just the overall direction of his life.

Any direction is not the same. A wise person, in his caution, avoids evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). A fool, because of his arrogance, is careless and does not avoid evil. But pride is not the only problem, anger can make a person blind to dangers and overconfident in his actions. To be quick to be angry is to act like a fool. But there are other people who don’t act of anger but still choose to do evil. A misdeed because someone was angered might lead to some sympathy, but

the person who deliberately chooses evil is hated.

The inexperienced gain foolishness. It isn't earned, it is inherited because of who they are. In contrast, the prudent wears a crown of knowledge. It is rewarded to them, again, because of who they are.

Ultimately the wicked are forced to give respect to the righteous (Psalms 49:14; Isaiah 60:14; Acts 16:38-39). It is due to the simple fact that wickedness is self-destructive and brings the evil person low, while righteousness tends to benefit the good and raises them up (Proverbs 14:1).

### **How people treat the rich and poor (Proverbs 14:20-24)**

People tend to make judgments based on a person's economic status. This is a statement of fact, not that it is right or fair, but people tend to be nice to rich people and rude to poor people, even those they know. Likely, behind it is the hopes that a rich person will give some of his wealth, where a poor person has nothing to give. This is what happened to Job (Job 6:21-23; 19:13; 30:10).

Despite the tendency, it is a sin to despise your neighbor – a much stronger statement than earlier mentioned in Proverbs 11:12 (James 2:5-6). True joy comes to those who are kind to the poor (Psalms 41:1; 112:5,9).

Those who plot evil will go astray from righteousness (Mark 7:21-23; James 1:14-15). Those who plan good have kindness and truth come to them.

When you work there is gain. Talking about working only leads to poverty. We've frequently talked about the power that words hold (Proverbs 11:9,11; 12:18,25; etc.) but words without action is empty (Ecclesiastes 5:3; James 2:14-17; II Thessalonians 3:10-12). Proverbs 12:24 was a similar statement.

The glory that comes to the wise is the wealth that they naturally gain. All fools have to display is their own foolishness. The placement of this proverb is important. Out of the context you might conclude that all wealthy people are wise. But the point is that because wise people know to work hard and focus on goodness, there are natural consequences that reflect back on their diligence.

Notice the chiasm: Proverbs 14:20 talks about hatred of the poor, while in contrast Proverbs 14:24 talks about the glory of the wise. Proverbs 14:21 talks about being gracious to the poor, while Proverbs 14:23 warns that mere talk will lead to poverty. Thus, Proverbs 14:22 becomes the pivotal verse and key to the chiasm.

### **For discussion:**

1. What does asking a rhetorical question, as in Proverbs 14:22, do for the reader?
2. How does Proverbs 14:22 fit into the flow of surrounding verses?
3. Is all gain from labor monetary (Proverbs 14:23)?

### **Saving lives through righteousness (Proverbs 14:25-27)**

If you are called upon to testify in a trial of someone you know, there is a temptation to tell a lie, so the person doesn't end up in jail, or if it is a really serious crime, put to death. But the focus is on the criminal and the victims are being ignored. If someone has done wrong, then

the truth needs to be told so that there are no more victims. And if the person on trial is innocent, then the truth will help free him. Lies never result in good and can endanger the lives of others.

In the fear of the Lord is both confidence and safety for those who follow God. Thus, the fear of the Lord becomes a source of life and a way to avoid deadly sins (see Proverbs 13:14). This one of the running themes in Proverbs (Proverbs 9:10; 8:35-36).

### **You can't rule without followers (Proverbs 14:28-32)**

What gives honor to a king is how many people follow him. You can't rule when you have no followers or not enough to carry out the needs of the kingdom. What follows is a list of reasons why a king may lack followers.

When you don't know much about a situation it is easy to get mad. Many people get mad about a government's decision, but they have no idea why those decisions were made. Thus, when you feel anger coming on, stop yourself and ask yourself why the person is behaving as he is doing. Try to understand it from their point of view, even if you don't agree. If you understand a person's motivation, then you have the keys to possibly changing them. But if you get angry you will never gain an understanding. People who are quick to get mad end up acting foolishly.

Calmness is another source of a healthy life. Being passionate about things may seem admirable, but it consumes a lot of energy and will eventually lead to ill health. The same Hebrew word for passion can also be translated as jealousy or envy.

Being mean to the poor is the same as mocking God because God is kind to the less fortunate. He created the rich and the poor alike (Job 31:13-15). By the way, it is not always the rich who oppress the poor. The person who mistreats the poor puts himself at odds with God.

The behavior of a wicked person causes his undoing. The behavior of the righteous gives him a place of safety when he dies. This is one of the subtle passages in the Old Testament that shows an understanding of life after death and a reward for living righteously. It should be noted that "his death" could refer back to the wicked in the first line. Regardless, the wicked's behavior causes insecurity while righteousness brings about security.

### **The impact of character (Proverbs 14:33-35)**

Wisdom rests quietly in the heart of a man of understanding, but the foolishness in the heart of a fool is on public display (Proverbs 12:23; 13:16). The wording in the second line is vague enough to cause disagreement in the translation. What is made known from the heart of fools is left as an implication and what you think it refers to can change how you would interpret the line.

Wisdom **rests in the heart of one who has understanding,**

But **in the hearts of fools it is made known.**

Most likely "it" refers to the absence of wisdom.

Righteousness gives glory to a nation. Sin in society disgraces a nation. This is like Proverbs 11:11 and Proverbs 13:6, but on a larger scale.

Though just a servant, a wise servant is favored by the king while a servant who embarrasses the king will face the king's wrath (Psalms 101:4-8; Matthew 24:45-51).

# Words Matter

Text: Proverbs 15:1-33

## **Improves or the lack thereof** (Proverbs 15:1-7)

A gentle answer prevents or takes away a person's anger but harsh words stirs up anger. It should be an obvious observation, but it is difficult to put into practice. We strongly tend to answer others in kind. We respond to politeness with politeness, but to anger we respond with anger.

A wise person knows how to make facts acceptable to his audience (Proverbs 10:32). It requires considering his audience – what they already know and how to reason with them. A foolish person doesn't consider his words. He doesn't often have knowledge; let alone the ability to consider his audience when speaking. Instead he just gushes out words. See also Proverbs 10:19.

God watches everyone and everywhere. In the context, this truth means that God is aware of everything we say. *"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment"* (Matthew 12:36).

Calm words give life to the hearers. They can heal a broken spirit and given encouragement. Twisted words cause the hearers to be discouraged and become depressed.

Fools reject correction. Prudent people pay attention to reproof because they know no one is perfect; therefore, everyone needs to be corrected in order to improve. Fools think only about their present feelings and not about their future. See also Proverbs 10:17; 12:1; 13:18.

You can find great wealth with the righteous. The wealth under consideration is not monetary because one can be poor and righteous. Instead, the righteous accumulate teachings that benefit those in the house (Matthew 6:19-21). The wicked only earn for themselves trouble. It is not something found but something that comes in payment for their actions and words. By implication, the righteous are protected from trouble.

Wise people spread the knowledge that they have. Fools have nothing within them to spread. See also Proverbs 15:2.

## **For discussion:**

1. Compare Judges 8:1-3 and Judges 12:1-6. What went right or wrong in each situation?
2. What are crooked or perverse words?

## **How you live your life** (Proverbs 15:8-10)

The wicked bring sacrifices to God, but they are just deeds without sincerity, so the Lord finds them disgusting. A multitude of sacrifices cannot pay for a person's sins (Isaiah 1:10-20). Prayers cost nothing, but God finds the prayers of those pursuing righteousness delightful because they are sincere. Notice that a person is *trying* to be righteous, while not always successful. Thus, the deeds of a person's life is more important than their attempts at worship, even though worship is required.

When a person leaves the path of righteousness, he will face stern or evil punishment.

Because he dislikes correction, he will die. See also Proverbs 9:7-8. The severity of the correction will not turn him back to righteousness. Sadly, Israel serves as an illustration of this truth (Isaiah 5:18-25), as does King Ahab (I Kings 22:8,23,37).

### **The effect of attitude** (Proverbs 15:11-17)

If God knows all that goes on in the grave (Sheol) and even in the side of the grave known as torments or Abaddon (Job 26:6), then the idea that God knows the hearts of people should not be surprising (Psalms 44:21; Acts 1:24). This is continuation of the idea presented in Proverbs 15:3.

A scoffer only believes what he already accepts, so if someone does attempt to correct him, he will reject it and blame the person who attempted to make him see that he could be wrong (Amos 5:10; II Timothy 4:3-4). Nor will a scoffer voluntarily seek out advice from someone wiser – mostly because it would be admitting that he isn't right about something.

When you feel happy it is hard to hide it from your face, but when you are sad it affects you deeply inside even if you manage to hide it (Proverbs 14:10, 13).

A discerning person seeks out facts in order to make good judgments. But foolish people feed on foolishness (Proverbs 14:7). They don't check the credibility of their sources and find outlandish claims to be tantalizing tidbits.

When you are depressed, you only focus on the bad things that happen. When you are happy you find additional things that continues your happiness. Life is a mixture of good and bad, but your personal attitude affects what parts of life you take notice of.

It is better not to have much but have the fear of the Lord than to be wealthy and all the turmoil that comes with wealth. But implication, those who fear the Lord experience peace (Philippians 4:4-9). Like the verse before, it is also better to have just vegetables to eat and have love than to be well fed with hatred around you. The food imagery provides the chain between these proverbs. Too often we focus on the tangible things and forget that spiritual things have a greater value. It is not saying that wealth is wrong and that we all should be poor. The emphasis is on the greater value of peace in the Lord versus turmoil and love verses hatred.

### **What makes life better** (Proverbs 15:18-21)

Being quick to get angry will stir up strife (James 1:19-20). Being slow to get angry tends to calm disagreements. People tend to respond in kind to how they are being treated. This is another application of Proverbs 14:19 and 15:1. The phrase "slow to anger" is literally "long of nostrils" in the Hebrew. I assume the idiom comes from taking in a long, deep breath before responding.

In trying to avoid effort, lazy people end up making their lives more difficult, like trying to make your way through a blackberry patch (Jeremiah 18:15). The upright, who are not lazy by implication, have an easier life, like moving down a highway (Isaiah 35:8; 57:14; 62:10). An example of this are the Israelites in Numbers 14 who complained about the war they would have to fight to conquer Canaan, as a result they had to wander the wilderness for forty years and never did enter the land.

Proverbs 15:20-21 makes an introverted poem, while each verse gives a complete thought at the same time.

A wise son makes a father glad,  
But a foolish man despises his mother.  
Folly is joy to him who lacks sense,  
But a man of understanding walks straight.  
(Proverbs 15:20-21)

A wise child makes his parents happy. A foolish child despises his parents. His refusal to learn is also a refusal of his parents' teachings. A similar verse was in Proverbs 10:1, but with a different twist. What makes a person without reasoning happy is foolishness. However, a man who can reason walks on the straight path. By implication the person without reason wanders off the path.

### **Advice and plans** (Proverbs 15:22-27)

Plans will get frustrated without advice from others. One person cannot know everything or think of all the possible alternatives. Even if all the advice is not good, it at least brings up possibilities to be evaluated. This doesn't remove a person's responsibility to decide the direction he will take, but he can select his path with more knowledge.

An appropriate answer given in a timely manner brings joy to the person offering the answer (Ephesians 4:29).

The path of a wise person leads upward to heaven, while the way of the fool (by implication) leads downward to the grave (Proverbs 5:3-5; 7:27; 9:13-18). But consider also that an uphill path is harder than a downhill one (Matthew 7:13-14). A similar passage is Proverbs 12:28.

God brings down the house of the proud. A house appears to be a permanent structure, but it will not last before God. But God will uphold the boundaries of a widow's land. While a widow looks defenseless, she has a strong defender (Psalms 68:5-6; 146:9). It is the proud who try to take advantage of the defenseless. A similar passage is Proverbs 14:11.

God finds plans to do evil disgusting, but pleasant words He sees as pure (Psalms 19:14). Notice a contrast between thoughts or plans and what a person actually says. It is not enough to think pleasant thoughts. They have to be expressed. A similar passage is Proverbs 15:8.

When a person makes money from illegal activities, he brings trouble to his own family and, by implication, ultimately death (Habakkuk 2:9-10). In contrast, a person who hates bribes, and other illegal activities, will live. A similar passage is Proverbs 10:9.

### **Review** (Proverbs 15:28-33)

The righteous thinks about how to properly answer another (James 1:19), but the wicked just spills out what is in his thoughts. Consider the example of Nehemiah who stopped to pray and to think before replying in Nehemiah 2:4; 5:7. Similar passages are Proverbs 10:19; 12:18; 15:2.

God listens to the prayers of the righteous, not the wicked (Psalms 34:16; 145:18-19; James 5:16).

A person with a cheerful face will brighten the day of another person. In Proverbs 15:13 we learned that a person's attitude is reflected in his face. Now we see that countenance can

affect the attitude of other people. A person who brings good news to another person will refresh them.

None of us are perfect, but we can improve if we are willing to listen when we are told we are wrong. Those who listen to the corrections of life will be counted among the wise. This proverb is more than just the verbal rebukes that others might tell us. Life itself can give us hard knocks when we do wrong. We cannot ignore discipline, else we show we don't care about ourselves. Listening to reproof improves our ability to reason.

Ultimately it is the fear of God that teaches us wisdom and before we can gain honor, we have to be humble enough to learn.

# Short Proverbs

## God Is in Control

Text: Proverbs 16:1-33

### **Man's Plans and Moral Choices** (Proverbs 16:1-9)

Man has free-will, granted to him by God. His plans are his own, you can say what you intend to do, but the outcome comes from God (James 4:13-17).

People have a strong tendency to assume that whatever they are doing is right (literally, “pure”), but we can't judge ourselves – that belongs to God. He not only judges what we do, He also considers why we do it (I Corinthians 4:5).

If we act committed to the Lord, then our plans will be established because the plans will not be contrary to God's purpose (Psalms 22:8; 37:5; 119:5). “Commit” literally refers to rolling something onto God, like a weight; in other words, giving God your burdens.

Everything is made for God's purpose, even the wicked who commit evil (Psalms 17:13-14; Romans 9:22). God doesn't cause evil (James 1:13), but God does make use of everything He created to accomplish His goals.

Those who are proud will be punished because God finds pride disgusting. The second half starts literally with “hand to a hand”, which is translated as “yes,” “yea,” or “assuredly” because the idiom is assumed to refer to sealing an agreement by the clasping of hands. It could also mean that even though the prideful join forces, they will not stop God from punishing them (Proverbs 11:21).

“Lovingkindness and truth” is a way to refer to the covenant and God's plan for the salvation of man (Psalms 25:10; 40:9-11; 138:2). It is through God's law that sin is atoned for (Romans 1:16). It is there that God promised a Savior to address the problem of sin (Zachariah 13:1). “Iniquity” means acting without law, but God fixes the problem with law. It is by fearing God, which motivates you to obey God, that you are able to stay away from sin.

When a person lives by God's laws, even his enemies are at peace with him (I Peter 3:13). This is not an absolute, but a general tendency. The best way to turn enemies into friends is by doing good.

Righteousness is better than injustice, even if it means living poorly (Psalms 37:16). Notice that injustice is not a true opposite of righteousness; thus, the cause of injustice is wickedness and it is the righteous who uphold justice.

Forming a bookend (Proverbs 16:1), we return to the point that a man makes plans, but it is God who determines what actually happens.

### **Rulers' Plans** (Proverbs 16:10-15)

Kings are expected to make decisions as God's representative (Romans 13:1-2), so he should be careful not to make mistakes in his judgments. Psalms 82 is a rebuke to judges (literally “gods”) who do not uphold the laws of God and a reminder that the judges will face the

Judge of all the earth in the end. In these days, kings were the final appellate court. Kings need to be aware of the responsibility laid on their shoulders.

Merchants also need to be aware that they must be honest in their dealings (Leviticus 19:36; Proverbs 11:1). God is concerned about the honesty of business transactions. Since this verse appears among proverbs dealing with kings, it can be assumed to also be a reminder that kings should be concerned where God is concerned (Ezekiel 45:9-10).

A ruler not only administers justice, he is also expected to live by the same standards (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). God finds it disgusting for rulers to indulge in sin. The stability of a kingdom depends on righteous living (Jeremiah 22:2-5, 15-16).

Those who promote righteousness should be a king's delight because it helps to stabilize his kingdom (combining with Proverbs 16:12). This proverb is similar to Proverbs 14:35. Notice that many of these verses are specific applications of more general proverbs to the needs of a king.

When a king gets angry, it is dangerous because he can order a person's death. A wise man understands this and words his advise to keep a king calm (I Samuel 19:4-6). Thus, connecting it with the prior verse, a right answer doesn't excuse a tactless answer; though it won't always be successful (Daniel 3:14-20). In contrast when a king is in a good mood, there is life and favor for those around him. In arid countries, rain is seen as a great blessing (Deuteronomy 11:14; Zechariah 10:1).

### **The Wise (Proverbs 16:16-20)**

Wisdom and understanding have more value than money. One can lose money, but it can be regained with wisdom and reasoning. And you can gain things with wisdom and reasoning that cannot be gained with money. This ideas was stated before in Proverbs 3:14; 8:11, 19.

The righteous take the fast way away from evil (I Thessalonians 5:21-22). By being careful were you go, you can preserve your life.

The opposite of prior verse is that pride precedes falls and ruin. A pride person doesn't watch where he is going. Often he doesn't think such care is necessary and won't listen to advice (Proverbs 1:25).

The summary of the prior two verses is that a person is better off with humility and be among the lowly than to be dividing ill-gotten gain with the proud. The proud won't last.

You find good when you go looking for it in God's word and happiness comes when you trust God (Proverbs 3:5-8). You are happier when working with God instead of against Him. A similar passage is Proverbs 13:13.

### **Positive Persuasion (Proverbs 16:21-26)**

Those who are wise in heart are seen as discerning. That is because the wise put thought into their words, considering how to best say what needs to be taught.

Insight is a source of life to the person who has it (Proverbs 10:11; 13:14). It is a well that never goes dry. The second half can be either translated that when fools try to correct, the result is foolishness and not true discipline; or attempting to correct fools is a foolish waste of time. Either way, the implication is that fools do not have access to the source of life.

The wise in heart teaches others and carefully considers how to express himself to be able

to persuade others (Proverbs 15:23,28; 16:21). Well-worded, pleasant teachings are desirable and benefit the listener's spirit and his physical health (Proverbs 12:18).

The wisdom we are talking about cannot be man's wisdom. Men are too short-sighted. There are ways that look good to men, but whose ultimate outcome is death. Therefore, all decisions must be based on the wisdom of God who does know the outcome of all things. This is identical to Proverbs 14:12.

While no one likes to be hungry, that hunger does become a drive to put in effort to work. Thus, a self-motivated person accomplishes more than trying to talk a person into working (II Thessalonians 3:10).

**For discussion:**

1. Proverbs 16:21 and Proverbs 16:23 are very similar. What is different?

**Evil Persuasion (Proverbs 16:27-30)**

Corrupt men search out the evil others do and are quick to tell others about it. Like wildfire, it spreads from one person to another (James 3:5-6). The result is that a perverse man spreads strife between people. And purposeful lies can separate the closest of friends. The problem is that we tend to believe negative news, even when that news should be doubted.

A violent man entices his neighbor to go ways that are not good for him (Proverbs 1:10-19). He hides his true objectives from his victims. He winks, perhaps to draw others to join him in his mischief, but it isn't fun that is planned but perversions. Compressing, pursing, or biting the lips would indicate being annoyed at another person or having a determined purpose (Proverbs 6:12-15; 10:10).

**People Worth Listening To (Proverbs 16:31-32)**

Age and experience are signs of honor if the person lived a righteous life (Leviticus 19:32). A long life tends to be result of following wisdom (Proverbs 3:2; 4:9-10; 9:11; Psalms 34:11-14; Ephesians 6:2-3).

The ability to control your anger makes you stronger than any strong man or conqueror. Physical power tends to decay and there will always be someone stronger. Self-control is something that tends to grow stronger as it is used.

**God Controls (Proverbs 16:33)**

Random events may be used to make decisions, but the ultimate choice of what happens belongs to God (I Samuel 14:41; Acts 1:24). Wisdom, persuasion, and corruption will not alter the course God sets.

# Relationships

Text: Proverbs 17:1-28

## **Family** (Proverbs 17:1-6)

It is better to have little in a peaceful house than much in a house full of strife. The Hebrew word behind “feasting” is literally the word for sacrifices and is probably referring to the peace offerings and fellowship offerings where the worshiper partakes of the offering (Leviticus 7:15-18). Contrasting the feasting of the peace offering with actual peace in a home makes for strong irony. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 15:16-17; 16:8.

Slaves in the Hebrew culture were not permanently slaves. A particularly good servant might even be adopted by his master. Thus, how a person acts is more important than bloodlines. A son who badly embarrasses his father may be put under the watchful eye of a wise servant. Consider that Joseph ended up running Potiphar’s household (Genesis 39:1-5).

Silver is refined by melting it and then scraping off the dregs that float to the top. Gold is refined by coating the gold with an acid flux and then heating it until just before its melting point. Impurities move to the surface where they are scrapped off. Thus, God uses the difficulties of trials to test the hidden thoughts of the heart, bringing the flaws to the surface where they can be dealt with (Psalms 66:10; 105:19; Isaiah 48:10; Jeremiah 9:7; Ezekiel 22:20-22; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2-3).

Those who are evil tend to listen to people like themselves (II Timothy 4:3-4). Thus, a person’s heart is revealed by the type of person he listens to.

Mocking people who are poor is a disrespect of God. Being happy about the misfortune of others will be punished by God (Ezekiel 25:6-7). God requires that we have compassion for the less fortunate (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18; Matthew 25:40; Luke 10:25-37). Similar to Proverbs 14:31.

Grandchildren are a glory and delight for old men (Psalms 128:6), while fathers are the glory of their children.

## **For discussion:**

1. Contrast Proverbs 17:3 and Proverbs 17:4. How are the righteous made more righteous versus how the wicked become more wicked?

## **Societal Ills** (Proverbs 17:7-13)

One does not expect fine, refined speech from a fool. It is an absurd concept. In the same way, lying rulers should upset the normal moral order of society.

Proverbs 17:8 explains why bribery exists in society. A person with money thinks he can get whatever he wants with enough cash. They see money as a magical talisman or charm to prosper them wherever they go. This should not be seen as promoting bribery or that the view of the person with a bribe is accurate.

The next proverb looks at the motivation behind gossiping. A person who doesn’t let a matter die doesn’t have love. His constant gossiping about matters will divide even the closest

friends. But person who truly forgives out of love, buries the past difficulties. Love “*keeps no record of wrongs*” (I Corinthians 13:5 NIV). And often we are better served to ignore the small wrongs that others might do against us without thinking. A similar proverb is Proverbs 16:28.

A fool never learns regardless of how much punishment he receives. A discerning man learns more than you might expect from a rebuke because he deeply considers what is being said.

An evil man is set on rebellion, and so action will be taken against him. Examples are Solomon’s handling of Adonijah (I Kings 1:5-10, 49-53; 2:19-25) and Jeroboam (I Kings 11:40). God, too, takes steps against the rebellious (Psalms 78:40,49).

A fool involved in foolishness is a dangerous man (Proverbs 8:35-36). A person would be safer with a mother bear robbed of her cubs. In her anger a mother bear attacks the first person she meets in the assumption that he stole her cubs. In the same way, a fool doesn’t control who his foolishness affects – you can easily become collateral damage.

Some people return evil even though good was done for them. Such people will have their whole family facing evil for the rest of their lives. People forget they set examples for others, especially for people in their own household.

**For discussion:**

1. What is the difference between Proverbs 16:28 and Proverbs 17:9?
2. Using Proverbs 17:10, compare Pharaoh’s reaction to Moses’ rebukes to Nathan’s rebuke of King David.

**Bad and Good Relationships (Proverbs 17:14-18)**

The start of a disagreement is like a leak in a dam. At first it is a slow trickle, but if nothing is done, it soon becomes an overwhelming flood. The best solution is to avoid a disagreement, if possible (Proverbs 15:1). What starts out with a seemingly minor disagreement can quickly escalate to a major battle (Matthew 5:25-26; Ephesians 4:26-27).

God find particularly disgusting people who invert morality by justifying the wicked and condemning the righteous. This is particularly true of those who represent God in government (Psalms 82:1-2; Isaiah 5:20; Romans 13:3-4).

Previously we learn that wisdom is extremely valuable and ought to be “purchased” (Proverbs 4:5-8; 16:16). The price of wisdom is heeding and obeying (Proverbs 4:1-5). Some fools think they can pretend to heed without sincerity – without heart. It just won’t work (Proverbs 1:27-32).

True friendship is consistent, but often family stays at your side even when everything goes wrong (Ruth 1:16). A mark of a truly special friend is his remaining with you through trials; that friend becomes your brother.

A person without sense will co-sign a loan; thus, explaining why people get themselves into these bad situations (Proverbs 6:1-5; 11:15). It is short-sighted and done without careful thought of the consequences.

**For discussion:**

1. Looking at Proverbs 17:17, what would indicate someone is a false friend? How can you know before you put your trust in someone?

2. Why is Proverbs 17:18 after Proverbs 17:17?

### **Consequences (Proverbs 17:19-21)**

Verses 19-21 form a list of attitudes and behaviors that lead to consequences you might not expect:

*He who loves transgression loves strife;  
He who raises his door seeks destruction.  
He who has a crooked mind finds no good,  
And he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.  
He who sires a fool does so to his sorrow,  
And the father of a fool has no joy.*

The person who loves sin also loves strife because sin typically involves causing harm to a neighbor (Romans 13:9).

When you put a fancy door on your house, you are declaring to the world that you are rich and, thus, you end up making yourself a target for thieves and bandits. By implication, a person who exalts himself also makes himself a target.

A person who is devious in thought ends up finding problems for himself. He plots what he thinks will bring an advantage to himself, but in the end it will turn and bite him.

A person who is not straightforward in his words ends up in trouble. Deviousness does not lead to good relationships.

To raise a foolish child will bring the parent no happiness in his life. Thus, it is important to raise a child right, not only for the child's sake, but also for the parents' peace of mind.

### **Dealing with Others (Proverbs 17:22-28)**

A positive, happy attitude improves the health of a person, but depression ruins a person's health. When dealing with other people, we should strive to be upbeat. This proverb is similar to Proverbs 15:13 and Proverbs 15:30.

The wicked is willing to receive a quiet bribe to twist the ways of justice (I Samuel 8:3). Because of this, a person should not expect justice from a person who looks for bribes (Exodus 23:8).

A discerning man has wisdom right in front of him where he can see it. He is always ready to use it. A fool can't see wisdom, so he looks to the ends of the earth and never finds it. This proverb is similar to Proverbs 14:6.

A foolish son is a source of vexation and bitterness to his parents. Thus, effort should be expended not to raise foolish children and children need to realize that their choices reflect back on their parents. This proverb is similar to Proverbs 10:1 and Proverbs 17:21.

Righteousness should not be punished by fines or beatings (Deuteronomy 25:1-3). Society needs to encourage righteous behavior, especially in its governing officials.

When you know the truth, you don't have to say much. When you are able to reason well, you can remain calm. Even a fool can appear to be wise and prudent by simply remaining quiet. People assume that someone who doesn't speak much knows more. It should be remembered,

though, that fools have a strong tendency to babble (Proverbs 10:8,10).

**For discussion:**

1. Why do you suppose there are so many statements about foolish sons causing his parents grief?

# Bad Attitudes

Text: Proverbs 18:1-19

## **Self-Willed** (Proverbs 18:1-3)

A person who isolates himself does so because of his selfishness and anger. He doesn't want to deal with contradictory desires and thoughts, so he separates himself where there is no one to disagree with what he wants. Reasoning with such a person doesn't work because he quarrels with everything that he doesn't agree with, even the truth.

A fool doesn't enjoy reasoning or understanding other people (Proverbs 1:7). His delight comes from telling everyone what he thinks, which unfortunately doesn't have much content. This serves as a corollary to Proverbs 17:27-28.

The wicked have contempt for other people and people without honor scorn others. Thus, this answers the reason for why the wicked are so cruel – they don't care about other people.

## **Words Reveal the Inner Man** (Proverbs 18:4-8)

People generally have plenty to say, but like a well, you sometimes have to put effort into drawing them out. A man of wisdom is a well that spills out to naturally give of what he has to other people (Psalms 78:2). Similar proverbs are Proverbs 10:11; 13:14; 16:22.

Giving the wicked special favor or to reject the righteous in judgment is never good (Isaiah 5:23). A similar proverb is Proverbs 17:15.

A fool is often quick to quarrel and call for violence. More times than not he brings trouble upon himself by his own words and traps himself. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 10:14; 12:13; 13:3; 14:3,16; 16:17.

When a person brings slander, they are like dainties to be gobbled up by those who listen (Psalms 55:21), but once in, they can't be removed – they end up becoming a part of a person. Sometimes we refer to gossip as juicy tidbits, but we need to realize that the things we listen to affect and color our thinking from that point forward. This passage explains how friendships can be damaged by slander (Proverbs 16:28).

## **Destructive** (Proverbs 18:9-12)

A lazy person is a destructive person. A similar proverb is Proverbs 10:4.

God's reputation and authority protects the righteous who seek it (Psalms 56:3-5). The idea of running to it invokes the image of the cities of refuge where someone who accidentally killed another would flee to for safety and judgment. In contrast, the rich have a tendency to trust in his wealth to protect him (Proverbs 10:15). Yet, that protection is only imaginary (Proverbs 11:4; Psalms 52:7-8).

Pride leads the way to destruction, while humility leads the way to honor. The arrogant trust only himself and doesn't seek help from others. The truth path to honor involves humbleness to listen to others, most especially God. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 11:2; 14:16; 16:18.

**Judgmental** (Proverbs 18:13-15)

People who make decisions before they gather the facts are both foolish and will embarrass themselves. A fast answer is rarely the best answer.

It is easier to endure a physical ailment than a spiritual problem. The spirit of a person can sustain a person, but if that spirit is broken then there is no support.

Contrasting with Proverbs 18:13, verse 15 tells us that a person who thinks ahead and the wise gathers knowledge. Thus, their decisions are based on facts.

**Conflict** (Proverbs 18:16-19)

A well-considered gift makes others look at you favorably. It can open doors that might otherwise remain closed to you. Examples would be Jacob's use of gifts to soften his brother's disposition toward him (Genesis 32:20-21) or Abigail's gift of food to prevent David from killing her husband (I Samuel 25:18-35).

We have a strong desire to believe what someone tells us, unless there is contrary evidence. Thus, we hear something we tend to believe it, forgetting that there are different viewpoints to any story. We should avoid drawing conclusions until we gather all the information that we can (Proverbs 13:16). Sometimes it takes a third person, asking the right questions, to reveal what is truly going on. Truth stands up to careful examination.

Sometimes the best way to settle a disagreement, or to avoid strife, is to use a random choice. For example, when two men were equally qualified to be apostles were found, a lot was cast, along with a prayer to the Lord for aid, to determine which man would replace Judas (Acts 1:26). When the land of Canaan was divided, lots were used to assign ownership (Joshua 18:10). When duties were assigned in the temple, lots were used to determine the assignments (I Chronicles 25:8).

Generally brothers are someone you can rely most on when things are difficult, but if a brother is offended, he is also the hardest to win back. He resists any efforts to settle the dispute. Thus, care should be taken to avoid letting disagreements between brethren to get out of hand.

**For discussion:**

1. Why isn't the gift in Proverbs 18:16 considered a bribe, such as in Proverbs 17:23?
2. Why is would a offended brother be harder to win back than an offended stranger?

# Good Attitudes

Text: Proverbs 18:20-19:29

## **Speak Properly** (Proverbs 18:20-21)

The result of speaking well is a satisfying life. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 12:14; 13:2.

Words are more powerful than we may realize (James 3). What we say can kill a person spiritually or bring a person back to life. We need to realize that we receive the consequences of what we say to others – both good and bad (Psalms 52:4). Some similar proverbs are Proverbs 15:4,28; 18:4,7.

## **Find a Good Wife** (Proverbs 18:22)

When a man finds a wife, he has found a good thing for his life. While we do the looking, we need to realize that having a spouse is a gift from God. Implied is that we should treat that gift as something treasured. A similar proverb is Proverbs 12:4.

## **Be Humble** (Proverbs 18:23-24)

A person's wealth affects how he talks to other people. A poor man asks with entreaties, but a rich man responds harshly. The difference is how the person sees his need for other people.

The first line of Proverbs 18:24 has two different translations: "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (NKJV) and "A man of too many friends comes to ruin" (NASB). The difference is that the Hebrew word *jehithroea* can mean "shout in triumph" or "be shattered" depending on the context. The majority of translations lean to the latter seeing the use of "friends" being satirical in nature. Having a lot of friends is not good when those friends are there because they focus on what they can gain from you.

The second line emphasizes that all friends are not the same. Some are more valuable because they stick with you through all difficulties, even more than family. A similar proverb is Proverbs 17:17.

## **Have Integrity** (Proverbs 19:1-3)

You are better off being poor and with your integrity intact than using twisted words and being a fool. Recall that what you say reveals what you think (Proverbs 4:23). Thus, fools have no integrity and are people you can't trust in regards to what they say.

It is not good to act without knowledge, so the person who rushes tends to make mistakes (Psalms 49:20). It takes time to gather the information that you need, so you need to be patient.

Foolishness causes a person to act deviously and to get incensed against God. The anger could be because God says "no" to the things he wants to do, or when his choices fail, he blames God for the failure.

## **For discussion:**

1. With all these proverbs stating that being poor is better, is it wrong to be rich?

### **Some People Won't Be Honest with You (Proverbs 19:4-9)**

People have a strong tendency to want to be friends with a rich person. But too often being poor is treated as an illness that people want to stay away from. The root cause is that people see a rich person as someone they can benefit from but a poor person is a potential drain. Too many "friendships" are really about self-interest. A similar proverb is Proverbs 14:20.

Liars will eventually be caught and punished. The problem is that there is only one truth, but many ways to lie. Eventually the liar forgets what he said. A similar proverb is Proverbs 10:9.

People tend to like a person who gives them benefits, whether it is money or political favor. It is not a true friendship because it only continues so long as the benefits continue. Even close family will shun a poor man, mostly to avoid the possible expenses to themselves. A similar proverb is Proverbs 18:24.

A person who gains wisdom (literally "acquires a heart") benefits himself. When a person hangs on to his reason, he finds good. This summarizes Proverbs 2:1-9.

Proverbs 19:9 is almost identical to Proverbs 19:5. The difference is in the emphasis of the ultimate consequence of lying – death.

### **For discussion:**

1. What should rulers in government keep in mind in regards to Proverbs 19:4,6-7?
2. Why do you suppose Solomon alternates between friendships and lying in this section?

### **Use Discretion (Proverbs 19:10-12)**

Living luxuriantly doesn't fit with a fool. He cannot retain it and wealth doesn't make him less of a fool. A slave placed in a position over a prince will not do well because the authority doesn't fit his training. Solomon's point is that position should be earned, not given or taken.

Being able to see the consequences can help a person keep his anger in check. Often it is better to overlook insults to gain a future advantage and to not sin (Matthew 5:38-42; Psalms 38:12-15).

When dealing with a person in authority, such as a ruler, that person has the power to make your life difficult or pleasant. Thus, you need to give thought to how you speak and behave before such men. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 14:35; 16:13-15. This also can be seen as a warning to rulers to remember that their authority amplifies their moods and impacts other people. A ruler doesn't want to frighten or benefit the wrong people.

### **Prudence and Your Family (Proverbs 19:13-14)**

Raising a foolish son will ruin a father. Having a wife who is never content is irritating, like a dripping faucet, but a leaking roof will eventually ruin a home. In other words, because a person lives in close proximity with people who cause difficulties, it has a bigger impact on his life. Both raising a child and selecting a wife involve choices made in advance. The outcome of those decisions need to be weighed carefully because they will affect your life. The people who ought to bring you the greatest comfort can bring you the greatest grief.

You inherit your home and your wealth, but a wise wife is a gift from God. Therefore, gaining a good wife doesn't just happen, like an inheritance. It involves careful, prudent

decisions in advance about something you might not fully see the outcome. A similar proverb is Proverbs 18:22.

### **Discipline** (Proverbs 19:15-19)

Lazy people tend to sleep more and ultimately eat less. It too is destructive.

Being careful to follow the law preserves a person, but those who despise the law tend to die. This is an important response to those who claim that legalism is wrong. Similar proverbs is Proverbs 13:13; 16:20.

Generosity to the poor can be seen as a loan that God pays back (Matthew 10:42; 25:40; II Corinthians 9:6-8; Hebrews 6:10). The proverb purposely reverses your expectation. A loan to a poor man is seen as a risk, but with God acting as surety, then it becomes a certainty.

Discipline your children while there is hope of making a change. There is limited opportunity to make an effect and putting it off will not help your child. To not discipline is to demonstrate that you don't care about the outcome of your child's life. A similar proverb is Proverbs 13:24.

Hot-tempered people (and children) must face the consequences of their actions. If you try to rescue him from the results of his action, then he will not learn and you will have to do it repeatedly.

### **Listen to Advice** (Proverbs 19:20-23)

Listen to advice and accept discipline because these will make you wise (Proverbs 12:15; 15:22; 16:16; 19:8).

Though a man makes many plans, it is the advice of God that endures (Proverbs 16:1-3; Isaiah 14:24; 46:11).

The first line of Proverbs 19:22 can be translated a number of ways:

- A man's desire is his shame
- A man's desire causes him shame
- A man's desire is his loyalty (or kindness)
- The desire for a man is his loyalty (or kindness)

If it is talking about a man's desire, then it means a man is loyal to what he personally desires, so he need to be careful regarding his desires. He is better off being honest than seeking out wealth by any means.

If this is about what people desire in a man, then what people like is a man who is loyal (kind). But there are people who offer loyalty (kindness), but are lying about it. They have no plans to actually be loyal (kind). Thus, Solomon says it is better to be a poor man who wishes to be loyal (kind), but cannot do so because he has no resources, than to be a man who lies about offering loyalty (kindness).

A healthy fear of God results in life and contentment, so that you can sleep soundly without fear of evil (Proverbs 3:21-26).

### **Respect Others and Authority** (Proverbs 19:24-29)

Some people are so lazy that they put their hand in a dish to get food, but won't remove it; thus, preventing other people from eating.

When a scoffer is beaten in punishment, the inexperienced learns from the example and becomes prudent (Deuteronomy 19:18-21). Punishment is not just for the one being punished. It also teaches others who hear of the punishment. When a man of discernment is scolded, he learns knowledge from the situation (Proverbs 9:9). He knows he is not perfect and is willing to change to improve himself. Notice that the scoffer never learns, but the naive and the man of discernment do.

A person who would hit or drive away his own parents is shameful and disgraceful. It is a direct violation of one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12).

If you stop heeding chastisement, you will stray from the truth because those words often tell us we are wrong (Proverbs 5:23; 10:17).

A corrupt witness makes a mockery of justice. For any justice system to work, there has to be a basic good and respect for law in those who participate. The wicked eagerly swallows sin (Job 15:16). Thus, the wicked don't mind being corrupt witnesses. However, there are judgments awaiting mockers and beatings for fools.

# Conduct

Text: Proverbs 20:1-30

## **Anger** (Proverbs 20:1-3)

Alcoholic drinks loosen the tongue and loosens control on you emotions (Hosea 7:5-6). It is never wise to get intoxicated, and those who are intoxicated think and act foolishly.

You should not make another person angry who has the power to do something about it, such as a ruler (Proverbs 16:14; 19:12). Rulers should be feared and not annoyed. You could be putting your life at risk.

It is easy to start an argument, any fool can do it and it is a sign of dishonor, but honor is shown by those who are wise enough to stop them (Proverbs 17:14; 18:6; James 3:17-18).

## **Future** (Proverbs 20:4-5)

After the harvest, the soil of a field should be turned over. It buries the leftovers of the last year's crop, which enriches the soil and it cuts down on the spread of diseases. The lazy don't put in effort in advance, always finding some excuse to delay. As a result they are surprised when they have nothing when they have a need (Proverbs 10:4-5; 13:4; 19:15).

Most people keep their thoughts to themselves, but a man of understanding (logic, reasoning) is able to conclude what is typically hidden. The understanding man is able to look at the facts of what happens and see the patterns that hint at the motives behind the events. Such men often know just the right question to ask to draw the hidden thoughts to the surface. See Matthew 7:15-20 where Christ says we can discover the false teacher by paying attention to the results of what they do.

## **Righteousness** (Proverbs 20:6-9)

Many people will declare that they are loyal, but a claim doesn't establish truth. It is much harder to find someone who is truly trustworthy. The rhetorical question invites an answer of "no one," but that in turn sets up a hyperbole to emphasize how few people are truly loyal.

Righteous people live lives in accordance to the standard of their integrity. They don't make emotional decisions, but consider what is right or wrong. It not only affects their own lives, it lives on to impact the lives of their descendants (Proverbs 13:22). This becomes the answer to the question raised in the verse before.

Kings served as the final arbiter of justice in older societies (I Kings 10:9). Solomon uses the imagery of winnowing out the chaff from the grain to say that a king's job is to winnow out evil by his personal vigilance (Psalms 1:4; Proverbs 16:10).

A rhetorical question is asked: Who can claim they have cleansed themselves from sin and so are pure? The implied answer is: No one (I Kings 8:46; Job 15:14; Ecclesiastes 7:20; I John 1:8,10). Yet, people often act as if they believe this of themselves (Proverbs 16:2). Cleansing can only come from God (I Corinthians 4:4; I John 1:7,9), and even then, we can only say that we are improving but not yet perfected. It is important when making judgments to remember that everyone has flaws, including ourselves (Matthew 7:1-5).

## Honesty (Proverbs 20:10-17)

Dishonesty in buying and selling by using different weights or measures is something the Lord finds as disgusting (Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Proverbs 11:1; 16:10).

You can even tell what kind of person a child will grow up to be like by observing what he does. Our choices and our actions tell a lot more about who we are than we realize (Matthew 7:15-20).

God made your ears and eyes, so what are you doing with them? Are you using them to listen to evil or to look at sinful things? That would not be a proper use of His gifts. Since God made the ears and eyes, why do men think that God doesn't know or see the things they do in secret? See Psalms 94:9.

Proverbs 20:8-12 forms a chiasm:

A king who sits on the throne of justice  
Disperses all evil with his eyes.  
Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart,  
I am pure from my sin"?  
Differing weights and differing measures,  
Both of them are abominable to the LORD.  
It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself  
If his conduct is pure and right.  
The hearing ear and the seeing eye,  
The LORD has made both of them.

Here is a reminder to people that the king's power does not come from himself alone. It is God who makes him able to hear and see in order to dispense justice. In a similar way, no one can claim that he alone can purify himself from sin. God demands that we change our actions to those which are righteous (Ezekiel 18:20-32) and it is by our deeds we are judged in the end (Romans 2:5). The central point is one that has been repeated often: a righteous merchant is an honest dealer. Both the king and God will judge his actions.

Loving to sleep and do nothing will lead to poverty (Proverbs 6:6-11). It is by being watchful and alert that a person finds contentment (Proverbs 10:4).

Proverbs 20:14 is a warning to pay attention to the motivation of the person talking. A person wanting to buy will talk down a product so he can get a bigger bargain. But once he owns it, he changes and talks about what a great purchase he made. To expand this, when someone is bad mouthing something or someone, ask yourself "why?" There is often a motive of personal profit behind the words.

Words of knowledge are both valuable and rare. In comparison, gold and jewels are cheap, common items (Proverbs 3:15; 8:11).

We already talked about the fact that someone who is willing to guarantee a loan or work of someone they don't know is really dumb. Thus, if someone wants to borrow from you, and you know they have been acting without thought by making guarantees, you better have a strong hold over this person, or you won't see your money again. A person's outer garment is his most

personal and valuable possession. Back in these days, clothing was extremely expensive. It would cost you half a year or more wages to buy a new set of clothes. And if a guy wants to borrow money from you to do something sinful, such as to pay a prostitute (literally, “foreigners” in the Hebrew), well, you're not going to get your money back unless the person is strongly motivated to get his personal belonging back. Therefore, what Solomon is saying is that there are two types of people who are horrible financial risks: the careless person and the lover of personal pleasures. Solomon is not recommending loaning such people money, he is strongly advising that you don't do it. When someone asks to borrow money because they are going partying that weekend, the answer is "no."

For a moment it seems pleasant to gain something by lying, but it leaves the unpleasant feelings of guilt afterwards.

**For discussion:**

1. How are each example in Proverbs 20:10-17 a form of lying?
2. Compare Proverbs 20:16 to Matthew 5:38-42 and Luke 6:29-32. How do these passages fit together?

**Relationships (Proverbs 20:18-22)**

Plans need to be made in conjunction with advice from others (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22). No one can think of everything (Luke 14:26-35). And in the execution of those plans, you need wise people to direct you because something always goes wrong and correction will be needed. All this is particularly true in a matter like war where people's lives are in jeopardy.

A person aiming to destroy another person's reputation will use every piece of information he has against the other person. If you have gossips among your friends, be certain that any secret you've mentioned is going to get out. “Gossip” translates a Hebrew phrase that literally says, “simple with regards to his lips;” thus, a person too inexperienced to know when to keep his mouth shut.

A person, who has no respect for his parent's authority, will find himself ruined or dead at a time when he most needed his parents' wisdom (Proverbs 13:9; Job 18:5-6; 21:17). Disrespect of parents was seen as a characteristic of a dangerous person (Exodus 21:17). Another way of reading the second line of Proverbs 20:20 is that he will die and no one will remember him, as his influence (his lamp) is removed.

A quick inheritance is not the blessing it might appear to be. Then person is younger and more inexperienced, so he is less likely to retain his inheritance. An example would be the parable of Jesus regarding the prodigal son. The younger son asked for his inheritance before his father even died. The point is that when a person suddenly comes into wealth, not because of hard earning, but because of chance, it won't work out well in the end. A person who gains without working doesn't know how to retain what he has. We have a saying, "Easy come, easy go."

Proverbs 20:22 is a warning not to take personal vengeance. You are involved, so you don't see things logically and fairly. So let the Lord handle the problems. And yes, implied is that you take your problems to God to be handled. But don't get impatient and think you have to do something because God isn't. God acts when the time is best, not when we think it should be

done. A good example is David's ignoring Shimei's cursing (II Samuel 16:5-13). Notice that the promise is that God will save you from the problems, not that He will necessarily inflict punishment on the evil right then and there.

**For discussion:**

1. How do Proverbs 20:18-19 relate to each other?

**Dishonesty** (Proverbs 20:23-25)

Dishonesty in business transactions is disgusting to God. To say it is not good indicates that dishonesty in business is also not good for the merchant. This has been mentioned before in Proverbs 11:1 and 20:10, and is a topic of discussion in Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Ezekiel 45:9-12; Amos 8:4-7; Micah 6:10-13. Clearly this was a major problem.

God, through His providence directs our lives, yet He doesn't tell us what He has planned. Since no man knows what God is thinking, it would be arrogant of anyone to think he knows all that is going on in his life and where his life is going (Jeremiah 10:23). This verse does not say God is dictating every little event in our lives, but it does say the overall course of each person's lives is according to God's plans (Psalms 25:4,12). The fact that we can't always know what God has planned for us is the point of this verse. Thus, when a person thinks he knows how his life will play out, he is being dishonest with himself. See also Proverbs 16:9.

To declare something as holy is to sacrifice it to God (Leviticus 27:9). Therefore, it is dangerous to impulsively give something to God and then think about the implications later. Either you will have to admit that you made a false vow, which is a sin, or you will end up keeping your vow to your own hurt (Deuteronomy 23:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

**Discernment** (Proverbs 20:26-30)

An allusion to the harvesting of wheat is being used, where wheat is first crushed to get the berries separated from the chaff and then sifted in the wind to separate the good from the worthless (Isaiah 28:27-28). The proverb actually mentions winnowing before threshing, which is physically impossible. It is likely presented backwards to capture the reader's attention. A wise king separates the evil from the good and scatters the evil (Proverbs 20:8; Psalm 101:3-5, 7-8); that is the purpose of government (Romans 13:3-4).

It is the spirit of man, which the Lord gave each of us, that defines who we are. We are not machines, our DNA doesn't define us. Only a man's spirit really knows who he is (I Corinthians 2:11). A lamp is also a guide (Psalms 119:105); thus, the spirit of a man serves as his conscience, looking into his innermost thought (Romans 2:15). The purpose of our conscience is to keep us on the right path.

"Mercy and truth" is a phrase that refers to a covenant (Psalms 25:10). The security of a king and his government depends on his upholding the law, which at its foundation are the hard facts of truth and the gentleness of mercy (Psalms 61:5-8). Imagine the chaos that would develop if laws were changed arbitrarily or held so strictly that there was no kindness.

What makes a young man attractive is his strength. What makes an old man attractive is his age, which implies wisdom from experience (Proverbs 16:31; Leviticus 19:32). There is a dependence between the two; each needs the other. There should be no envy or disrespect

between the two groups (Proverbs 17:6; I John 2:14).

We spend too much time avoiding hardship, never realizing that hardships force us to choose and to face ourselves. Think about the prodigal son. What made him give up his wild living and come back to his father? It was his hardship. Parents need to understand this lesson. You can't rescue a child from their mistakes. They need to face the consequences of what they have done and experience the hardship their choices cause in order to grow up. As an example, about the only way to rescue a drug addict is to let them face the misery of the life drugs give them. It is hard. You weep for the person, but "blows that hurt cleanse away evil." There are times when severe punishment is needed to drive a person away from evil and to affect a deep, permanent change in a person (Proverbs 19:29). When someone does bad, they need bad consequences (Ecclesiastes 8:11). The reason change sometimes doesn't happen is because we are reluctant to cause hurt (Hebrews 12:5-13; I Corinthians 5:1-5).

**For discussion:**

1. Why is it unwise not to remove evil from a society?
2. Why is truth important to the stability of a government?
3. Why is mercy important to the stability of a government?

# Consequences of Conduct

Text: Proverbs 21:1-31

## **God is involved** (Proverbs 21:1-5)

The illustration is that of irrigation ditches used to water a field. The farmer can control where the water will flow by making changes to the channels the water flows through. Oddly, from the water's point of view, it is going in the direction it wants (from high ground to low ground). It doesn't necessarily see it is being manipulated. In the same way, God is able to direct the way a king goes. The king might think that he is in control and from his viewpoint he is freely choosing the direction he wants to go; yet, he is unaware that he is being manipulated by God to accomplish God's purpose. A good example is how Ahab was convinced to enter a battle where he would be killed (I Kings 22:20-22). Even when told of God's design, Ahab thought he could outsmart God. Ahab's rebelliousness was used against him by God. Related verses that state God is in control (Proverbs 16:1, 9; 19:21; 20:24; Daniel 4:35; Romans 9:15-18). Related verses that indicate that God is able to put thoughts into men's hearts (Ezra 7:27; Revelation 17:17; Psalm 33:15).

People are naturally biased. They tend to view themselves as being good and the actions that they do must be right (Luke 16:15; 18:11-12). However, we are judged by God and not by ourselves (I Corinthians 4:4-5; Revelation 2:23; Jeremiah 17:10).

God is more concerned about actual righteousness than mere rituals or man-made ideas of serving God. Sacrifices are for men and not for God (I Samuel 15:22; Psalms 50:7-15; Micah 6:7-8). Wicked people are able to offer sacrifices, but it doesn't benefit them (Proverbs 15:8; Isaiah 1:10-20; Hosea 6:4-9). Rituals do not balance out sin (Isaiah 58:1-12).

There is a subtle progression in Proverbs 21:4. What the eyes focus on enters the heart and the heart in turn influences what a person does (Proverbs 16:18; Matthew 6:22-23). "Lamp" here would be a person's reputation (I Kings 15:4; Job 21:17; Proverbs 13:9; 24:20). There is a debate regarding "lamp" (the Hebrew word *ner*). Some versions have "plow" or "planning" (the Hebrew word *nir*) (Job 4:8-9). Either way, the overall point of the proverb is not that much different. Too often we look at the outcome and see the wrongfulness in a sinful action. But Solomon is saying that sin begins earlier. It starts with the attitude, thoughts, and plans (Mark 7:21-23; Matthew 5:28). These are just as bad as the actual commitment of sin.

Impulsive decisions will eventually lead to poverty as too many mistakes are made. It takes hard work and planning to gain an advantage. Notice that it doesn't say hard work and planning will guarantee success. We've seen a number of passages so far dealing with planning:

1. The example of the ants working while there is plenty (Proverbs 6:6-8)
2. Acting in advance of need (Proverbs 10:5)
3. Working with knowledge (Proverbs 13:16)
4. To this we add the need for hard work and planning

## **For discussion:**

1. Proverbs 16:2 and Proverbs 21:2 are very similar but not exactly the same. What

- different points do they make?
2. Notice that Proverbs 16:1-2 and Proverbs 21:1-2 follow a similar progression of thought. Why is there so much repetition in Proverbs? What purpose does it serve?
  3. Is God telling the Israelites not to offer sacrifices?
  4. Why do we need plans with diligent work? Could one without the other also give an advantage?

### **Bad behavior** (Proverbs 21:6-11)

Of course, there are always people who try to find shortcuts to wealth. Hard work isn't fun or fast, so many will use lies to gain what they want (Proverbs 10:2; 13:11). However, wealth gained by lying rarely lasts and might even get you killed (Jeremiah 17:11).

The result of sin is often a punishment for sin. Wicked people tend to die violently because they refuse to do what is right.

While Proverbs 21:8 seems to be stating the obvious, it is important to note that how a person behaves reveals his heart. Wicked people get involved in devious schemes. Righteous people act in a straightforward manner. There is a pun in the Hebrew for this verse "guilty" translates a rare Hebrew word *wazar*, while "clean" or "pure" translates the Hebrew word *wazah*.

A contentious woman is someone who finds fault. She is rarely happy and is set on arguing about every little matter. While a man might put up with it for a while, the constant harping will eventually get to him. Solomon uses the extreme to make the point – you won't be able to live with such a woman. It is a warning to men to be careful about who they pick as a mate. Beauty, charm, and housekeeping skills are not the only criteria that should be examined. Marriage is about companionship (Malachi 2:14; Genesis 2:18).

A wicked person actually enjoys doing wickedness. Concerns about another person's welfare doesn't enter into his thoughts (Isaiah 32:6-8; Micah 3:2-3; Proverbs 14:21).

Proverbs 21:11 is very similar to Proverbs 19:25, but the application is different. The inexperienced are easily lead astray by scorners or mockers because such people appear confident in what they believe (Proverbs 14:15; Ephesians 4:14). They lack the knowledge and experience to see dangers (Proverbs 7:7). When scorners are punished that the inexperienced who followed them see the result and become less naive. But a wise man doesn't need such an extreme example in order to learn. Simply instructing him will make him more knowledgeable (Proverbs 9:9; 18:15). Notice that some people learn from negative examples and others learn from positive instruction.

### **For discussion:**

1. Regarding dealing with a contentious wife: Too often the response to anger and nagging is anger in return. Will that solve the problem? (James 1:19-20)
2. What might motivate a woman to be contentious?
3. When dealing with a truly wicked person, can you reason with him?

### **Consideration of others** (Proverbs 21:12-14)

God doesn't overlook sinners, He punishes them. God doesn't miss what the wicked do and He will avenge. There is some debate whether "righteous one" refers to God or a righteous

man. In the latter, it would be that a righteous man considers that God overthrows the wicked (Psalms 37:35-38; 73:17,20). Evil doesn't disappear by being ignored. The wise person considers it and takes measure against it (Isaiah 1:17).

When you treat the disadvantaged poorly, the same will happen to you in your time of need (Matthew 18:30-34; Isaiah 1:15-17). This is the opposite of what was taught in Proverbs 19:17 and Isaiah 58:6-11.

A gift, or bribe, to alter justice is wrong. Bribing someone who is supposed to be neutral, such as a judge or a government worker, is wrong. But here we are talking about handling someone who is mad at you. It is a corollary to the idea that a gift wins attention and friends (Proverbs 18:16; 19:6). An example would be Jacob's gift to the ruler in Egypt (Genesis 43:11). A gift will cool things down, but Solomon says it needs to be done privately. If you publicly give a gift to someone who is mad at you, he will see it as lacking sincerity. You are trying to force his hand using public pressure, which he will resent it. A private gift will look more sincere since you can't directly gain something by the act of giving the gift. A private gift gives him a chance to think, change his position, and not have to explain why to anyone -- so you are more likely to get a change (Romans 12:20-21).

### **Moral ideals (Proverbs 21:15-19)**

The righteous are happy when justice is done, but to those who act without authority (iniquity) justice causes fear (Romans 13:3-5). This theme was discussed in Proverbs 10:24-30.

Staying on the path of understanding, or reason, is important. The use of "wander" indicates a person who is careless about the direction he goes in his life and not willfully rebelling. Even so, such a person's final stop will be among the dead.

A person who loves pleasure and expensive things spends all his money. But pleasure and things don't last, so in the end he has nothing to show for it. Since pleasures are temporary, they must constantly be renewed; thus, they become a bottomless pit for money.

A ransom is what you give to regain what you value. Thus, God is willing to give over the wicked and treacherous in order to save the righteous and the upright (Isaiah 43:3-4). This proverb is similar to Proverbs 11:8.

You can't stop a person who is set on arguing and finding fault. It is better to go live alone in the wilderness. In other words, it is better to have no company than bad company. This is similar to Proverbs 21:9. This is both a warning to young men about picking a suitable companion and a warning to women that they can drive their husbands away by their misbehavior.

### **For discussion:**

1. Why are warnings about living with a contentious woman repeated so often?

### **Good behavior (Proverbs 21:20-23)**

The wise stores up for future needs, but the foolish squanders all that he has and is left with nothing. Wisdom can lead to wealth (Psalms 112:3; Proverbs 15:6; Ecclesiastes 7:11), though true treasure is in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). Contrast this to Proverbs 21:17.

When you seek after righteousness and mercy you gain life, righteousness, honor. Thus

you gain what you seek and more. It isn't just "follow" but "run after" or to diligently pursue (Matthew 5:6; Philippians 3:12; I Timothy 6:11). Notice that by presenting this with only the positive (and not a contrast) it emphasizes how much more is gained.

Wisdom is stronger than strength (II Samuel 20:16-22; Ecclesiastes 7:19; 9:14-18). Those less than wise put their trust in things that will fail.

If you can control your mouth, you can keep yourself out of trouble (James 1:26; 3:2-13). Similar proverbs are Proverbs 10:19; 12:13; 13:3; 18:21.

### **More bad behavior** (Proverbs 21:24-29)

"Fury," or in some translations "pride," is a word for an emotional outburst. A scoffer is more than just prideful, he is proud of his pride. If his ego is wounded, he lashes out emotionally; thus, pride often causes some people to become angry. The actions of a man reveal his character. People know that being proud, haughty or a scoffer is not good, but few think that their actions will cause them to be labeled as such. This becomes a contrast to Proverbs 21:23.

A lazy man has no limits on what he wants, but he never gets them because he won't work. What he wants most of all is not to work and that leads to his death. This is one reason why a lazy man falls prey to get rich quick schemes. Similar proverbs are: Proverbs 13:4; 20:4.

The lazy consumes all that is available. Since he avoids work, he doesn't replace what he uses. In contrast, the righteous, who are diligent, have enough to share with those who are in need (Ephesians 4:28; Psalm 112:9; II Corinthians 9:9-14; Luke 6:30-36).

Offering worship doesn't balance out sin. You can't cover for sin with sacrifices (Jeremiah 6:19-20; Isaiah 1:11-16). As an example, consider a person living in fornication or adultery, but then excusing it by saying, "I prayed about it." Or a person who says, "If I win the lottery, I'll give 10% to God." This was the fault of Saul (I Samuel 13:12; 15:21-23). Worse, though, are those who use righteous acts to accomplish evil (Matthew 23:14; James 4:1-5). For example, a person who prays for success in robbing a bank. A similar proverb is Proverbs 15:8.

Proverbs 21:28 makes heavy use of ellipses. It literally states, "A witness of lies will perish, but one who listens, unto forever he will speak." There is a contrast between testifying lies and listening; thus, the implication is he is listening to either truth or God. When someone perishes, he stops speaking, but the one who listens speaks forever (Proverbs 12:19). A person who listens to God speaks the truth. As often as he speaks, he is consistent because truth never changes. This is unlike the liar who eventually contradicts himself because he changes his story. A liar destroys himself (Proverbs 19:5,9). In other words, you can spot a liar because his story changes. The person who tells the truth has a consistent story.

A wicked person just assumes he has the right and goes in the direction he wants. He never gives consideration as to whether he is going the right way or not (Jeremiah 8:12). A righteous man thinks about the way he is going. He is willing to question himself and look for the right way. Thus, a wicked man looks like he is confident, but he is on shaky ground (Psalms 52:7). Consider the harlot in Proverbs 7:13. A righteous man might look like he has doubts, but he always stands on firm ground. A similar proverb is Proverbs 11:5.

### **God always wins** (Proverbs 21:30-31)

Nothing is wise, reasonable or good advice if it is contrary to God (Isaiah 7:5-7; 14:27).

you can't go against God and succeed. People in their "wisdom" often think they are smarter than God, but all they do is prove how foolish they are. A similar proverb is Proverbs 19:21.

We have less control over things than we might think. We do the best we can, but the true victory comes because of God, not our plans or skills. Thus, this is a warning not to get prideful in our abilities (Psalms 20:7; 33:17; 147:10; Isaiah 31:1). There are things which are outside your control, but all things are under God's control (Psalms 68:20). It isn't saying we should do nothing because God wants us to be active.

# Prudence

Text: Proverbs 22:1-16

## **Prudence in behavior** (Proverbs 22:1-5)

To have a good reputation has more value than wealth (Ecclesiastes 7:1) and to have the favor of other people is also more valuable than silver and gold (Philippians 4:18-19).

Both the rich and the poor are children of God (Job 31:15; 34:19; Malachi 2:10). They are in their situation by God's decision (Proverbs 10:22; 14:31; 17:5). Neither group should treat the other with contempt, nor should they think they are different (James 1:9-11). No one is unneeded (I Corinthians 12:21).

A prudent man doesn't ignore the danger of evil but avoids it. Those lacking experience don't realize the danger and continue on to his own harm. An example is the reaction of the Egyptians to Moses' warning (Exodus 9:20-21). Or consider Noah, who was warned of the destruction of the world. He warned others but only his own family listened to him (Hebrews 11:7). Similar proverbs are Proverbs 14:16; 27:12.

True riches, fame, and life are gained by humility and fear of God (Psalms 112:1-3; Matthew 6:33; I Timothy 4:8). It is only through humility and fear that a person sees the need to learn and is willing to learn. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 3:7-18; 15:33; 21:21.

The perverse (crooked or deceitful) have a difficult way through life, so if you want safety for your soul, you will avoid the snares of perversity (I John 5:18). This adds to the collection of things that make life harder: wickedness (Proverbs 11:6; 16:17) and laziness (Proverbs 15:19).

## **For discussion:**

1. What can we do to improve our reputation?

## **Preparing for the future** (Proverbs 22:6-9)

Teach a child, when he is young, the proper way to live, and it will remain with him the rest of his life (Lamentations 3:27; Proverbs 19:18). Other proverbs on training children are Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 20:11.

Those with money end up with control over those who don't have it. Therefore it isn't wise to give up control of your life by borrowing. An example is found in Nehemiah 5:4-5. God actually wanted His people to be lenders and not borrowers (Deuteronomy 28:12).

You only harvest what you sow. Sin produces sorrow and loss of abusive power (Galatians 6:7-8; Hosea 10:13). An example of the loss of abusive power is found in Isaiah 10:24-25. Interestingly, "iniquity" means acting without authority and the rod is a symbol of forced authority on others.

In contrast to the previous verse, generosity produces blessings (II Corinthians 9:6-11; Proverbs 11:25; 19:17; Isaiah 32:8). The Hebrew literally says, "good eye;" in other words, this is a person who looks for opportunities to do good.

**For discussion:**

1. Does Proverbs 22:6 mean a child will never stray if properly trained?

**Prudence in words (Proverbs 22:10-14)**

Getting rid of the source of the problem will solve the issue. A scoffer is the source of contentions, strife, and reproach (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). An example was the removal of Ishmael from Abraham's home (Genesis 21:9-12).

In contrast to the prior verse, a person who loves pure hearts and speaks graciously will find friends even in the highest levels of government. This is a person who is honest in his dealings and speaks well to others. It is a characteristic that should be desired in government. Similar to Proverbs 16:13. An example is Daniel (Daniel 6:20-23).

God has always preserved His word (the truth) (Isaiah 59:21; Luke 21:33; Mark 13:31; Matthew 24:35), but the words of the faithless disappear. An example is what happened to Herod (Acts 12:23-24).

The lazy will always find an excuse not to work. He imagines dangers that keep him from acting. An example would be the ten spies (Numbers 13:32-33).

The words of an immoral woman are like a deep pit – easy to fall into but very hard to get out of. Interestingly, the wicked are more easily ensnared by such women (Proverbs 2:16,19; 5:3; 7:21).

**Prudence from experience (Proverbs 22:15-16)**

Children tend to be foolish, whether because of inexperience or rebellion, but discipline, such as spankings, drives away the foolishness (Hebrews 12:6–7). Similar to Proverbs 13:24; 19:18.

Two sure ways to poverty are oppressing the poor to gain wealth (Micah 2:2-3; Zechariah 7:9-14; James 5:1-5) and giving money to those who don't need it. Jesus tells us that we should do the opposite and give to those who cannot repay you (Luke 14:12-14).

**For discussion:**

1. Is spanking the only way to discipline a child?



# Longer Proverbs

## What You Should Not Do

Text: Proverbs 22:17-28

### **Listen to the Words of Wisdom** (Proverbs 22:17-21)

Beginning with Proverbs 22:17 there is a change in the style used since chapter 10. The use of mostly two line proverbs gives way to a variable number of lines. Most not only give advice, but also give reasons why the advice is sensible.

Because these are called “the words of the wise,” some believe these are a collection of proverbs written by other authors, beside Solomon.

The reader is urged to:

1. Incline his ears – be willing to hear what is about to be said
2. Hear the words – understand what is being said
3. Apply your mind – think about what is taught

The resulting benefits is also threefold:

1. Pleasant thoughts, if they are kept in mind
2. Ready on the lips – you will know how to respond
3. You will trust in God, since these teachings are God’s word

The benefits are also presented as a inverted list:

For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,

That they may be ready on your lips.

So that your trust may be in the Lord,

I have taught you today, even you

Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge

To make you know with certainty of the words of truth

That you may correctly answer him who sent you?

Going into the list, the statements are presented as future results. Exiting the list is a series of rhetorical questions regarding what has been accomplished. The core point of the list is the first line – these benefits only come if you keep the teachings within you.

### **Do Not Take Advantage of the Poor** (Proverbs 22:22-23)

The first proverb is direct primarily to legal situations, since it mentions the gate where legal decisions were rendered by the elders and the fact that God would plead the case of the poor and afflicted. Those who are at a disadvantage economically or because of hardships are not to be taken advantage of because God will support them and will inflict punishment (death) on any to abuse them in court.

**Stay Away from Angry People** (Proverbs 22:24-25)

The people we associate with will influence us. Staying around an angry man will cause you to tend to pick up his characteristics and trap yourself in the same outcome that he will face.

**For discussion:**

1. Why can't a calm person influence an angry person and cause him to become calmer?

**Do Not Guarantee Loans** (Proverbs 22:26-27)

You don't want to be numbered among those who co-sign loans. The loan comes due because the person did not make his payments, then you will be responsible for the debt; and if you don't have the money, you will lose your personal property to make the payment. Even if you have extra money at the time you co-sign the loan, given the uncertainty of life, you don't know if you'll have the funds at the time the loan comes due. Similar warnings are given in Proverbs 6:1-5; 11:15; 17:18.

**Do Not Move Boundary Markers** (Proverbs 22:28)

Boundary markers were used to determine the edges of a person's property. Moving those markers was a way of stealing land from your neighbors (Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17).

**For discussion:**

1. Unlike the prior warnings, Proverbs 22:28 does not give a reason for the prohibition. Why do you suppose it is different?

# Overindulging

Text: Proverbs 22:29-23:23

## **The Value of Skill** (Proverbs 22:29)

When a person is particularly skillful in his work, he will not live an obscure life. People will notice him, even the rich and powerful. This sets the proper standard in contrast with the section that follows, which involves things we should not become “skilled” in doing.

## **Do Not Desire Delicacies of the Rich and Powerful** (Proverbs 23:1-3)

When someone rich or powerful does you a favor, consider carefully the motivation behind the honor. Restrain yourself so you don't get distracted. Mostly likely the reason a powerful person invites you over to dinner is because he wants something from you and the dinner is to soften you up so you are more likely to give him what he wants. An example of this was Haman's invitation to eat with the king and queen (Esther 5:12). He had no clue that he was being set up for a trap.

## **Do Not Overwork for Wealth** (Proverbs 23:4-5)

People are mistaken to think there is security in wealth. Even if we are currently enjoying a comfortable life, we must be mindful that wealth and prosperity are flighty things. Worrying about something that may or not be there is not worth your time. Solomon is not against wealth, especially when it is gained by hard work (Proverbs 12:27; 14:23). But at the same time wealth should not be the primary concern in life.

## **Do Not Desire Delicacies of the Selfish** (Proverbs 23:6-8)

The miser (literally a man with an evil eye), doesn't like seeing others benefit from him. He plays the role of a gracious host, but all the while he is counting the cost of every bite you consume. Ultimately, his hypocrisy will make you sick. Your compliments will be wasted. Thus, the warning not to desire his delicacies (Psalms 141:4).

## **For discussion:**

1. What better defines a person: what he does or what he thinks?
2. What additional warnings can be derived from these verses?

## **Do Not Try Teaching a Fool** (Proverbs 23:9)

If a person refuses to learn, trying to instruct him is a waste of time and only will result in the fool despising what you offer. Since he cannot understand words of wisdom, he makes a mockery of them (Matthew 7:6).

## **Do Not Take Advantage of the Weak** (Proverbs 23:10-11)

Where Proverbs 22:28 gives the command without reasons for obeying the command, here the same command is repeated and an explanation is given why it is important to heed the

command. Moving boundary markers is a form of stealing. Trespassing on the property of those who are weaker than you is a form of intimidation. With no father, orphans don't have someone to defend them, but God's response to such tactics is that He will act as their personal lawyer (Exodus 22:22-24; Proverbs 22:23).

### **Be Disciplined** (Proverbs 23:12)

To behave properly, a person must first discipline his heart. Thoughts and desires must be kept under control (Mark 7:21-23). A person must also apply himself to learning (in contrast to the fool in Proverbs 23:9).

### **Do Not Hold Back Discipline** (Proverbs 23:13-14)

As a parent, discipline also must be imposed on your children. Some parents avoid hurting a child's feelings or out of a fear that some harm will come to the child. They become overindulgent of their whims. We are not talking about abuse, but even corporal punishment will not harm a child; instead, it will benefit the child by keeping him from an early death (Proverbs 19:18). Thus, discipline is a sign of love for the child's well being (Hebrews 12:8; Proverbs 13:24; 21:5; 22:15).

### **Be Wise in Heart and Word** (Proverbs 23:15-16)

When a child is wise in thoughts and words (because he has properly disciplined himself – Proverbs 23:12), then his father's thoughts will be joyful. Notice that these verses create a four line inverted list.

My son, if your heart is wise,  
    My own heart also will be glad;  
    And my inmost being will rejoice  
When your lips speak what is right.

### **Do Not Envy Sinners** (Proverbs 23:17-18)

It may appear that the wicked get their way, but we should not envy them. Instead we should fear God and know that we have a future. There are other passages that tell us not to envy the wicked because they will face ruin (Psalms 37:1-3; 73), but this proverb focuses on the positive. We are in a better position than they are.

### **Do Not Overindulge** (Proverbs 23:19-21)

This section starts with a wake-up call to listen, be wise, and direct your heart in "the way" (Proverbs 9:6). "The way" is the direction we should take our lives (Psalms 25:12; 32:8). It is the way of God's teachings (Psalms 119:27,32,33). "*Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in You; Teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up my soul*" (Psalms 143:8). Once again, it indicates that the topic that follows is of critical importance.

Hanging around those who are heavy drinkers, overeaters or lazy will cause your ruin. They become poor because they overspend on things that do not last. If you closely associate with them, then you too will become poor, either by picking up their habits or by paying for their habits.

It is gluttons who are being described. Gluttony is not just overindulging in food. The Hebrew word *zalal* refers to a person who has no restraint or no self-control. Thus, there is a broader application. The law required that a person without restraint, doing what he pleases, was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

**Buy the Truth** (Proverbs 23:22-23)

Again there is another wake-up call. Don't neglect advice just because it from your parents or because you think they are too old to understand. What is important is truth. Its value is such that you should never give it up. Thus, do not lie.

And it is not truth alone. Gain truth that is truth combined with wisdom, instruction, and understanding. Truth is valuable (Psalm 119:72, 127; Matthew 13:44; Hebrews 11:25-26), and it is free! (Isaiah 55:1).

# Addictive Sins

Text: Proverbs 23:24-35

## **Make Your Parents Happy** (Proverbs 23:24-25)

A father is made happy by a son who is righteous and makes wise decisions. Thus, children should strive to make their parents happy in this way.

As we have seen before this type of exhortation precedes a section that is particularly important to pay attention to.

## **Sex** (Proverbs 23:26-28)

God, through Solomon, wants the reader to give his heart to Him; that is to turn over his innermost being, his seat of emotions. When your heart is focused on something, your eyes follow along.

Unfortunately, many young people, especially young men, focus on sexual images. Once again Solomon warns that promiscuous sex is like a deep pit or a narrow well – it is an easy trap to fall into and very hard to get out of (Proverbs 22:14; Ecclesiastes 7:26). One reason is that young men see themselves as the hunter in sexual encounters and never notice that same drive makes them easy prey (Proverbs 6:26). Here the seductress is described as an unseen robber (Proverbs 7:12). Thus, it is important not to wander from the true path or you will become a target.

Two types of women are described: the prostitute who uses sex to gain money or advantages and the adulteress who uses sex to please herself. Whether it is fornication or adultery, both are outside of the marriage covenant. Whether a person engages in fornication or adultery, the long term effect is marriage is destabilized.

Previous proverbs on this same topic are Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:1-20; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; 9:13-18; 22:14.

## **For discussion:**

1. Why are there so many warnings in Proverbs regarding sexually immoral women?
2. What can be done to avoid the trap of the seductress? (Hint: Proverbs 23:26.)

## **Alcohol** (Proverbs 23:29-35)

This section contains a very detailed description of effects of alcohol. It starts off with a list of rhetorical questions that are essentially a riddle.

- It causes woes and sorrows. Alcohol is a depressive; yet, oddly people often use alcohol when they are feeling sad because it numbs their feelings for a while. However, at the same time it increases their feelings of sadness, making the person wanting to drink more.
- It causes strife and anger. There is a lack of restraint while under the influence of alcohol. Matters that should have been overlooked because they really don't matter instead flame a passionate outburst.
- It loosens tongues and causes the drinker to babble complaints. It is another effect of

removing self-control.

- It affects the memory. One can get hurt and not feel it nor remember where the injuries came from the next day.
- The redness in the eyes is due to the breaking of capillaries. Alcohol dissolves fats and removes water, weakening the blood vessels and damaging the nerves.

Notice that the first two questions deal with a person's inner emotions. The next two deal with his relationship with other people. And the last two questions address his physical condition.

The answer to each question is the same: people who spend long hours drinking alcohol (using alcohol for recreation) and those who sample wine mixed with drugs (Isaiah 5:22). Since alcohol dissolves chemicals, it was often used to extract intoxicants from various herbs. Thus, while alcohol is the primary focus of this passage, it also applies to recreational drug use.

The warning is not to get distracted by how pretty wine might look or taste. This is a focus on the short-term pleasures of drinking. Rather, we need to think about its longer term effects. The writer of this passage likens it to two types of poisons.

- The bite of the serpent affects a person's circulatory system, widening capillaries near the skin while constricting blood flow to vital organs. It might feel like it is warming you, but it is actually cooling your core temperature.
- The bite of the adder affects the nervous system causing hallucinations, reducing reaction time, throwing off balance, and in extreme cases stopping the heart or other vital organs. Alcohol dissolves the fatty layer of insulation around the nerves causing signals to go to the wrong places. This is why drunks stagger (Isaiah 28:7-8).

The numbing effects of alcohol causes the drinker to think he is tougher than he really is. He takes punches and doesn't feel the full effect through his misfiring nerves.

But the saddest aspect of drinking alcohol is that when it wears off, the drinker thinks foremost about getting another drink to numb the pains in his body caused by the alcohol he was drinking and the fights that he got into. Like all addictive drugs, it creates an endless cycle of "needs" that are never satisfied (Isaiah 5:11-12).

**For discussion:**

1. Read Hosea 4:11. Why are warnings about sex and alcohol placed together?
2. Why is comparing alcohol to snake venom particularly appropriate? Who is generally associated with snakes?

# The Strength of Wisdom

Text: Proverbs 24:1-22

## **Do Not Envy the Wicked** (Proverbs 24:1-2)

While it may seem that the evil have advantages, don't envy them or desire to their companion (Proverbs 23:17; Psalms 37; 73). All they think and talk about is violence and trouble.

## **Illustrating Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom** (Proverbs 24:3-6)

Wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are defined through an illustration of building a house. Knowledge is the facts - it is the furnishings in a house. Understanding is logic - it is how a house is built or the foundation the house rests upon. Wisdom is the application - it is the design of the house.

The first illustration is a peaceful one, the second conjures up images of war. In a battle, knowledge increases your power, since you know what is going on. Understanding is the wise advice you get as multiple people examine the situation (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; Luke 14:31). Wisdom is the strong response that comes from knowing what you need to do (Proverbs 21:22; Ecclesiastes 9:16).

## **Weak Men** (Proverbs 24:7-10)

Wisdom is beyond the reach of fools (Proverbs 14:6; Psalm 92:5-6; I Corinthians 2:14). A city's gate was where the elders would gather to render judgment (Amos 5:12,15). You won't find a fool among these wise men because the fool doesn't speak out for those who need defending (Job 31:21). Nor will a fool come to the wise to seek out advice.

A person who plans evil is called a schemer by people (Isaiah 59:3-8). The very act of creating such plans is sinful. It is not a sign of strength.

A scoffer makes fun of any who thinks differently from himself. Thus, he won't listen to advice and will not lead people in strength; instead, he is disgusting to people.

Laziness in hard times limits your strength that is needed for trials. Thus, you won't be able to succeed.

## **Strength Is in Helping the Weak** (Proverbs 24:11-12)

There are people whose poor choices or circumstances in life are leading them off to their deaths. God requires that we try and prevent it (Psalms 82:3-5; Isaiah 58:6-11; Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-20). God expects us to be our brother's keeper. Claiming to not know is not an excuse because God knows our hearts and judges each of us by our deeds (Jeremiah 17:10; Romans 2:5-6).

## **Wisdom Gives You a Future** (Proverbs 24:13-14)

Wisdom is sweet for the soul and it gives hope for the future (Psalms 19:7-11; Proverbs 23:18-19). The comparison to honey is because it is not made but must be found.

### **The Righteous Don't Give Up** (Proverbs 24:15-20)

A warning is given to wicked not to attack the righteous because they will not succeed. Righteousness is not a protection from problems, but rather the righteous keep going despite setbacks and hardship (Micah 7:8; Psalm 34:19-20). God helps the righteous to continue (Psalms 37:23-26; Psalms 59:1-17). In contrast, the wicked fold in the face of disaster. Consider the examples of King Saul and Judas.

We return to the topic raised in Proverbs 24:11-12. Though evil doers must be punished, the righteous are not allowed to rejoice over it (Job 31:29). What we learned earlier is that they should be striving to rescue people instead. If you do rejoice at the fall of the wicked, God will punish you by bringing a similar punishment on you (Proverbs 17:5). It was this type of sin that led to the downfall of Edom (Obadiah 12).

Thus, we return to the point we started the chapter with, “do not envy the wicked,” but with a twist. Instead of desiring what they have, we should not worry about their successes that cause us harm. Unlike the wise (Proverbs 24:14), the wicked have no future and their influence in the world will be snuffed out (Psalms 37; 73).

### **Respect Authority** (Proverbs 24:21-22)

Follow God and the government (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:17). Don't go with those who wish to rebel and make changes. Such people tend to come to ruin suddenly (Proverbs 17:11).

# Additional Sayings of the Wise

Text: Proverbs 24:23-34

This is a short section dealing with other proverbs from unnamed wise men. The KJV and NKJV take this as sayings directed to wise men, while most other translations see this as sayings from wise men.

## **Proper Judgment** (Proverbs 24:23-26)

When you are called upon to make a judgment, remember that it is not right to show partiality (John 7:24; Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 18:5). Each person should be judged according to what he has done or said. Who he is should not matter.

The standard of right and wrong must not be changed. To acquit the evil will have society rejecting you because there is no standard being used for judgment (Proverbs 17:15; Isaiah 5:23). Acquitting the evil will only encourage more evil. However, to rebuke evil will bring delight to the populace and blessings from them (Proverbs 28:23; Leviticus 19:17). Too often people try to avoid harsh rebukes, but they are necessary (Titus 1:13; 2:15; II Timothy 4:2).

Appreciation is given to the person who speaks honestly and rightly (literally “in plain words”).

## **Proper Way to Start** (Proverbs 24:27)

Proper order is important in financial dealings. First get your income in order, then work on a place to live (your expenses). In farming, it takes time for the crops to come in, so plant first and use the time when you are waiting to build your home.

## **For discussion:**

1. Why do you need to establish your income first?

## **Things Not to Say** (Proverbs 24:28-29)

Don't testify against another person unless there is a reason. This is one of the failings of gossiping, it tears down another person without need (Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 35:7; John 15:25).

Don't tell lies (Revelation 21:8).

Don't say you'll get revenge or pay someone back in kind (Proverbs 20:22; Romans 12:17,19).

Notice that no reason is given for why you should not do these things. But these things reveal the character of a person who bears a grudge against another person.

## **Lessons from the Lazy** (Proverbs 24:30-34)

You can learn even from people who are doing wrong. "That wise men profit more by fools than fools by wise men; for wise men will avoid the faults of fools, but fools will not imitate the virtues of wise men" [Cato Major].

These verses are divided into observations (Proverbs 24:30-31), reflection (Proverbs

24:32), and conclusion (Proverbs 24:33-34).

The prophet noticed the property of a lazy, foolish man. It was in decay from neglect. But what he realized is that this state didn't come about all at once. It was a small problem here and another one there that wasn't addressed. Over time it accumulated to become an overwhelming set of problems (Proverbs 6:9-11). The state wasn't due to a conscious decision to create problems, but from years of choices to put off solving issues.

**For discussion:**

1. What applications can be made from these observations in daily life?
2. What solution is implied by the way the problems arose?

# You Don't Know Everything

Text: Proverbs 25:1-10

## **Later Additions** (Proverbs 25:1)

This passage indicates that the proverbs that follow were not included in the original text of Proverbs. They are still the writings of Solomon, who was inspired by God, but they were appended to the book many years later in King Hezekiah's day. These were not the recording of oral traditions because the verse indicates they were copied or transcribed from another written document or documents. I Chronicles 31:21 indicates that Hezekiah appointed servants to do various tasks on behalf of the Lord. Likely this was one of them. There were prophets, such as Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea, during this time and any one of them could have been asked to take on the task.

## **Observation on Kings** (Proverbs 25:2-7)

God gains glory because we cannot guess the reasons behind His actions (Romans 11:33). God doesn't have to explain Himself, and the fact that we cannot fully understand God just emphasizes how much greater He is than man. However, kings are not God. Their glory comes when they search out information. God knows everything, but He doesn't reveal everything He knows. Instead, He insists that leaders figure out what is going on. When they show understanding of people and the various situations that come before the kings, it brings them honor.

But like any person, no other person knows exactly what a king thinks (I Corinthians 2:11). His thoughts are as difficult to understand as the entire universe. We may learn a bit of the universe, but we won't ever comprehend it all. Those who seek to advise a king should remember this.

Dross is the worthless material mixed in with raw silver ore. It is only when the worthless material is removed that the silver becomes useable. In the same way, a kingdom containing widespread evil is not stable. Only by removing evil is a king's rule made stable because only righteousness is stable (Psalms 101:3,8). This is especially true if evil exists within the government. No king can rule justly if his servants are corrupt (Jeremiah 6:27-30).

Holding self-pride before someone who is superior to you is a quick route to embarrassment. Recall that no one knows the mind of the king, where you might think you are superior to others, the king may very well have a different opinion. Thus, it is better to have a ruler bestow honor on you than to be lowered by the ruler in the sight of other people (Luke 14:7-11).

## **Handling Disputes** (Proverbs 25:8-10)

Continuing with the idea of the difficulty of pride, we are warned not to be quick to take a neighbor to court. No one knows everything and the reason you are in a disagreement may likely be due to a lack of knowledge. What happens when you appear in court and are made to look foolish because of some vital, but overlooked, fact? (Matthew 5:25).

Instead, try to settle the argument directly with your neighbor. If it is settled, then don't reveal the problem to anyone else (Matthew 18:15-17). The knowledge you learn in settling the matter is not yours to divulge. Gossiping about settled matters will only ruin your own reputation.

# Similitudes on Relationships

Text: Proverbs 25:11-26:2

This section is written with proverbs that compare two things and then leads you to realize another pair of items are similar. Each gives insight into our relationship with other people.

## **Well-Spoken Words** (Proverbs 25:11-13)

A well-timed message is a beautiful thing (Proverbs 15:23; Isaiah 50:4-5; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6).

Wise reproof given to a person willing to listen makes the listener look better (Psalms 141:5; Proverbs 15:31).

Harvest season is typically hot and dry. Thus, thoughts of the cold snow of the mountains is refreshing. A reliable messenger is also refreshing to those who trust him with a message. But there is also a hint that just as snow in the summer is rare, so is it rare to find a trustworthy messenger.

## **Restraint** (Proverbs 25:14-17)

When the ground is dry and rain is needed, thunder clouds and wind that seem to signal a shower coming but produces nothing are annoying and disappointing. It is the same when a person boasts of abilities that he doesn't have (Jude 12).

Patience (restrained anger) can persuade even a ruler and soft answers (mild and without provocative emotions) answers are strong (Proverbs 15:1; Ecclesiastes 10:4). A good example is Abigail's confrontation with David.

Too much of a good thing can make it become a bad thing. Visits are fun, but don't overstay your welcome. Leave your neighbors wishing they could see more of you than less of you.

## **Troublemakers** (Proverbs 25:18-24)

A person who lies about his neighbor can be deadly (Psalms 120:2). This is what God accused the Israelites of doing (Jeremiah 9:8).

Trusting a unfaithful man in a critical time will hurt you. We have to be aware of the character of people around us and not wait until it is important to find out that someone is not trustworthy (Isaiah 36:6).

Someone acting cheerful when you are gloomy is irritating and the opposite of what you need. An example of this were the Babylonians who want to hear songs about Jerusalem while the Jews were in captivity (Psalms 137:3). What we should do is match our own emotions to those of others (Romans 12:15). This stands in contrast to Proverbs 15:23.

Not all irritation is bad. Treating enemies well is a irritant to them. The illustration of heaping burning coals on an enemy's head can be seen as softening an iron disposition that is set against you. The idea of loving your enemy is found in both the Old and New Laws (Exodus 23:4-5).

How you behave affects the behavior of others. Backbiting is talking negatively about someone behind his back (Psalms 101:5). Backbiting will naturally and predictably bring about anger.

This is yet another warning to be careful who you marry. A person who is never happy and constantly finds fault is someone impossible to live with (Proverbs 19:13; 21:9, 19).

### **Good News (Proverbs 25:25)**

Good news from someone you don't hear from often is refreshing. An example of this is when Jacob learned that his son, Joseph, was still alive after thinking he was dead for many years (Genesis 45:27; Proverbs 12:25).

### **Focusing on Self (Proverbs 25:26-28)**

A righteous person who does not stand against evil is like polluted water. He ruins his example, he makes the wicked think that sin is acceptable or that there is no meaning to the righteous man's words. Shadrack, Meshack and Abed-nego serve as a counterexample. They stood solidly against a bad law and in the end were honored for it (Daniel 3:16-18). You cannot change evil by compromising with it.

Seeking out fame is wanting too much of a good thing. It is nice to be recognized for what you do, but you should not seek it out. Fishing for compliments isn't a true compliment.

If you don't have self-control, you don't have any defenses (I Corinthians 9:24-27).

### **Misplaced Wishes (Proverbs 26:1-2)**

Honor doesn't fit a foolish person. Some may think they are encouraging someone by giving an honor that is not deserved. By they end up harming their own reputation by giving credence to a foolish person.

Wishing someone harm for no reason will not change matters (Deuteronomy 23:5; I Peter 2:18-20; Hebrews 6:7-8).

# The Fool and the Lazy

Text: Proverbs 26:3-16

## The Fool (Proverbs 26:3-12)

Because a fool refuses to learn, he has to be controlled by stronger measures. A whip or bridle is not a tool for punishment but a way of controlling a stubborn beast. Indirectly this is saying that fools lack reasoning and are stubborn, like animals (Psalms 32:9). And, sadly, one of the few ways of getting useful work out of a fool is through punishment.

Two seemingly conflicting ideas are purposely placed together to force the reader to consider how they are both true. If an action is deemed foolish, then responding in the same fashion is equally foolish (I Peter 3:9). Therefore, when dealing with fools we must be careful not to respond in an equally foolish manner. However, we need to answer him as his foolishness requires. For example, a foolish argument delivered in sarcasm is sometimes effectively answered with sarcasm. People don't expect to be answered back in a similar way, and it can make them think. Another way is to answer a poorly formed thought with humor to make the person think (Titus 1:12-13). Sometimes a person's pride must be wounded before he will use his head (Isaiah 5:21).

You harm yourself when you rely on a fool to perform a critical task. A messenger, in a sense an extra pair of legs, to be somewhere you cannot be. But when you rely on a fool as messenger, you are cutting off your own legs. In addition, the message will likely be garbled, causing get damage. Similar proverbs warned against relying on the lazy (Proverbs 10:26) and the wicked (Proverbs 13:17). Relying on a trustworthy person is refreshing (Proverbs 25:13).

Proverbs told by fools are useless as a lame man's legs (Psalms 50:16-21). Even if what he says is correct, his own life contradicts his words. However, more likely a fool can't retain a proverb anyway since he refuses to learn. Any proverb he knows won't impact his own life. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 17:7; 26:9.

A sling operates by placing a stone in a pouch held by two strings. As it is twirled around, the stone is released by letting go of one string. But if the stone is bound to the pouch, you won't have to worry about dropping the stone while trying to get the sling to twirl, but then the stone won't go anywhere when you release the string. The point is honoring a fool is useless. It might seem like a good idea at first, but won't profit in the end. The honor won't stop him from being a fool. This is similar to Proverbs 26:1.

A drunk may get a thorn stabbed into his hand and not immediately notice that he has hurt himself until later. In the same way a fool will repeat proverbs thinking that they will make him appear wise. It won't be until later that he will see that those same proverbs makes his own behavior look bad. An illustration of this is the man with one talent in Luke 19:20-23.

There is a very wide variation in translations of Proverbs 26:10 due to the uncertainty of meaning given to several keywords in the proverb:

- "The great God who formed everything gives the fool his hire and the transgressor his wages" (NKJV)
- "Like an archer who wounds everyone, so is he who hires a fool or who hires

- those who pass by.” (NASB)
- “Like an archer who wounds everyone is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.” (ESV)

The majority of translations lean toward the NASB style of interpretation. It does fit the similitude style better than the KJV and NKJV. When you make use of a fool or any random person, you harm others randomly. You need to know who you hire because you are putting trust in that person to complete a job.

Foolish people don’t learn, so they tend to repeat their mistakes. They seem convinced that the same actions will reproduce a different outcome the next time. An example of this is seen in Pharaoh (Exodus 8:15). Peter quotes this proverb and applies it those are not fully converted to the Gospel (II Peter 2:22).

A person who thinks he is smart learns less than a fool (I Corinthians 3:18-19; 8:1-2). The proud doesn’t think he needs to learn, while a fool just refuses to learn.

### **The Lazy (Proverbs 26:13-16)**

A lazy person will imagine dangers to avoid work (Proverbs 22:13). Notice that the second excuse, that there is a lion in the market place, even less believable than the first excuse.

A lazy man is like a hinged door, he moves but gets nowhere and accomplishes nothing. He’ll stay in bed all day if he could (Proverbs 6:10; 24:33). Even when he “works” nothing is accomplished.

A lazy man wants but is too lazy to get it, even when it needs little effort to obtain (Proverbs 19:24). Worse, because his hand is **buried** in the dish that others are supposed to share, he keeps others from gaining or enjoying.

The lazy person thinks he is smarter than most other people. Why seven? Seven is a perfect set. Here is a perfect set of sensible people. Thus, while doing nothing, the lazy considers himself a genius.

Note that both the section on the fool and the lazy end with the point that each thinks he is wise in his own eyes. Both foolishness and laziness leads to pride.

# Strife and Hatred

Text: Proverbs 26:17-28

## **Meddling in an Argument** (Proverbs 26:17)

Getting involved in other people's arguments will get yourself attacked and hurt. Dogs were typically not domesticated in these days. They were scavengers, so taking a wild dog by the ears would be to invite a furious attack as soon as you try to disengage. The people involved in the dispute must want help, or you need to have reason for your involvement. A relative stranger's opinion will be rejected and the stranger attacked. As an example, notice that when Jesus was asked to take a side in a dispute between two brothers, he declined (Luke 12:14).

## **"I Was Only Joking"** (Proverbs 26:18-19)

Another foolish behavior is seen in some people, when caught in a lie will try to cover their tracks by claiming that it was just a joke. But lies are not a game (Jeremiah 9:5). The person hurting everyone around him like a madman with weapons.

### **For discussion:**

1. Is joking wrong?

## **Why Strife Doesn't Die Down** (Proverbs 26:20-21)

Gossiping keeps strife going long after it should have died away. It continually reminds people of the disagreement. It invites people to take sides. But it doesn't solve the problem. In the same way a person who constantly finds fault in another lights the fires of strife (Proverbs 15:18; 22:10). By implication, the way to get strife to cease is to remove the person fueling the fire (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10).

## **Gossip** (Proverbs 26:22)

People have a hard time resisting gossip. When they give in and listen to gossip, what they hear stays with them and becomes a part of how they view another person (Proverbs 18:8). This proverb, then, explains how gossip ends up fanning the flames of strife and hatred.

### **For discussion:**

1. What is different between Proverbs 26:22 and Proverbs 18:8?
2. Why repeat the same proverb?

## **Hypocrisy** (Proverbs 26:23-28)

Sincere sounding words don't make a wicked man any better or useful (Matthew 23:27-28). No matter how fervently spoken, he still has an evil heart. A person who hates you will usually disguise it with lies. Be skeptical of such a person's kind words, he is trying to get you to let down your guard (Psalm 28:3; Jeremiah 9:8). Seven abominations means a complete representation of all that is abominable. In the end, his wickedness is exposed despite his lies

(Proverbs 12:13).

The one who lays traps ends up being snared (Psalms 7:15-16; 9:15; 57:6; Ecclesiastes 10:8). His goal is to crush and ruin, but he will end up ruining himself.

A liar doesn't want the best for those to whom he tells lies. The same is true for the insincere flatterer (Psalms 12:3). Therefore, don't make excuses or cultivate as friends people who lie or flatter

# Advice for Life

Text: Proverbs 27:1-27

## **Boasting** (Proverbs 27:1-2)

Don't live as if tomorrow is a certainty. We don't know the future (James 4:13-17).  
Similar proverbs (Proverbs 16:1,9; 19:21).

Don't blow your own trumpet. It is fine if someone else chooses to praise you, but when you brag about yourself it comes across badly. Similar proverbs (Proverbs 15:33; 16:18).

## **Disagreements** (Proverbs 27:3-6)

The obnoxious behavior of a fool is a heavy burden to bear. It might be tolerable at first, but it won't take long before it becomes intolerable.

Envy or jealousy is a stronger emotion than anger. It can be like a flood that is not easily stopped (Proverbs 6:34-35).

An open rebuke can be an expression of love (Leviticus 19:17; Revelation 3:19). A friend might have to say something that hurts, while an enemy might pretend to be kind (Psalms 141:5; Hebrews 12:10; Proverbs 26:23-26). Therefore, words alone might not tell you what the motive is behind the words. Some examples of deceit in the guise of kindness are Joab in II Samuel 20:9-10 and Judas in- Matthew 26:48-50.

## **Desires** (Proverbs 27:7-8)

Your perception changes depending on circumstances. If you are full, even sweets are not appealing. If you are hungry, even bitter things sound appealing (Luke 15:16).

What Proverbs 27:8 says is clear, but you will find a wide variety of interpretations depending on what a person thinks is the focus of a bird wandering from her nest. When you leave your connections to home and family, you expose yourself to dangers. Many people don't realize how well off they are and wander from their place in search of something better only to find themselves worse off.

## **For discussion:**

1. How would Proverbs 27:7 be applied in daily life?

## **Friends** (Proverbs 27:9-10)

Advice from the heart is appreciated by friends, like good smelling perfume (Proverbs 25:11-12).

Learn the true value of friends, whether your own or your parents' friends. Don't neglect them because they are valuable, especially in times of trouble. You are better off with a nearby friend than long distance relative. Consider that your father's friends are people who have shown their value for a long time. A good example is David's loyalty to Jonathan's descendants (II Samuel 21:7). A bad example is Rehoboam's neglect of his father's advisors (I Kings 12:6-8).

**For discussion:**

1. Compare Proverbs 17:17; 18:24 and Proverbs 27:10. Are they saying the opposite thing? How are they compatible?

**Foreseeing Problems (Proverbs 27:11-16)**

When a son acts wisely, it not only makes his parents happy, but it also gives proof to his parent's wisdom (Psalms 127:5); thus, it raises his parents' status in the community and removes an avenue of attack.

A prudent man looks ahead, sees evil and avoids it. The ignorant ignores it and suffer the consequences (Proverbs 22:3).

Don't trust someone who would guarantee a loan for a stranger or a sinner. Demand extra proof or additional insurance. Someone who is making bad business deals isn't a good risk (Proverbs 22:16). Given the verse prior to it, there is the implication that such a person doesn't think ahead to the consequences of his actions.

This is another verse that says timing is important (a negative of Proverbs 25:11). Loud praises of another would generally be appreciated, but not early in the morning. Notice that each piece is not a problem, but in combination it becomes one. But it is also a warning. Over-the-top praises (especially those given before an audience) is an indication of insincerity (II Corinthians 12:6).

A contentious woman is like a continual drip. The mere repetition gets annoying. While stated before, here it is extended to note that it is impossible to stop a contentious person (Proverbs 19:13; 21:9, 19).

**Testing (Proverbs 27:17-22)**

Friends improve friends (Hebrews 10:23-25). Friends shape each others thinking and behavior to their mutual benefit if you have been wise enough to pick good friends.

There is reward in serving others ( I Corinthians 9:7; John 12:26). Fig trees are slow to mature but produce for a long time once they are established. The implication is that there isn't instant recognition, but one that develops over time and then lasts for a long while. Also notice that the service must come first before there is any benefit.

A person's heart is reflected in what he does (James 1:22-25; Mark 7:21). By watching a person's behavior, we can grasp who a person is inside, but it is not an absolute grasp, just as water does not make a perfect mirror.

A greedy person, who is driven by wants, is never satisfied (Ecclesiastes 5:10; 6:7; Habakkuk 2:5). Even when a want is gained, there is more that is wanted.

This proverbs starts out the same as Proverbs 17:3. Praise by others determines the value of a man. The effect praise has on the person reveals his true character. For example, how do you find a good employee?

You cannot force foolishness out of a person (Proverbs 17:10). For some, no amount of punishment will drive foolishness from a determined fool (Isaiah 1:5; Jeremiah 5:3; Revelation 16:10-11). For example, consider Ahaz in II Chronicles 28:19-23.

**For discussion:**

1. How can a business owner use the ideas in Proverbs 27:17-22 to find a good employee?
2. Compare Proverbs 22:15 and Proverbs 27:22 and explain the difference.
3. How do children often illustrate the principle taught in Proverbs 22:20?

**Pay Attention to What You Have (Proverbs 27:23-27)**

You need to keep track of where you are financially for the very fact that riches are an untrustworthy commodity. Understand the cycles of your business, gathering so you last during the “off” cycles. Have a variety businesses that run on different cycles. Balance consumption and production. Then you will have adequate supplies for your needs.

# More Short Proverbs of Contrasts

## Dealing with the Wicked

Text: Proverbs 28:1-13

Proverbs 28:1-13 forms a chiasm:

The wicked flee when no one is pursuing,  
But the righteous are bold as a lion.

By the transgression of a land many are its princes,  
But by a man of understanding and knowledge, so it endures.

A poor man who oppresses the lowly  
Is like a driving rain which leaves no food.

Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,  
But those who keep the law strive with them.

Evil men do not understand justice,  
But those who seek the LORD understand all things.

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity  
Than he who is crooked though he be rich.

He who keeps the law is a discerning son,  
But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates

his father.

He who increases his wealth by interest and usury  
Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.

He who turns away his ear from listening to the law,  
Even his prayer is an abomination.

He who leads the upright astray in an evil way will himself fall into his  
own pit,

But the blameless will inherit good.

The rich man is wise in his own eyes,  
But the poor who has understanding sees through him.

When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,  
But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.

He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

**Going In: Differences** (Proverbs 28:1-5)

The wicked might appear bold while doing evil, but in truth they are nervous most of

their life. Guilt turns men into cowards. They don't know if someone looking at them knows what they had done or not. In contrast, the righteous are confident even though they are humble in their actions (Psalms 27:1; 46:1-3). They don't have a guilty conscience. A similar proverb is Proverbs 14:26. In Hebrew, this verse forms a chiasm:

They flee  
without a pursuer  
the wicked  
the righteous  
like a lion  
are confident.

When sin is prevalent in a country, the turnover rate of its leadership is high (Isaiah 3:1-7; Hosea 13:11). But a single man with righteous knowledge and understanding can bring stability to a country. Compare the many dynasties of northern Israel to the single dynasty established by David in southern Judah.

You would think that a person would have compassion for people in similar situations to his own, but some prey on other poor people (Matthew 18:28-30). Instead of a rain that brings growth and harvest, it is a rain that floods and erodes. Thus, people who prey on other people who are having hard times are destructive.

Law breakers praise wicked people (Psalms 10:3; Romans 1:32). Law keepers contend with the wicked (Psalms 15:4; Ephesians 5:11). Thus, you can determine a person's character from who he supports or battles.

Evil people don't understand the concept of justice (I Corinthians 2:14). Righteous people do understand justice (I Corinthians 2:15; Jeremiah 4:22).

Integrity is far more valuable than a person's economic situation. You are better an honest poor man is better than a scheming rich man (Proverbs 19:1).

### **For discussion:**

1. What would cause a poor man to oppress his peers?
2. How would you put Proverbs 28:4 to use?
3. Why is Proverbs 28:6 true?

### **The Seventh Point: Judgment and Self-control (Proverbs 28:7)**

The law abiding display good judgment in who they select for companions (Proverbs 2:3). The rebellious will accumulate friends who have no self-control (Proverbs 1:10-19; 22:24-25; 23:20-21). The result will both destroy the person's life and embarrass his parents.

### **Going Out: Consequences (Proverbs 28:8-13)**

A person who makes money by excessive interest or extortion won't hold on to it. It is forbidden in God's law (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-38; Deuteronomy 23:19-20). The one who is generous to the poor will gain (Ecclesiastes 2:26; Job 27:16-17; Proverbs 13:22).

God finds the prayers of the disobedient sickening (Psalms 66:18; 109:7; Isaiah 1:15; Zechariah 7:11-13). God doesn't listen to the prayers of those who will not listen to Him. This is similar to Proverbs 15:8; 21:13.

A person who causes a good man to sin will be also trapped by the same sin (II Peter 2:18-20; Ecclesiastes 10:8; Psalm 7:12-16). Instead of being trapped by sin, the blamelessness inherit good, not because it was earned but because it is the result of listening to God (Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 6:12). This is similar to Proverbs 1:18-19; 7:15; 26:27.

Wealth does not indicate wisdom, but the rich often assume they are wise simply because they have more money. The poor tend not to think too highly of themselves and can see that the rich are not as wise as they claim to be. Their humbleness grants them greater insight.

When the righteous win, all celebrate. When the wicked win, people hide. People prefer righteousness because it makes them feel secure. Evil spreads insecurity. This is similar to Proverbs 11:10.

Hiding sins doesn't help avoid the consequences of those sins. It is by admitting wrong and changing that a person improves (Psalms 32:3-5; Numbers 32:23; I John 1:8-10).

**For discussion:**

1. Since law is from God, why would someone ask in prayer, if one is not inclined to listen?

# Sin Is Destructive

Text: Proverbs 28:14-29:1

## **Stubbornness** (Proverbs 28:14)

You ought to have some fear to be cautious and keep out of sin. Stubborn people walk into disasters (Proverbs 16:18). Thus, some sins are personally destructive.

## **Oppression** (Proverbs 28:15-17)

The combination of a wicked ruler and poor people is highly destructive. The people have no defenses and the ruler has no restraint. Consider Herod as an example (Matthew 2:16).

A ruler who can't reason tends to oppress others, using them to make himself wealthy. A person who hates greed tends to live longer. (Remember Proverbs 28:2?) The contrast shows that the greedy tend to be oppressive as well. A lack of covetousness becomes a needed requirement in a ruler (Exodus 18:21; Ecclesiastes 10:16).

The first line of Proverbs 28:17 says, "A man oppressed by the blood of life ..." Thus, a man's action, in this case murder, ends up oppressing himself with the guilt of his violent deed. Murderers will be trapped in guilt and eventual death. They should get no sympathy or be rescued from the consequences of their deeds (Genesis 9:6).

## **Perversity** (Proverbs 28:18)

Salvation comes to the one who lives blamelessly or in integrity. But the one who pursues crooked ways finds sudden problems and sudden falls (Psalms 125:5). Similar proverbs are Proverbs 10:9; 17:20.

## **Lazy** (Proverbs 28:19-20)

Working in advance brings prosperity. A farmer must till the ground before planting his seed. Skipping this step heavily effects his later produce. People who chase after empty things will have plenty of poverty. They don't use their time to do the essential things. Instead, they chase after whatever appeals to them at the moment, which is never work. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 12:11 (which answers why); Proverbs 10:4-5; 20:4.

## **For discussion:**

1. Give examples of frivolity that distracts from work.
2. Does this mean we can't ever have fun?

## **Rashness** (Proverbs 28:20)

A trustworthy person has blessings (happiness), but a man who rushes to become wealthy will be punished (I Timothy 6:9). Rash behavior leads to poor, and often sinful, decisions. By implication he becomes someone you cannot trust. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 13:11; 20:21.

### **Biased Judgment** (Proverbs 28:21-23)

We cannot be biased in our judgments. When people start compromising their values, then even a seemingly small advantage will throw justice out the window. An example of it happening is found in Ezekiel 13:19.

Envy (miserly, stinginess) drives a man to greed and he doesn't realize the instability of his position. Notice that this too causes people to make rash decisions. An evil eye refers to looking at something with greed or envy ( Proverbs 23:6; Matthew 20:15). In contrast, a good eye is someone who is generous (Proverbs 22:9). Similar proverbs are Proverbs 18:5; 24:23.

People appreciate rebukes more than flattery after some time has passed (Psalms 141:5). It is only when you see the results and realize who was right that you can truly appreciate what they did for you.

### **Selfishness** (Proverbs 28:24-28)

A person who thinks there is no wrong in robbing his own parents is destructive. Two laws are broken against stealing and honoring your parents (Exodus 20:12,15). Children are apt to consider their parent's property as their own; and thus, think nothing of doing as they please with it.

A proud person causes strife. The description of the man is literally someone who is "wide of soul." It can also be translated as greedy, covetous, or arrogant. A person who trusts in God, rather than himself or in things, prospers (literally "made fat", generous - Proverbs 11:25) (Isaiah 58:11). Pride brings strife (Proverbs 13:10; 21:24). A similar proverb is Proverbs 27:5-6.

You are a fool if you trust your own wisdom (Proverbs 12:15). But a person who actually practices wisdom will be protected. Your emotions are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). Emotions change constantly. But God's wisdom is constant and truth does not change. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 3:5, 7; 14:16.

A generous man will not come to want. People will love him for what he has done and will take care of him if he has a need. A person who ignores the needs of others will be strongly hated ( Deuteronomy 15:7). When he has a need, people will not be willing to help him. See also Proverbs 19:17; 22:9.

When the wicked come to power, people hide. When the wicked are gone, righteousness increases. This gives hope that the damage caused by wicked rulers can be reversed. Righteousness is never totally destroyed. Similar proverbs are Proverbs 11:10; 28:12; 29:12.

### **Stubbornness** (Proverbs 29:1)

A stubborn person who requires frequent rebukes will eventually come to destruction. An example of this is Israel (II Kings 17:14; II Chronicles 36:11-17; Nehemiah 9:29; Jeremiah 7:26; 17:23; 19:15). The motivation behind reproof should be love for the person (Proverbs 3:11-12). Reproof is to save a person from harm (Proverbs 6:23). Similar to Proverbs 1:24-32; 6:15.

This section is "book ended" by the same topic, creating bookends as boundaries.

# Justice

Text: Proverbs 29:2-27

## **Benefits of Wisdom** (Proverbs 29:2-11)

When righteousness is generally prevalent in a society, people are happier as a whole. Some translations say “when the righteous are in authority” but the Hebrew word *birovoth* means “when being abundant.” In contrast, it only takes a single wicked ruler to make people miserable (Proverbs 11:10; 28:12, 15-16, 28).

Parents love it when their children have a love for wisdom. However, a person who wastes his money on prostitutes is definitely showing a lack of wisdom. Such a person would be a grief to his parents (Proverbs 5:9-10; 10:1; 28:7). An example of this would be the prodigal son (Luke 15:13, 30).

A king who rules justly gives stability to his kingdom (Psalm 89:14; 99:4). People know what is expected of them and know that wrong doers will be punished. But bribes overthrow justice. Judgments are no longer a matter of what is right or wrong but who can pay the most (Proverbs 28:21). An example is what happened to Israel (Micah 7:3-4).

A person who is flattering others is most likely planning a trap (Proverbs 26:23-26). Flattery is dangerous because it tells a person things they want to hear, so they are distracted and do not check why they are being flattered. An example would be a false teacher (Romans 16:18) or how the Pharisees flattered Jesus while laying a trap for him (Luke 20:20-21). Notice that after a series of contrasts, this verse stands out by its lack of contrast. This puts extra emphasis on its message. Interestingly, the trap is laid out for “his steps” but it is left ambiguous whether “his” is the flatterer or the one being flattered. It is likely purposely ambiguous because both can be true. The flatterer can also be unintentionally trapping himself by his own words (Proverbs 10:9).

An evil person’s sins becomes a trap for him (Proverbs 1:18; 5:22; 12:13; 26:27). A righteous person has freedom shown in his songs and cheerful attitude.

A righteous person thinks about other people’s rights, including those often overlooked (Psalms 41:1). This is particularly needful in a court. The wicked doesn’t even understand why it should be a concern, but that is because he thinks only about himself.

Scoffers, who mock anyone who doesn’t agree with them, stir up strife. The Hebrew literally says they fan a city. The imagery is that of fanning coals to get a fire started (James 3:5-6). They take existing disagreements and make them breakout in full riot (Proverbs 11:11). The wise, in contrast, deflect anger so that peace can reign (Proverbs 15:1).

It is a waste of time to argue with a fool. Whether the fool laughs at you or rages in anger, you won’t gain a peaceful settlement. This is because a fool won’t listen to reason (Proverbs 18:2). Either reaction is a rejection of your reasoning (Matthew 7:6; 11:17-19).

Violent people have no concern regarding another person’s well-being. They hate those who live with integrity, likely because their lives make them look bad. The second half of this verse is debated because in the phrase “they will seek his life” the question is whether “they” refers to the upright, which is in plural, or the men of bloodshed. If it refers to the violent, then it is saying they attack both those with integrity and those who are upright. An example would be

Cain's attitude toward his brother (I John 3:12-13) or the warning Jesus gave his disciples (John 15:18-19). If it refers to the upright, then it is a contrast where the upright seek to protect the life of those with integrity.

A fool has no self-control so he expresses all his feelings. But a wise man knows that feelings are unreliable, so he suppresses them and speaks only what is needful (Proverbs 12:16; 14:33; 15:28; 17:27-28).

### **Just Judgments** (Proverbs 29:12-14)

When a ruler gives heed to lies, his servants become evil. If one type of evil is encouraged, all sorts of evil breaks out (Psalms 52:2-4). The opposite is taught in Proverbs 20:8 and Psalms 101:5-7.

God gives blessings to both the poor and the one who oppresses the poor (Job 12:16; Matthew 5:45). Both groups are alive because of God, so there should be actions chosen in accordance with God's will.

Honest, just judgments for the poor stabilizes a kingdom. There should be no bias for the poor or a bias against the poor (Exodus 23:3; Psalms 72:2, 4, 13-14; Isaiah 11:4). The rich are not always oppressors, and the poor are not always victims.

### **For discussion:**

1. Why would a ruler want to listen to lies?
2. Why should God give benefits to the wicked?
3. Now, consider: Why should we love our enemies?
4. If a group has been downtrodden in the past, should they be given special privileges or held to a lesser standard?

### **Correction** (Proverbs 29:15-19)

Without corrections and a willingness to punish, a child on his own will tend toward evil (Hebrews 12:10-11). While we tend to get wiser as we get older, experience alone is not sufficient (Proverbs 23:13-14). It must be guided – including both physical punishment and verbal scoldings. Notice that both are required. Physical punishment alone leaves a child clueless as to what he did wrong. Scoldings alone encourages a child to tune out authority. An example is King David's son (I Kings 1:6).

Evil deeds increases with the number of evil people, because evil people encourage each other to do more evil. However, the righteous will outlast them all (Psalms 37:34-38; 58:10-11). Wickedness may be more popular and temporarily stronger, but righteousness is more enduring because the wicked will fall. The "fall" in this verse is one that is frequently used to describe God coming in judgment (Ezekiel 26:15,18; 27:27; 31:13,16; 32:10). Similar proverbs are Proverbs 10:25; 28:28; 29:2.

Correct (chastise, literally or figuratively with blows) a child and you will change his behavior. Stern parenting pays off in the long run. Proverbs 29:15 focused on how discipline benefits the child. This verse focuses on how discipline benefits the parent. It seems paradoxical that physical punishment, which is not pleasant, will in the end bring peace.

When there are no rules, people are unrestrained in their behavior, but it leaves them

unhappy (Judges 17:6; 21:25; Psalms 12:4-5; Hosea 4:6). The reign of Ahaz is an example of this (II Chronicles 28:19). When laws are followed, then people find happiness (Psalms 19:11; John 13:17; James 1:25). However, this proverb goes even deeper. There are people who look for special divine guidance (visions) before doing anything. Since such visions were rare, even in Solomon's day, people did as they pleased thinking God didn't care or supported what they were doing. An example of this is what happened with the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain (Exodus 32:25). Or consider what happened with Eli's sons (I Samuel 3:1, 11-14). This is contrasted with people who follow what God has already stated and don't require extra messages to know what they need to do. Consider Josiah's reaction when the scrolls of the law were found (II Kings 22:11-13).

Words alone are insufficient to cause a change in behavior. Even a slave, who is required to obey his master, may understand what his master says, but when there is no consequence to ignoring what he is being told, he won't change. A similar proverb is Proverbs 19:29.

**For discussion:**

1. Aren't people happier when there are no rules? How can restrictions bring happiness?
2. How can Proverbs 29:19 be applied in raising a child? How about in a legal situation?

**Forethought (Proverbs 29:20-21)**

A person who talks without first thinking is worse than a fool (a person who doesn't know what he is talking about) (James 1:19; Ecclesiastes 5:2; Proverbs 17:27-28; 26:12). Recall that in Proverbs 27:22 we learned that you can't remove foolishness from a fool.

When a servant is pampered, eventually he stops serving and is treated like an heir. This can be viewed as a promotion for the slave (Proverbs 17:2). There is a debate on the last word, *manon* – translated as son or offspring by the NASB and NKJV. This is the only place it is found and it depends on how the translators think the word is derived. The NIV and NRSV translators thought the word has a meaning of grief or sorrow (based on the Septuagint). Thus, they see pampering a slave would eventually lead to heartache for the master, or the slave, because he will see himself as someone he is not.

**Results of Sins (Proverbs 29:22-25)**

Anger spreads to cause strife among people (Proverbs 28:25). A quick tempered man will cause many sins (James 1:19-20; Proverbs 15:18; 19:19). See also Proverbs 22:24-25

Ironically a man's pride, where he thinks he is greater than others, will ultimately lead to him being brought low; while a humble man will gain honor (Proverbs 15:33; 16:18; 18:12).

When you tie yourself to a wicked person, you don't value your own life (Psalms 50:18-22). If a matter comes to court, you place yourself in a no-win situation. Refusing to testify was a punishable sin (Leviticus 5:1). But testifying might lead you to be charged as an accessory to a crime or facing vengeance from the one who committed the actual crime. In other words, you can't escape by saying "I didn't actually commit the crime."

Being fearful of other men becomes a trap. You can be pressured into doing things you should not do. You make poor decisions because you are afraid of what other people might think. But having a fear of God and trusting Him will improve your situation (Matthew 10:28; Psalms

118:6; Isaiah 51:12). An example of this was Peter's denial of Jesus in Matthew 26:69-74.

**Justice** (Proverbs 29:26-27)

Many people want a ruler's favor because of what that ruler might do. But true justice comes from God, so He is the one we should be seeking. In the end justice is not a human commodity and no man is in full control (Job 34:29).

It is a plain fact that righteous people find the wicked disgusting, while at the same time the wicked find the righteous disgusting. They have different approaches to life and make decisions based on different standards – and these differences are at odds to each other (II Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

# The Words of Agur

Text: Proverbs 30:1-33

## Introduction (Proverbs 30:1)

Proverbs 30 is written by Agur. His name derives from a root word in Hebrew that means “hireling.” His father’s name, Jakeh, is believed to come from the Akkadian language, used in southern Arabia. In that language, his name means “to obey.”

The chapter is addressed to two males: Ithiel, which means “God is with me” in Hebrew, and Ucal, which has no known meaning in Hebrew. They are assumed to be brothers and sons of Agur. It is also possible that they were students of Agur.

After Agur’s father’s name appears the word *hammassa*. This can be translated several ways, depending on the context. It could mean that Jakeh is a descendant of Massa (Genesis 25:14; I Chronicles 1:30), who was a founder of one of the Arab tribes. Given that Jakeh is an Arabian name, this would be the most likely meaning. However, the Hebrew word *massa* also means a prophecy of doom and is usually translated as “a burden.” This doesn’t match the content of Agur’s writings, so many translations state “an oracle.” The problem is that this and Proverbs 31:1 would be the only instance of this word meaning “oracle.” There is a different Hebrew word that is usually translated as “oracle.” I suspect the reason that the more obvious translation is not typically used is that the translators assume that all prophets come from Israel or that only the words of Israelite prophet would be in the Bible. This overlooks that there have been writings concerning non-Israelites, such as Job, a prophet, who was from Uz in the area where Edom later arises (Job 1:1; Lamentations 4:21), and there was Balaam, who was from Pethor in upper Mesopotamia (Numbers 22:5). An Arab prophet from Massa would not be odd.

Given Agur and one of his son’s names having meaning in Hebrew, a likely supposition is that Jakeh’s wife was an Israelite.

It should also be noted that if the consonants are parsed slightly differently in the Hebrew text, instead of “to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal” you would have “I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, but I will prevail.”

## Who Knows More: the Student or the Teacher? (Proverbs 30:2-6)

Assuming that Ithiel and Ucal are teenage boys, a typical problem is for young men to think they know more than the one trying to teach them. Agur starts out by declaring that he must be dumber than every other man. The reaction by his students or sons would be a denial, but it also would draw them in by desiring to disagree with Agur.

Think how many people will answer questions on any topic as if they are the world’s foremost authority. Think how many people are confident that they know what God desires or would approve of (I Corinthians 2:11; Psalms 73:22). Ithiel and Ucal are probably no different, so Agur turns the tables on his students and asks them to explain a series of questions to their teacher.

- Who has ascended into and descended from heaven?

- Who has gathered the wind in his fists?
- Who has wrapped the waters in his garments?
- Who has established all the boundaries of the earth?
- What is his name or his son's name?

But there would not have been an answer to Agur's questions. No one in their knowledge has gone to heaven and returned, so no one could claim they know what God wants. No man controls the elements. These are things only God can do. While God has revealed several titles or names for Himself (Genesis 17:1; Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 28:58), are we certain which is God's name. And asking the name of God's Son, who had not be revealed at this time would have totally confused Ithiel and Ucal. Thus, Agur proved that if he is stupid, then they know far less than he does and there is room for them to add to their knowledge. One of the first steps toward learning is admitting how little you know.

However, there are answers to Agur's questions:

- God has on occasions come down to visit man (Genesis 3:8; 11:5). And in particular, the Son of God has both descended and ascended (John 3:13).
- The control of the winds and water refers to both the Father and the Son (Job 38:4-41; Psalms 104; Mark 4:41).
- The marking out of the boundaries (Proverbs 8:22-31; Job 38:8-11; Psalms 104:1-9).
- And like God, the Father, we have a variety of names or titles for the Son, Jesus (Isaiah 7:14).

Compared to the God Agur serves and learns from, Agur is ignorant – nearly to the level of a beast. In turn, Agur's students know even less, so Agur's first lesson is in humility.

This leads to a corollary: every man is a student of God. Further, every word of God is tested or pure. It is the real thing and contains no falsehoods. God protects everyone to puts their trust in Him (Psalms 18:30). But that also means if we put our own thoughts into God's words, they will no longer be pure (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:31; Revelation 22:18-19). Instead of protection we will face God's reproof and be proven to be liars.

### **Agur's Prayer (Proverbs 30:7-9)**

Agur's prayer is beautiful in its simplicity and humility. He begs of God two favors before his life ends.

The first request is to keep all lies far from him. He does not want to be deceived by others and thereby be led astray. Nor would Agur wish to be a liar by adding to God's word (Proverbs 30:6).

His second request is to have neither poverty nor riches. Many focus on getting richer in this world, but Agur knew there was a danger. Those who are rich often become complacent (Deuteronomy 31:20; 32:15; Hosea 13:6). At times you'll also find people who argue that poverty is the way to serve God better. They believe that holiness is found in giving away everything they have. But here there is also danger – becoming so needy that you are tempted to sin or to blame God for your situation.

Agur's focus is on serving God in this life so as to be with God in the next. His requests are aimed to keep him faithful to God throughout life. If we weren't certain before about Agur's

wisdom, this prayer alone shows a man with deep understanding of life.

### **Cruelty to the Downtrodden** (Proverbs 30:10-14)

Unfortunately, there are people who think it is funny to pick on people who are weaker than themselves. They will cause problems for someone in a lowly position, believing that he cannot defend himself. But such people forget that God is concerned about the downtrodden (Psalms 101:5). The slave may complain to God, and God, who knows the truth of all matters, will find them guilty (Romans 14:4).

In every generation there arises some who

- Have no respect or gratitude for their parents
- Are hypocrites – thinking they are pure when they are not (Romans 2:1-3). In truth, they are lying to themselves (Jeremiah 17:9-10).
- Are proud
- And are cruel in their speech, especially the less fortunate.

This list begins a series of lists of four things. It explains where disrespect comes from: a lack of respect for authority, and inability to see one's own flaws, and arrogance in thinking you are better than other people. All of these lead to verbal cruelty.

Notice that this becomes an application of “keep lies far from me” (Proverbs 30:8).

### **Discontentment** (Proverbs 30:15-16)

Agur gives another list of four dealing with things that are never satisfied and are always demanding more.

- A leech
- Has two daughters named “Give” and “Give”
- There are three things which will not be satisfied
- There are four things which will not say “Enough.”

Notice the memorization technique: one, two, three, four, which are always increasing in demand.

The first of these this is the grave. No matter how many die, there is always room for another person in the grave (Proverbs 27:20; Habakkuk 2:5).

The second is a childless woman, who wants a child. This is well illustrated by Rachel who blamed Jacob for her lack of children and who was constantly trying to find ways to become pregnant (Genesis 30). Sarai wanted a child so badly that she was willing to have her husband marry her maid, so she could claim the child (Genesis 16:1-5). Hannah is another example of a barren woman desperate for a child (I Samuel 1:5-16).

The third is the ground. While you can add too much water too quickly, in general the ground always needs more water to be productive. It doesn't take long for a lack of water to cause a drought.

Finally, fire will consume everything it has. Giving it more only makes the fire bigger. It is only when nothing more is given that a fire dies. The same is true for greed. The more you give someone who is greedy, the greater becomes the demands. Also, giving it anything else will not stop the demands for what it truly wants.

Notice that this becomes an application of Agur's second request, that he did not want too

much (Proverbs 30:8).

### **Our Relationship with Our Parents** (Proverbs 30:17)

In both of the prior lists, the command to honor your father and mother becomes a key point. Cruelty begins with disrespect for your parents. Discontent is learned when children demand more and more from their parents. Now we look at another problem: thinking you can't learn from your parents, which brings us right back to the starting point (Proverbs 30:2).

The command to honor our parents comes with a promise of a long life (Ephesians 6:1-3). But a son who mocks his parents by look, action, or words will find himself dead (Proverbs 20:20). The imagery is of a person killed in battle or killed by violent men, but whose body is left unburied and the carrion birds feast on his remains. No one will care that he died.

### **Everything Isn't Comprehensible** (Proverbs 30:18-20)

There are fascinating things in our world that are difficult to understand, but that difficulty doesn't make them any less interesting to ponder. Agur gives a list of three things within a list of four things. The first three are fascinating because of the physical properties of God's world:

- How an eagle can float in the air for long periods of time without beating its wings.
- How a serpent is able to move on hard ground without any legs.
- How a sailing ship can move through water, especially being able to tack against the wind.

Each of these we know the science behind how these things work, but they are no less interesting. They deal with the air, land and sea. But the fourth is different, it deals with the spirit: What causes a man and woman to fall in love? Why that particular man or woman? Young people have been asking this for years. What do I need to do to get this other person to fall in love with me? As if there was a step-by-step manual for falling in love. Still, it is fascinating to watch, even if we don't know why it happens.

Of further interest: all four ways leave no tracks behind.

But there is a fifth puzzle, but in a different way. An adulterous woman can have sex with a guy, wipe away the evidence that you have already seen, and then claim that she has done nothing wrong. The sheer callousness and self-deception is shocking. Yet, this is how sinners function when dealing with sin; otherwise, the guilt would get to them (I Timothy 4:1-2). Notice that in this path, the trail of evidence is clear, unlike the four prior ways, but the person refuses to look at it.

### **Situations that Are Unstable** (Proverbs 30:21-23)

When a slave somehow manages to gain the kingship, the country becomes unstable (Ecclesiastes 10:7). Usually such a thing happens due to assassination or coups. Yet, the servant has no training in ruling and is apt to make many mistakes. Jeroboam is an example of a servant who became a king through rebellion (I Kings 11:26,40; 12:20). Zimri assassinated the former king and managed to last all of seven days (I Kings 16:9-15). It isn't surprising the northern Israel was unstable.

When a fool has what he wants, he lacks any restraint on his behavior, since his focus is on the immediate (Proverbs 19:10). He ends up causing mischief.

An unloved or hated woman does not gain a marriage for her own sake. She is someone used to gain her dowry or used for her potential to bear children. Leah is an example of this (Genesis 29:26). Such women, in their attempts to gain what they know is lacking, end up destabilizing their own marriages. Too often they become bitter, hateful, and overbearing.

A maid who replaces her former mistress also has difficulty bringing stability to a family because all remember who she once was. Worse is when a maid gains her position by seducing her master or a master replacing his wife with her maid.

In every case, the normal social order is upset and it leads to instability. Change is not always good.

### **Wisdom** (Proverbs 30:24-28)

Ants are not strong, but they survive through preparation during times when other people tend to relax (Proverbs 6:6).

Rock badgers (or conies) survive by making strong homes (Psalms 104:18). They too prepare in advance of a need.

Locust have no leader, but are able to survive by working in mass. For others they cause destruction and are hard to stop.

Spiders (or lizards) survive by populating hidden places. Even the king's palace has them present. They too are hard to stop because of their numbers.

In each case, the creatures use abilities that they do have to overcome what they lack.

In the Hebrew text, verses 27-28 are book-ended by the word "king," which hints that these particular examples are applicable to leadership. A king needs to remember that common folk are more numerous than those in the noble class and are found everywhere, even in palaces because someone has to take care of the place. Even without leadership, if the masses get stirred up, they can cause a lot of trouble and there is no place that they cannot access. Even a king may not be as powerful as he thinks.

### **Pride** (Proverbs 30:29-33)

A lion has a stately walk because its strength puts it at the top of the food chain. It does not need to fear. Other animals also strut and show no fear, such as a rooster (meaning is a guess by translators, it literally means "pressed in the loins"). The third example is a male goat, which when attacked will turn to face down predators. All three animals have grace and majesty in the way they move. A king also struts when he has his army behind him to back him up. Unlike the animals who are majestic in their nature, a king pulls his confidence from those surrounding him.

Yet, despite their pride, each can be killed. If you have been speaking arrogant words, you need to put a hand over your mouth because such words are foolish. The plotting of evil is just another form of arrogance and should not be expressed.

Just as you know that churning milk is going to produce butter or a punch in the nose is going to cause a nosebleed, so you are guaranteed that stirring up anger is going to produce conflicts (Proverbs 29:22). In the Hebrew, Proverbs 30:33 forms a list:

For pressing milk yields curds,  
And pressing a nose yields blood,  
And pressing anger yields strife.

The Hebrew word for “nose” and “anger” are the same word in this text. The point is that arrogance and forcing your way will lead to strife and ultimately bloodshed.

**For discussion:**

1. How many lists of four things are there? How many lists are three things and 4 things?
2. In each of the lists, the purpose is to learn by examining what is in common. You could find other examples, but how do you apply the lesson from each list to your own life?
3. Go back through Agur’s writing and notice how numbers form an integral part. What would be the purpose?

# The Words of King Lemuel

Text: Proverbs 31:1-31

## **Introduction** (Proverbs 31:1-2)

As was mentioned in Proverbs 30:1, the Hebrew word *massa* is normally translated as “burden” and not oracle. It is only translated this way here because the writing is not a prophecy of doom and gloom. But there is another way to translated it: as a location. In that case, it would mean that Lemuel was a king in Massa, which was one of the Arab tribes. This would explain why you don’t find Lemuel listed among the kings of Israel or Judah.

Since Lemuel’s name means “belonging to God” in Hebrew, it is likely that Lemuel’s mother was an Israelite and gave her son an Israelite name. The situation would not be unheard of. Esther was a Jew but became queen in Persia during the captivity.

Interestingly, Lemuel says these are the words his mother taught him, which would imply that it was Lemuel’s mother who was a prophetess and Lemuel was only the recorder.

Lemuel’s mother started out emphasizing her relationship to her son. He might be king, but she remained his mother. She was his mother, she physically gave birth to him, and he was the result of her marriage vows (Malachi 2:14). For all these reasons, she had the right to advise him.

## **Behavior Unfit for Kings** (Proverbs 31:3-7)

Her first warning is against sex with multiple women because that has led to the downfall of many kings, including Solomon (I Kings 11:1-10). The Hebrew word for strength, *chelekha*, is a military term for power but can be used figuratively of physical strength (Ecclesiastes 12:3) or fertility (Joel 2:22). It is a waste of time and effort to be having sex with multiple women (Proverbs 5:9), especially for a king who has a kingdom to run. Consider the damage David did to his kingdom by committing adultery with Bathsheba. It nearly cost David his life (II Samuel 12:13). As a side note, the word for “kings” in Proverbs 31:3 is Aramaic instead of Hebrew – hinting that the writer is from another country.

Alcohol is also not fit for rulers because it interferes with their ability to recall the laws and it distorts their judgment (Proverbs 23:33; Leviticus 10:9-10; Isaiah 28:7-8).

In both the case of fornication and drunkenness, there is a lack of restraint on the physical appetites. This is another bad characteristic in a ruler as choices revolve around what the ruler wants instead of what is right or good for the people (Hosea 4:11).

Instead, alcohol is more fit for those who are dying as it will numb their pain. Or those who are depressed or overwhelmed by life since alcohol causes people to temporarily forget their problems. It isn’t that Lemuel’s mother is recommending that people get drunk, but rather she is emphasizing what alcohol does to the mind and that at least these types of people might have a reason to want those effects. It could be used medicinally for physical or mental anguish. Alcohol is a depressant and can be used to manage pain, though we have better pain medications today. When someone is severely depressed or in anguish, alcohol can take the edge off for a while, though we have better antidepressants today. But like the medications of today, continued use

after the need is gone is not good for a person. In contrast, rulers should never desire alcohol.

**Behavior Fit for Kings** (Proverbs 31:8-9)

What a king ought to be doing is being outspoken for the rights of the unfortunate, afflicted, and needy. He should speak for those who have not voice, not necessarily to speak for them but to make sure their words are not ignored. When he judges, his decisions should be righteous. This is not to say that the poor are given advantage over the rich (Exodus 23:3); rather, there is to be no partiality (Deuteronomy 1:16-17; 16:18-20).

**Finding an Excellent Wife** (Proverbs 31:10-31)

Proverbs ends with a complex poem. It has 22 verses, each verse begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet; thus, creating an acrostic. It also goes through the phases of married life in a rough chronological order: dating (verse 10), youth (verses 11-18), middle age (verses 19-22), late middle age (verses 23-25), old age (verses 26-29), and her memory (verses 30-31). It is also a chiasmic poem that contains smaller chiasms. To combine a chiasm while restricting word choices to match an acrostic and all the while describing a growth through life is art of the highest degree.

The following attempts to give a more literal reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 so that the word order is better preserved.

Dating	A		10	A wife of valor, who can find? For far above jewels is her worth.
Early Years	B		11	The heart of her husband trusts in her, And gain he will not lack.
			12	She rewards him with good and not evil All the days of her life.
	C	1	13	She searches for wool and flax And works in delight with her palms.
		2	14	She is like the ships of a merchant ; From afar she brings her food.
		3	15	She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And instructions to her maidens
		4	16	She considers a field and buys it; From fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
		3	17	She girds herself with strength on her hips And makes strong her arms

		2	18	She senses that her <b>gain</b> is good; She does not extinguish at night her lamp.
Middle Years		1	19	Her <b>hands</b> she put forth on the distaff, And her <b>palms</b> grasp the spindle.
	D		20	Her <b>palms</b> she extends to the afflicted, And her <b>hands</b> she stretches out to the needy.
	E		21	She is <b>not afraid of the snow</b> ,
	F			For all her household are <b>clothed</b> with scarlet.
	G		22	Coverings she <b>makes</b> for herself; Fine linen and purple are her clothes.
Later Years	H		23	Known <b>in the gates</b> is her <b>husband</b> , When he sits with the elders of the land.
	G		24	Undergarments she <b>makes</b> and sells them, And belts she supplies the <b>merchant</b> .
	F		25	<b>Strength and dignity</b> are her <b>clothing</b> ,
	E			And she <b>laughs at the future</b> .
Elderly Years	D		26	<b>Her mouth</b> she opens in <b>wisdom</b> , And the <b>teaching</b> about kindness is on <b>her tongue</b> .
	C		27	She <b>watches</b> the ways of her household, And the bread of idleness she does not eat.
	B		28	Her children rise up and declare her blessed; Her <b>husband</b> , he praises her:
		29	"Many daughters have acted with <b>valor</b> , But you excel them all."	
Memory	A		30	Deceitful is charm and vain is beauty, But a <b>wife</b> who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.
			31	Give her <b>the fruit of her hands</b> , And may they praise her <b>in the gates</b> for her deeds.

In a chiasmatic poem, the main point is found in the center of the nested ideas. It is Proverbs 31:23, but it is not what you might expect in a poem that praises the accomplishments of a valiant woman. Commentators have called this verse an interrupting thought, but it cannot be. The layout states that this is the focus of everything else that is being discussed.

Recall that “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband*” (Proverbs 12:4). The phrase “excellent wife” is the same phrase that begins this poem. Remember also that this was advice

that Lemuel's mother gave him and that the general theme of Proverbs is advice to young men. Thus, the praise of an excellent wife is not just about her accomplishments but also about the impact she has in her husband's life. This goes all the way back to the consequences God laid out for Eve because of her sin: "*Yet your desire will be for your husband*" (Genesis 3:16).

### **The Search for a Valiant Wife** (Proverbs 31:10)

But we need to return to the question asked at the start of this poem: How can you find a valiant wife? Clearly for any man, let alone a king, the outcome of that decision will have a significant impact on his future. But oddly, the poem doesn't answer the question; instead, it lays out what a valiant woman's life might be like through the years. I suspect the reason it is not directly answered is because no future is guaranteed. The resulting life is not just the man's decision but also the woman's choices.

The Hebrew word, *chayil*, is a military term carrying the meaning of strength, whether we are talking about military might in the form of an army, economic might in the form of wealth, a strength of character, physical strength or competency in a job. The woman Lemuel is urged to find is a strong woman and the poem proceeds to show a woman who is strong in a variety of ways. In our Bible, Ruth is described as being that type of woman (Ruth 3:11).

The value of such a woman to her husband is extremely valuable. She cannot be purchased or hired. She only can be found but, like jewels, it takes effort to find such a woman.

### **Youth** (Proverbs 31:11-18)

It starts with how a husband treats his wife. For strength to develop and grow, there has to be freedom to face challenges. A wise husband puts his trust in the one he loves (I Corinthians 13:7). Too many young men believe they have to exert control in a marriage in order to be the head of the family. They fear a wife who makes her own decisions, but as Lemuel's mother points out, a man who places his trust in his wife will not suffer loss.

The term "gain" in Proverbs 31:11 refers to plunder or the spoils of war. Because the husband did not earn what his wife produces but still benefits from it, it is referred to as plunder – a far greater gain than the effort to obtain it. She rewards his trust with good and not evil (Proverbs 18:22). She wants the best for her husband.

The third level in the chiasm ( C ) is itself a chiasm in the first half. It describes the planning and effort the wife puts into benefitting her husband. In is longer than the level C in the second half because it seems the hard work in our youth takes longer.

She searches out sources of raw material to work with and she works with delight. The marriage is new and the excitement of establishing herself carries through the hardships of working. She searches for the best bargains in the markets, even if that means traveling further to get them. In this she is compared to a merchant ship, which goes to far ports to find the best deals to sell in other places.

The wife also rises early in the morning, before sunrise, to fix food for the family. Here we see that the family is prospering because she now has servant girls helping her and she sets out their tasks each day. The word translated as "portions" can mean either prescribed portions of food or prescribed duties. Most translators use the first meaning since it parallels giving food to the household, but since the servants are a part of the household, it would be a duplication of

meaning. More likely it is referring to giving the servants their duties.

She also uses some of the income available to her to purchase a field after careful consideration. She then uses the money she has been earning from her work to improve the land and plants a vineyard that will supply the family with food and the excess can be sold. What becomes notable is that her husband does not seem to be involved in these transactions. She is improving the family's position and her husband trusts her decisions. She is not impulsively spending large sums of money. The emphasis is on her weighing out the consequences of her choices and selecting an option that brings long term benefit to the family. Of course, in any major decision, the wise person gets advice from multiple sources, which should include her husband (Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; etc.).

Proverbs 31:16 is the main point of the chiasm regarding her efforts in improving her household. She is using the "fruit of her hands" to better herself and her household. Going into the chiasm, the emphasis is on the various preparations, plans, and efforts she does that eventually leads to her making a significant purchase. As we work out from this point, she evaluates her efforts to this point.

She has shown her willingness to work and she prepares herself to work hard. "Girding" refers to hitching up garments in advance of physical labor. This valiant woman demonstrates one aspect of strength - physical strength.

She also looks at the gains she has made and sees that it too has been good. The word for "gain" refers to transactions with a merchant. Those searches for bargains and selling the excess of what she makes is paying off. It demonstrates her economic strength and is illustrated by her lamp. It could mean that not only is she the first up, but she is also the last to go to sleep. Or, it means that she is doing well enough, that she can afford to leave a lamp burning all night as a night light.

### **Middle Age** (Proverbs 31:19-22)

While Proverbs 31:19 closes out the chiasm that started in Proverbs 31:13, it is also closely tied to the next verse with an introversion, which smooths out the transition back into the main chiasm. The introversion is lost in most English translations because the need to change the word order. The first line of 19 and the last line of 20 uses the Hebrew word for "hands." The last line of 19 and first line of 20 uses the Hebrew word for "palms."

She works to spin the fibers she shopped for and from the profits she is able to give generously to the poor (Proverbs 19:17; 22:9; Psalms 112:9). "*He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need*" (Ephesians 4:28). It is through hard work, and not laziness, that got her to this point. The lazy usually don't have enough for themselves, let alone being able to give to others (Proverbs 19:15; 20:13).

She has no fears about the coming winter because she has adequate clothing for all her household. In fact, she has been doing so well, she is able to afford to use scarlet dye for the cloth. Red dye was a luxury. Nor has the wife been neglecting herself, she makes bedspreads for herself and her own clothing is fine linen, also dyed with an expensive color – purple. These incidentals demonstrate that her household is prosperous.

### **Senior Years (Proverbs 31:23-25)**

Proverbs 31:23 is the central point of the main chiasm. It becomes the turning point of the poem. Because of her hard work, her husband's reputation has been enhanced. He is well-known to the elders of the city and often joins them. The elders served as judges for the city to settle smaller matters. As we continue from this point the emphasis shifts to the benefits she gains from her labors, though these continue as well.

She has moved from producing thread and cloth to making and selling linen undergarments and belts. The garments were linen wraps (like housecoats) that went under normal clothing and were more comfortable to wear against the skin. It was an item that generally only the wealthy could afford. The belts or girdles were either belts worn by soldiers (I Samuel 18:4; II Samuel 20:8), or perhaps decorative cloth sashes used to tie robes (Jeremiah 13:1) or loincloths (Ezekiel 23:15). The items were sold to merchants who would then sell them to others. She is now producing high-end items for sale.

Her clothing was mentioned as we entered the chiasm (Proverbs 31:22), but as we exit the chiasm it isn't her physical clothing that is what we notice about her. She carries herself with strength and dignity. Thus, she now has another aspect of strength – a strength of character and confidence. By this time in her life she has her household and business well-managed. Her supplies are stocked and she is prepared as well as anyone for the future. This is not a family living from paycheck to paycheck.

### **The Elderly Years (Proverbs 31:26-29)**

Her experience and success gives her an audience wanting to learn from her, and she is able to pass on her wisdom and teach about generosity (Proverbs 31:20). Another way this could be read is that she teaches in a way that is kind and not harsh.

Despite growing older, she continues to manage her household details, watches over her children and those who work for her, and doesn't allow herself to be idle.

The years of hard work has paid off. Her children honor her by standing when she enters (Leviticus 19:32) and say that she is blessed. Her husband also honors her and praises her, telling her that there are many valiant women, but she excels them all in his view. This statement answers the original question: How do you find a noble woman? You don't. She grows into the part through her hard work. Then one day you realize that you received more than you expected (Proverbs 18:22).

### **How She Is Remembered (Proverbs 31:30-31)**

The summary of what we've learned is given in the last two verses. Eloquent manners can hide the true character of a person. Beauty is only temporary. However, a follower of God, a woman who fears the Lord (Proverbs 1:7), will receive praise. She deserves the results of her labors and those efforts will praise her to the community where she lives (Ruth 3:11).

Notice that "the fruit of her hands" is the same key phrase from Proverbs 31:16, which was the central point of the inner chiasm. Also, "in the gates" is the same key phrase from Proverbs 31:23, which was the central point of the main chiasm.

What does this mean to a young man looking for a wife? He needs to find someone who puts

God first, just as he should have God foremost in his life. He is not looking for someone of great beauty or exquisite charm. You could understand that this might be tempting for a young man, who is a king, to have a “trophy wife” like King Ahasuerus wanted (Esther 1:10-11; 2:12-14). But even laboring young men tend to get distracted by beauty or charm and not look at the true character of the woman in whom they are interested. The best wife is a strong woman whom you can trust with your whole heart, an industrious woman who is able to make good decisions. Such a woman improves over the years and bring her husband joy all the days of his life.

When people live wisely, happiness is the result.

**For discussion:**

1. Why do you think that a book aimed primarily toward young men, ends on a description of an ideal woman?