

PROVERBS

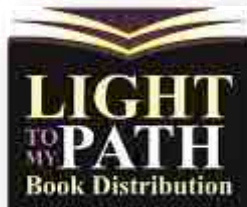
A large, leafy green tree with a thick trunk and dense foliage grows out of the center of an open book. The book is lying flat on a vibrant green grassy field. The background is a clear blue sky filled with numerous bright, multi-pointed stars of varying sizes. The overall scene is peaceful and symbolic, representing the growth of wisdom from the words of the book.

*A Devotional Look at the Wisdom of
Israel as Recorded in the Book of
Proverbs*

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Proverbs

A Devotional Look at the Wisdom of Israel
as Recorded in the Book of Proverbs



F. Wayne Mac Leod

LIGHT To MY PATH BOOK DISTRIBUTION
Sydney Mines, NS, CANADA

Proverbs

Copyright © 2012 by F. Wayne MacLeod

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the author.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the New International Version of the Bible (Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used with permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers, All rights reserved.)

Scriptures marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible

Proof Reading: Pat Schmidt, Lee Tuson

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Introduction to Proverbs.....	3
1 The Fear of the Lord	6
2 Wisdom's Benefit: Victory and Direction.....	14
3 Grace for the Humble	22
4 Wisdom is Supreme.....	33
5 The Path of the Adulteress	41
6 Qualities of a Good Man	47
7 The Young Man and the Adulteress.....	56
8 Wisdom's Call	63
9 Wisdom and Folly	70
10 The Way of the Righteous	76
11 The Fruit and Character of Righteousness.....	86
12 Humility, Discipline and Diligence	99
13 Prosperity, Correction and Integrity.....	113
14 Wisdom, Discernment and Joy	126
15 Wealth, Friendship and Blessing.....	135
16 Words, Correction and Contentment.....	145
18 Integrity, Justice and Relationships.....	173
19 Words, Wealth and Friendships	188
20 Friends, Truth and Discipline	202
21 Honesty, Righteousness and Justice	217

22 Sovereignty, Diligence and Victory	232
23 Poverty, Wickedness and Discipline	245
24 The Thirty Sayings: Sayings 1-15	259
25 The Thirty Sayings: Sayings 16-30	270
26 More Sayings of the Wise.....	280
27 Sayings Copied by Hezekiah's Men: Part 1	286
28 Sayings Copied by Hezekiah's Men: Part 2	298
29 Sayings Copied by Hezekiah's Men: Part 3	308
30 Sayings Copied by Hezekiah's Men: Part 4	322
31 Sayings Copied by Hezekiah's Men: Part 5	339
32 The Sayings of Agur.....	354
33 The Sayings of King Lemuel.....	366

PREFACE

Writing a commentary on the book of Proverbs has proven to be a challenge. There are several reasons for this. First, this collection of wise sayings and proverbs do not seem to be organized in a logical sequence. This means that the reader bounces from one topic to another quite rapidly. This was a real challenge for me as I personally like to build on each theme logically and systematically.

The second challenge of this commentary has to do with the practical application of each proverb. There are so many different ways of applying the truth of each proverb to life that it is impossible to cover each possible application. I can only trust that the insights the Lord has given will stimulate further application to other life situations.

Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings. While much of the book is written by King Solomon, it also contains a section of sayings by Agur and King Lemuel's mother. The focus of the book is to draw its readers into seeking God and living according to His purpose. The fear of the Lord seems to be the central teaching of the book and the underlying motivation for living the life that the writers describe. The heart cry of each writer is that their readers will be drawn to fear their great creator God and live in a way that will bring honour and respect to His name.

I would challenge you to take your time reading this commentary. Consider each section and proverb and let the Spirit of God challenge you regarding the personal and practical application. Read this commentary alongside of the Bible. This commentary is not the Bible. I have tried my best to be accurate and practical in the interpretation of the various passages but my insights are not infallible. This commentary will only be useful if it draws you closer to the Word of God and to the Lord who is its ultimate author.

I trust that God will use this humble effort in many lives. I offer it to Him for the expansion of His kingdom in your life and the lives of those you will touch as a result. May God be pleased to use it in a very particular way to draw you closer to Himself.

F. Wayne MacLeod

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS

AUTHORSHIP:

Proverbs 1:1 makes a clear reference to King Solomon as one of the authors of this book. His authorship is confirmed again in Proverbs 10:1 and 25:1. While the first 29 chapters of the book are credited to Solomon, he is not the only author. Proverbs 30 contains the wisdom of a man by the name of Agur. Proverbs 31 is attributed to King Lemuel, as taught to him by his mother.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is spelled out for us in the introduction. Proverbs 1:2-7 makes two important statements about the book. First, Solomon gives a number of reasons for putting these sayings into writing:

- 1) To give the reader wisdom and discipline in life (verse 2)
- 2) To give greater insight to the reader (verse 2)
- 3) To enable the reader to do what is right, just and fair (verse 3)

- 4) To show the simple person how to be cautious or prudent in life (verse 4)
- 5) To give knowledge and discretion to the young person (verse 4)
- 6) To increase the learning of the wise person (verse 5)
- 7) To give those who are discerning greater understanding of the sayings of the wise (verse 6)

The second important statement about the book concerns Solomon's definition of wisdom. For Solomon, wisdom had its roots in the fear or reverence of the Lord God and His ways (Proverbs 1:7). Wisdom for Solomon was rooted in God. This is not a book about worldly knowledge and understanding. It is a book that points us to God and His purposes. The fool, according to Solomon, was someone who turned his or her back on God and His purposes.

IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK FOR TODAY

The inspiration for the book comes from Solomon's observation of life. He watches a young man's encounter with an adulterous woman in Proverbs 7:6-23 and tells his readers of the consequences to his life. He speaks about marriage, friendships and business relationships. He addresses the issues of alcoholism, laziness and immorality, issues that break down a society. He also speaks to the issues of justice, fairness, hard work and integrity, issues that build a society up.

Solomon makes it clear that the insights in this book are not his ideas. They are the purposes of a Creator God. These purposes of God are the hope for our nations. By following them, we will find blessing and success in life.

The book of Proverbs is immensely practical. Here in this book, Solomon (and the other writers) speaks to real life issues. They show us how to apply the purpose of God to a variety of life situations. This is a book of practical advice on how to live life to the full. The full and satisfying life, according to Solomon, is a life lived in the fear and reverence of God and His purposes.

1

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Read Proverbs 1:1-33

The book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom. In this book, Solomon, the son of David, gives his readers insight for living. Solomon was gifted of God in wisdom and understanding (see 1 Kings 3:10-12). In this first chapter, Solomon tells us why he wrote the book. He also tells us about the source of his wisdom and challenges his readers to pursue it with all their hearts.

As Solomon begins, he gives us several reasons why he wrote this book of Proverbs. Notice first, in verse 2, that he wrote the book so that his readers could attain wisdom. Wisdom in its very basic sense has to do with the art of living a godly life. Notice in verse 2 the connection between wisdom and discipline. The word "discipline" in the Hebrew language can also mean "correction" or "chastening." The desire of Solomon was that his readers be corrected and chastened or rebuked so that they could be brought to the path of righteousness and godliness. His book is designed to help us live wisely. To do this it will correct and rebuke.

Notice, second, that Solomon wanted his readers to gain understanding in words of insight. Here in this book, Solomon will share many words of insight. He will do this in many different subjects. God had taught him many things about life. Solomon wanted to share his deep understanding in a way that was simple and easy for the reader to grasp.

In verse 3 Solomon told his readers that another purpose for writing this book was so that his readers could acquire a disciplined and prudent life. A prudent life is a life of good sense and judgment. Solomon wanted to help his readers acquire a life of good sense and judgment so that they could make decisions that were "right, just and fair." The instructions in this book are designed to help the reader make good decisions in life, decisions that would bring honour to their Lord and Creator.

In verses 4-6 Solomon identifies his target audience. We see that there are three types of people Solomon wanted to reach through this collection of proverbs. First, he wanted to give prudence (good sense and judgment) to the simple. The simple are those who do not have much in life. They do not have a great education or riches. They are ordinary people. Solomon wanted to give good counsel and advice to these simple people so that they could make good decisions in life.

Second, from verse 4, we see that Solomon also had a burden for the youth of his day. He wanted to give these youth knowledge and discretion. He wanted to give them the tools necessary to live a life with purpose and direction. He wanted to share with them his vast experience and wisdom so that they could have clear direction to live their life to the full.

His third target audience was the wise and discerning. The wise were people who had a certain experience in life. Solomon wanted to challenge them to add to their learning. He wanted to share with them from his own experience and wisdom. He wanted them to reflect on his proverbs, parables, riddles and wise sayings so that they would be sharpened in their skills to live with even greater discernment. In reality, this book is for everyone who wants to learn the art of living well.

Verse 7 is a key verse for understanding the whole book of Proverbs. Here Solomon told his readers that the beginning of knowledge (and wisdom) was the fear of the Lord. We need to examine this in some detail.

The word "fear" in the Hebrew language can also mean "reverence" or "respect." When Solomon speaks about fearing the Lord he speaks of respecting or treating God with the respect and honour He deserves. Solomon is telling us that true wisdom and knowledge begins with a healthy respect and reverence for God. In other words, if we want to know what life is all about and how to live life, we need to begin with God and a proper relationship with Him. Reverence and respect for God is the foundation on which true wisdom is built. The wise person understands who God is, what He requires, and lives his or her life accordingly. If we miss this starting block, we miss what Solomon is telling us. True wisdom is based in reverence and respect of our Creator. The goal of wisdom is to bring God the honour and respect He is worthy of receiving.

Notice in verse 7 how Solomon says that the fool despises wisdom and discipline. In this context, what Solomon is saying is that a fool is someone who chooses to ignore the wisdom that has its foundation in respect and reverence for God. There are many who are considered wise in this

world's way of thinking. According to Solomon, however, they are fools because they do not begin with God and the fear of His name.

The wisdom Solomon speaks of here is a wisdom that begins with God and an understanding of His purposes. This wisdom comes to us in a variety of ways. In our day we find it recorded in the pages of the Bible. In Solomon's day, however, those pages were not readily available. For the people of Solomon's day, the wisdom that began in God was passed on from parent to child. Parents instructed their children in the ways of the Lord. Notice in verse 8 that Solomon told the young man (and the young woman) to listen to their father and mother and the instructions they gave them. The instructions referred to here are instructions for living under the fear of the Lord.

Notice the promise in verse 9 that those who listened to the instruction of their parents would be honoured. The instructions would be like a garland to grace their head and a chain about their neck. The garland and the chain were objects of honour. They set apart those who wore them and gave them dignity and honour. This is what the godly instructions of parents would be for those who listened to them.

There would be many temptations in life for the young person. In verses 10-14 Solomon gives an example of some of those temptations. He speaks about a group of young men who were intent on doing evil. Notice how they call out to another young man, enticing him to follow them in their evil, pleasure-seeking ways. They invite him to come and lie in wait for a harmless soul. Their intent is to swallow the person whole like the grave. That is to say, they wanted to kill him and take his possessions. They wanted to get "all sorts of valuable things" and fill their houses with

plunder. They are thieves who want to enrich themselves at the expense of others. They entice this young man by telling him that they would divide their plunder with him, they would share a common purse.

Solomon speaks to this young man and others like him in similar situations. He challenges him not to listen to the ungodly counsel of his friends. He reminded them that the feet of his friends were quick to rush into sin and shed blood (verses 15-16).

In verse 17 Solomon used an example of a net spread out in full view for a bird. This was what these young men were doing. They were setting traps in full view to catch all they could. Those who fell into these traps saw what they were doing and knew it would mean trouble, but they didn't care. This is what sin does to us. It offers us a moment of pleasure but takes our life in exchange. Like fools, there are many who walk right into sin's trap.

In verse 19 Solomon told the young man that there was certain destruction for all who sought after "ill-gotten gain." They fell into a trap that would take their lives (verse 19). We see the power of sin's temptation. All too many men and women have sacrificed their life and eternity for a moment of pleasure. They have sacrificed everything to satisfy the craving of their sinful heart. Solomon is trying to show the young man in this passage the foolishness of listening to the call of sin and evil. Instead, he was to lovingly follow the godly instruction passed on to him from his parents. In so doing he would be honoured and his life spared.

In verse 20 Solomon speaks of wisdom and her call to all who would listen. We have seen the call of sin and evil in the last few verses. Wisdom too calls out. Remember that wisdom has its roots in fear, respect and reverence for

God. This wisdom is pictured as calling out in the streets to all who would listen. She raised her voice in the public squares. The call of the Spirit of God is a very real call. Over and over again the Spirit of God speaks to the hearts and minds of all who will listen. He calls them to turn to the Lord and know His way. All too many people pass by and take no notice of that call. They busy themselves with activity but do not listen to the call of wisdom.

Wisdom called out to the simple. These individuals loved their simple ways but they did not have the fear of God in their hearts (verse 22). They were ordinary (possibly good living people) who were lost in their sin. They may not even have known this. They lived in ignorance but they would perish.

Wisdom also called out to the mocker and the fools who hated knowledge (verse 22). These individuals mocked the way of truth, thinking that they knew a better way. I remember attending university where the professors openly mocked the ways of the Bible. Solomon calls these individuals fools because they rejected the fear of God as their starting point and openly mocked God and His ways.

Notice in verse 23 the promise of God to those would listen.

If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you.

God delights to reveal His heart to us. He wants us to know His ways. If we open our heart, He will teach us and instruct us in the way we should go.

The people Solomon spoke of here, however, did not open their heart to this wisdom that came from God. They turned their back on it and chose to block their ears (verse 24). They refused the advice of wisdom and would not accept the rebuke of God (verse 25). Because they rejected wisdom that had its beginnings in the fear of God, when disaster came to them, God would laugh at them and mock them in their calamity. In other words, their judgment would come. In that Day of Judgment God would not listen to them.

Verse 27 makes it quite clear that this judgment would come like a storm. In that day those who reject God's wisdom will call out to Him but He will not listen to them. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would eat the fruit of their own ways (verse 31). Their own sinfulness and complacency would destroy them. Only those who listened to the Lord God and His wisdom would be safe and free from harm (verse 33).

Solomon shows us here the importance of true wisdom. He tells us that true wisdom comes from God and is cultivated by means of a right relationship with Him. He reminds us of the many temptations that surround us and shows us what will happen to those who follow the foolishness of this world. Only those who listen to the voice of the wisdom that begins in a healthy fear of God will be safe from the judgment that will one day come to this earth.

For Consideration:

- Solomon tells us that his goal in writing this book is to offer correction and discipline to those who will listen. Are you willing to listen to correction and discipline in your spiritual life?
- How has the wisdom of God, as found in His Word, given you purpose and direction in life?
- What is the fear of God? Do you fear God? How is this fear of God the beginning of true wisdom and knowledge?
- What are the temptations you feel in this life? What do we learn here about the lure of sin? What are people willing to sacrifice for a moment with sin?
- How is God calling out to your society today? Does your society need the wisdom of God? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to listen to correction in your life.
- Ask God to give you a deeper reverence and respect for His name. Ask Him to help you to live in the fear of His name.
- Ask God to protect you from the lure of so many temptations in this life. Ask Him to give you grace to resist the pull of sin.
- Thank the Lord for revealing Himself and His true wisdom to you.

2

WISDOM'S BENEFIT: VICTORY AND DIRECTION

Read Proverbs 2:1-22

In the last chapter we saw that wisdom had its source and motivation in a right relationship with God. The wise person was one who feared (reverenced and respected God). Wisdom can be defined as the art of living in reverence and respect for God. When we live out of respect and reverence for God, this will affect our relationships with those around us. It will affect how we communicate, do business and relate to our neighbours and friends.

We will begin our examination of chapter 2 with verse 6. Here Solomon made it very clear that the Lord was the source of the wisdom he was speaking about in this book: "For the LORD gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." It is important that we underline this before moving any further in our discussion of wisdom in this chapter.

There is a natural wisdom that comes with age and experience. Over the course of our life we experience many different situations. As I listen to the youth around me I can sometimes see their lack of experience in life. Our experience in life gives us a natural wisdom. We learn how to deal with life, and are able to share that experience with others. This type of wisdom is natural and comes to all people whether they are in a right relationship with God or not. Even the unbeliever can have a certain amount of natural wisdom.

We need to understand, however, that Solomon is not speaking about natural wisdom in his book. He has already told us that the wisdom he speaks about has its roots in a healthy fear of God. While we learn natural wisdom through the experiences of life, the wisdom Solomon spoke about came from God. Verse 6 makes it clear: "For the LORD gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding."

If we want the wisdom that Solomon is speaking about, we cannot look to our experiences in life or to our worldly education. To gain the wisdom Solomon speaks about we must look to God. This wisdom comes to us today through the teachings of the Word of God and the marvelous direction and guidance of His Spirit who lives in the heart of every believer.

Having defined wisdom, we will now move on to examine what Solomon has to tell us here in chapter 2 about this wisdom. He begins by telling his listeners (here pictured as a son), how they could get the wisdom that came from God.

Notice in verse 1-4 that attaining this wisdom is not something that comes easily. In verse 1, Solomon reminded his

listeners that they would need to accept it. This leads us to believe that the wisdom spoken of here can be rejected. God offers us His wisdom but He does not force it on us. We must accept the wisdom God offers. The problem often is that the wisdom of God will often contradict the wisdom of this world (see 1 Corinthians 3:19). There will be many times in life when we will have to make a decision about which wisdom to choose. On the one hand, we have the logical ways of the world. On the other hand, we have the Word of God that seems to defy human wisdom and logic. Many have chosen the wisdom of the world over the wisdom of God. Solomon tells us that if we want the wisdom that comes from God we will have to learn to step out in faith and accept what God tells us in His Word and through the guidance of His Spirit.

Second, in verse 1 we see that if we want wisdom we will also have to store up God's commands within us. The word "store" can also mean to treasure or hide. What Solomon is telling us is that if we want to be wise we will have to treasure the words of God. To treasure them is to hold them in the highest regard. It is to submit ourselves to them and live in obedience to them no matter what happens. It is to place the truths of the Word of God in our heart through study and meditation, choosing to live in obedience to them. This again will not be without its struggle and much discipline.

In verse 2 Solomon tells us that we are also to turn our ear to wisdom. The act of turning one's ear is a discipline. This means that we need to put ourselves in a place where we can hear the teaching of the Word of God and the direction of His Spirit. In turning our ear to wisdom we will also have to turn it away from the teachings of this world. If we want the wisdom that comes from God we will have to find

opportunities to listen to God through the instruction of His Word.

Not only are we to turn our ear to hear wisdom but we are also to apply our heart to understanding. If you have ever been a student, you will understand that it is one thing to sit in a classroom and quite another to take in what the teacher is saying. Words are not enough to give us wisdom; our hearts also need to be engaged in the process. We need to be motivated from the heart to understand and apply the truth we are learning. Solomon underlines this in verses 3-4.

In verses 3-4 Solomon challenges his readers to set their heart on gaining the wisdom that comes from God. He challenged them to call out for it and cry aloud for it. The loud cry is a cry of despair and urgency. This is the attitude Solomon wants us to have when it comes to wisdom (the art of living with respect and reverence for God). He challenged his readers to search for this wisdom as they would for silver or for hidden treasure. This was to be their life's ambition and desire.

Notice in verse 5 that if we seek after wisdom we will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. This may seem somewhat confusing at first. What we need to understand, however, is that wisdom, and the fear and knowledge of God, are the same thing in the mind of Solomon. Solomon has told us that wisdom begins in the fear of God. Wisdom also ends in the fear of God. If we want to live wisely, we need to begin by seeking God and His purposes for our lives. Those who do so will find that this path of wise living has a single goal. That goal is God. The source of wisdom is God. When we follow the wisdom He gives we come to reverence and love Him more. We find that ultimately the wisdom of God leads us to God

Himself. He is the goal of life. He is what brings satisfaction and purpose to life. To fear Him and walk in His purpose is the goal of wisdom.

In the remainder of this chapter Solomon takes the time to show us the benefit of God's wisdom. He tells his readers that God's wisdom has two key benefits: victory and direction.

In verse 7 Solomon tells us that wisdom held victory in store for the upright. It was a shield for those whose walk was blameless. In other words, those who chose to listen to wisdom were assured of victory. We need to understand that this victory may look different from what we might expect. The natural wisdom of this world is very different from the wisdom that comes from God. When the apostles were stoned or cast out of a city for preaching the gospel, natural wisdom said that they were defeated and their cause hindered. When the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross, natural wisdom claimed victory. Nothing could be further from the truth. In God's wisdom, these seeming defeats were wonderful victories. Even death for the believer is victory, for God's purposes do not end in death. We must not see victory from the perspective of natural wisdom. Victory is assured for those who pursue God's wisdom but it will not always look like victory to the human eye. Solomon reminds us in verse 7 and 8 that God will shield those who seek after His wisdom. He will guard the course of their lives. He will protect those who are faithful to Him (see also verse 11). Those who pursue the wisdom of God will experience God's blessing and protection on their lives. Though they suffer and perish in this world, they will be victorious.

Victory is not the only benefit of wisdom. Wisdom also brings direction and guidance for those who seek it.

Solomon tells us that wisdom will give us understanding of what is right and fair (verse 9). It will lead us to the "good path." This direction and guidance on the "good path" is a direct result of wisdom entering the heart (verse 10).

The promise of Solomon in verse 10 is that the knowledge that comes from the wisdom of God would be pleasant for the soul. In other words, it would satisfy and fill the soul. The believer can never be happy outside of a right relationship with God. There are many things that appeal to the sinful human nature. They will satisfy our lusts for a moment but these things will leave the soul empty. Only living in a right relationship with God can satisfy the soul. This is the goal of God's wisdom. It will bring us into a right relationship with God and satisfy the longing of our soul.

The wisdom that comes from God will guide and direct us in the way God wants us to live. It will protect us and keep us from "the ways of wicked men" (verse 12). Solomon describes these men and their ways in verses 12-15. Their words are perverse or corrupt (verse 12). They speak words that defy the truth of God and His purposes. They leave the straight path and walk in darkness (verse 13). The straight path is the path that God has laid out for us. These people turn from the path of God to do their own things. Verse 14 tells us that they delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil. Their paths are crooked and they are devious in their ways (verse 15).

Solomon is telling us that the wisdom that comes from God will keep us from the path of these wicked people. It will lead us into truth and keep us in tune with God and His purposes.

In verses 16-19 Solomon gives us another example of how the wisdom of God will keep us from the path of evil and

sin. He told his readers in verse 16 that the wisdom that came from God would keep them from the path of the adulteress and her seductive words. This adulteress cared nothing for the vows she had made to the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God to be faithful to her husband (verse 17). The path of adultery she had chosen, though pleasant for a moment, led directly to death from which she would never return (verses 18-19). God's wisdom would keep the listener from falling into her trap of death. It would direct those who followed it into the path of life.

By seeking the wisdom that came from God, the seeker would be kept on the path of righteousness (verse 20). This was the path of reverence and respect for God and His ways. This was the path of blessing, life and victory (verse 21). Ultimate victory was only for those who followed the way of God's wisdom. All who turned from it would perish.

For Consideration:

- Compare the wisdom that comes from God with the natural wisdom we acquire through experience in life. What is the difference?
- Solomon tells us that if we want the wisdom that comes from God we will have to learn to accept it. Have you ever struggled with accepting the wisdom that comes from God? Explain.
- We are encouraged to seek the wisdom of God as one would seek after a great treasure. Has it been your desire to have this wisdom so that you can live a life of respect and reverence for God?

- How does the wisdom of God protect us?
- Solomon tells us that the wisdom of God satisfies the soul. Have you found this satisfaction in God's Word and His purposes for your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to open your heart to receive more of His wisdom.
- Ask God to give you courage and strength to turn your back on natural wisdom when it contradicts the wisdom of God.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the way His Word and His Spirit have kept you over the years from falling into sin and evil.
- Thank the Lord for revealing His wisdom to you. Thank Him for the way living for Him has satisfied your soul.

3

GRACE FOR THE HUMBLE

Read Proverbs 3:1-35

The key to understanding chapter 3 of the book of Proverbs seems to be its conclusion in verses 34 and 35. Here Solomon told his readers that God mocked the proud but gave grace to the humble. The wise would be honoured but the fool would be put to shame. Solomon tells his readers that there is rich blessing in humbling oneself before God and seeking His wisdom. The humble person was one who submitted to the Lord God and chose to live a life of reverence and respect for Him. Solomon tells us here that this was the path of blessing.

Solomon begins in verse 1 by challenging his reader not to forget the teaching of wisdom. There is a good reason for remembering and keeping the teachings of wisdom. Solomon told his readers that these teachings would prolong life and bring prosperity. While we ought to listen to the wisdom of God because it is right and honours our Creator, Solomon tells us that this wisdom also brings rich blessing to those who submit and obey.

This statement of Solomon is not easy to understand. There are those who faithfully keep the commands and teaching of God who die at a young age. Many believers have given up everything for the cause of God's wisdom. Jesus died at the age of 33 and lived a simple life with very little earthly possessions to call His own. How are we to understand what Solomon writes here in this verse about prosperity and long life? First, we need to see that Solomon is speaking in general terms. He is simply telling us that if we choose to listen to wisdom, it will mean a better quality of life for us. Sin and rebellion strip us of God's blessing. The wisdom of God will lead us into the highest quality of life under the blessing of God. By walking in the wisdom of God, we will experience the very best God has to offer us in this life.

In verse 3 Solomon challenged his readers to bind love and faithfulness around their necks and write them on the tablets of their hearts. In other words, they were to wear them like a necklace for all to see. They were to inscribe love and faithfulness on their hearts so that every decision and action flowed from these two virtues. It was the motivation for all actions. This love and faithfulness expressed itself in relationships with God but also with neighbours and friends. Every action and word was to come from a heart of love toward God and a faithful commitment to His wisdom.

Verse 4 tells us that if we make love and faithfulness to God and His wisdom our motivation in all we do, we will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and people. This is because our actions are loving and honest. This is in direct contrast to those whose only desire was to promote their own interests at the expense of those around them.

Remember that Solomon is speaking here about a general principle. Jesus lived with love and faithfulness but He was hated by the world. The principle Solomon is giving us here is that generally, when we live with love and faithfulness toward God, our lives will shine brightly in this dark world and people will notice. They will respect the love and commitment we have toward the Lord and His ways. They will know that we are trustworthy and honest.

Solomon challenges us to trust in the Lord and His wisdom with all our hearts (verse 5). In particular he tells his readers that they were not to lean on their own understanding but rather acknowledge God in all their ways. Solomon reminds us here that there is a wisdom that is natural to human beings and then there is a wisdom that comes from God.

There have been many times in my life when I have been trusted my own wisdom and reasoning. Sometimes the wisdom of God does not make sense to the human mind. God's ways are very different from our ways. Solomon's challenge to us is to trust God in these times. He commands us not to rely on our own understanding. What a challenge this is for us. This means that we will have to trust in God's wisdom as it is revealed to us through His Word and the leading of His Spirit. This will mean stepping out into the unknown. Solomon challenges us to rely more on God's wisdom and guidance than in our own understanding. He tells his readers in verse 6 that they were to acknowledge God in all their ways. That is to say, they were to seek Him and His wisdom in everything they did. They were to bring Him into every decision and every action. They were to seek His direction in everything.

Again, this is not the attitude of the proud person. It is only the humble person that would submit every decision to the

Lord and His wisdom. Notice again, however, the blessings attached to this command. Verse 6 tells us that if we do submit to the wisdom of the Lord in every matter, God will direct us and make our paths straight. A straight path is a path of clear direction. It is a path where all obstacles have been removed. Solomon is not saying that we will never have problems in life if we listen to the wisdom of God. He is telling us, however, that those who seek God in all their ways will know His blessing and be kept from much harm and danger. God will guide and direct them, showing them the right path to take.

In verse 7 Solomon told his readers not to be wise in their own eyes. To be wise in our own eyes is to feel that we have enough wisdom in ourselves to live our lives. It is to fail to recognize our need of a wisdom that is higher than ours. Solomon speaks here about natural wisdom that is common to all. Natural wisdom is not sufficient to live a life that respects and reverences God. There are things that natural wisdom simply cannot understand.

Instead of lifting up natural wisdom, Solomon challenged his readers to fear the Lord and shun evil (verse 7). What he is telling his readers here is that instead of trusting their own wisdom they were to seek the wisdom of God. This wisdom would guide them and keep them from evil.

There was a rich blessing attached to turning from their own wisdom to the wisdom of God. Solomon told his readers that the fear of the Lord would bring health to their body and nourishment to their bones (verse 8). Again, remember that even believers get sick and suffer from all kinds of disease. Solomon is telling us, however, that those who humble themselves before God find themselves in a path of health and refreshing. They live with a clear conscience. They avoid the pitfalls of those who wander from the path

of true wisdom. They can go to bed at night and sleep the sleep of the content and happy. This will affect their overall health and well-being.

In verse 9 Solomon speaks to the issue of wealth and possessions. Here he told his readers that they were to honour God with their wealth and the first fruits of their crops. That is to say, they were to offer Him a portion of what they had. They were to use their resources to bless His cause. The proud person kept these resources for himself. The humble person surrendered his or her possessions to God for His use.

Solomon reminded his readers that when we surrender all we have to the Lord for His use and honour Him with our possessions, God will make sure that we do not lack what is necessary for our wellbeing. In verse 10 he told his readers that God would care for them so that their barns were filled to overflowing and their vats to the brim with wine. We are stewards of God's resources. The proud claim their possessions for themselves. The humble realize that everything belongs to God and willingly surrenders all he or she has to Him.

God will provide for us if He can trust us with the use of His resources. He promises to fill our barns to overflowing if we will surrender our claim to these possessions. We sometimes hold onto our possessions tightly. God is asking us to be a channel for the blessings He has given to us. He is asking us not to hold onto those blessings but to freely give as He leads. If we will be a channel of these blessings, God will fill that channel to overflowing.

Verse 11 speaks about God's discipline. Solomon tells his listeners not to despise the Lord's discipline in their lives. God will correct us when it is necessary. There will be

times when that correction will be difficult. No one wants to be disciplined. Discipline, by its nature, is hard. The proud person will not remain under that discipline or accept it. The humble, however, will realize that they need correction and learn from the discipline of God. They will hear the rebuke of the Lord and change what needs to be changed. Solomon reminds us in verse 12 that the reason the Lord disciplines us is because He loves us. Like a father, God trains "the son He delights in."

God's heart is to train us and use us for the sake of His kingdom. He works on our character and shapes us into people He can use. He disciplines us because He cares for us and who we are. Like an artist, God shapes us into objects of special beauty for His kingdom. The humble will let God do this work. They will accept His correction and rebuke with delight because they know it comes from the hand of a loving God who has their interest at heart.

According to Solomon, there is great blessing in finding wisdom (verse 13). The wisdom God gives is more profitable than silver and yields a better return than gold. It is more precious than rubies and nothing can be compared to this wisdom (verse 15). Wisdom, as we have said, refers to the art of living a life of respect and reverence toward God. The blessings of this life are far greater than anything that could be purchased with gold and silver.

Long life is in the right hand of wisdom, and riches and honour in her left hand (verse 16). Wisdom's ways are pleasant and all the paths of wisdom lead to peace (verse 17). Solomon compared the wisdom of God to a tree of life for all who embraced her. The Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden was a tree that gave eternal life (see Genesis 3:22). The wisdom of God as found in His Word shows us

the way of eternal life. Those who follow this wisdom of God know life and great blessing.

It was through wisdom that the Lord laid the earth's foundation and His understanding set the heavens in their place (verse 19). That same wisdom divided the waters and caused the clouds to drop their dew on the earth (verse 20). The wisdom of God in creation is beyond anything we could ever understand. It is far superior to the natural wisdom of man. It is this wisdom that disciplines and trains us. It is this wisdom that wants to guide and direct us in a life of reverence and respect for God. Solomon challenges us to embrace this wisdom and seek it with all our hearts. He calls us to put our full confidence in this infinite wisdom that God wants to give all who will seek Him.

In verse 21 Solomon exhorted his readers to preserve sound judgment and discernment and not to let them out of their sight. This sound judgment and discernment came from the wisdom of the God who laid the foundation of the earth and set the skies in place. Sound judgment was not the natural fruit of the proud heart. Its source was the infinite wisdom and understanding of God given to the humble who would listen. This judgment and discernment that came from God's wisdom would be life for those who preserved it as an ornament around their neck (verse 22). God's wisdom is not merely words, it is life. The wisdom of God gives life to us and is the source of tremendous blessing. It is medicine for the soul and brings healing to life's deepest hurts. It is light for our path and guides us in the way we should go. It keeps us from stumbling (verse 23). The wisdom of God will keep us when we are afraid (verse 24). It is comfort and encouragement for us in our discouragement and by following its counsel we can lie down in peace so that our sleep will be sweet (verse 24). It will guide us so that we will not have to fear the sudden

disaster and ruin that will overtake the wicked (verse 25). It will keep our feet from the snare of those who seek our defeat (verse 26).

For Solomon, God's wisdom was far more than intellectual words. It was a life-giving power, directing, protecting and restoring all who would surrender to it. Hebrews 4:12 puts it this way:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Moses, in Exodus 32:46-47 told his people:

"Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

Both Moses and Solomon agree that the wisdom of God is living and powerful. The wisdom of God found in His Word is able to transform the lives of all it touches. This underlines the importance of Scripture. Those who teach the Word of God are not teaching doctrines and truths only; they are sharing a life transforming power with those who are humble enough to receive it.

As Solomon concludes this chapter he gives some final challenges to his readers. He knows that following the wisdom of God would not be easy. He encouraged his readers not to give in to natural reasoning in these times but to

choose the wisdom of God. He gives us some practical examples to follow.

In verse 27-28 Solomon reminded his listeners that they were not to withhold good from those who deserved it when they had the power to act. In other words, if their neighbour was in difficulty and they could do something about it, they were to do so and not hold back. They were to give whatever they could at the moment. Solomon made it clear that they were not to tell their neighbour to come back the next day when they had something to give them that very moment (verse 28). This is significant. Have you ever felt prompted to give but decided to think about it first? Very often, what happens is that we turn to our natural wisdom and begin to do our calculations. Natural wisdom tells us that we need to store up for the future and not give our money away. Solomon knew the temptation of those who hesitated. He knew that they would be tempted to turn to natural wisdom. Natural wisdom would keep them from stepping out into God's purpose. When God puts it on your heart to give, then give without hesitation. Trust God and He will provide for you.

Solomon gives another example in verses 29-30. Here he told his readers that they were not to plot harm against their neighbour or accuse them for no reason. This is what a proud person would do. The proud person wants to be better than his neighbour and will do anything to bring him or her down so that they look better. The humble person, on the other hand, would live at peace, content with his or her lot.

Related to this is the challenge of verses 31-32. Here Solomon told his reader not to be envious of a violent man and his ways. Why would someone be envious of a violent person? The answer may be in the fact that a violent

person exercised violence for the purpose of bettering his lot in life. A violent person wanted what his neighbour had and so he took it by force. For a time, the violent man or woman enjoyed the profits of their violence. They lived in the luxury of riches stolen from others. Solomon wanted to be sure that his readers understood that while the violent person might enjoy a life of luxury and ease for a moment, the Lord detested their ways and would judge them. Their position was not one to envy. Their lot was a terrible one. The curse of God was on the wicked (verse 33).

While the Lord God detested the proud and perverse person, He took the upright into His confidence (verse 32) and blessed the home of the righteous (verse 33). God mocked the proud but gave grace to the humble (verse 34). Those who pursued God's wisdom would be honoured but those who rejected it would be put to shame (verse 35).

Solomon makes a very strong point in this chapter. He showed his reader that the path of victory was in seeking the wisdom of God. There was no future for those who turned from this wisdom. The wisdom of God was powerful and life transforming. Those who followed the way of God's wisdom were blessed with long life and prosperity. They knew the favour of God on their lives and could be assured of His guidance and direction. Their barns would be filled. They would be trained in godliness and eternal life would be their inheritance. This is a powerful motivation for seeking God's wisdom.

For Consideration:

- What does Solomon tell us are the blessings in store for those who pursue God's wisdom?
- Why is it so hard for the proud to accept God's wisdom?
- Have you ever found yourself leaning on your own understanding? What is the challenge of this chapter? Why do we turn so often to our natural wisdom?
- What does Solomon teach us about giving?
- What does Solomon teach us here about the life transforming power of God's wisdom? How has God's wisdom changed your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to humble yourself to see your need of His wisdom.
- Thank the Lord that He loves you enough to correct and discipline you.
- Ask God to help you to hold onto your possession lightly. Ask Him to lead you in how you use what He has given.
- Thank the Lord for how His Word has transformed your life. Thank Him for a very particular way that His Word has transformed an attitude or behaviour in your life.
- Ask God to give you grace to seek His wisdom in all you do.

4

WISDOM IS SUPREME

Read Proverbs 4:1-27

Solomon has been speaking about the importance and benefits of God's wisdom. We have made a distinction between natural human wisdom and God's wisdom. Solomon makes it clear that the wisdom he speaks about in this book has its roots in the fear of God and that those who find wisdom find the fear of God (Proverbs 2:1-5). Here in chapter 4 he continues to underline the importance and benefit of God's wisdom. He pleads with his readers to turn to this wisdom and seek it with all their heart. Solomon personalizes his plea to his readers by speaking as a father pleading with his sons to listen to his instructions (verse 1).

Verse 2 gives us the assurance that the wisdom that comes from the father is sound. That is to say, the teaching that comes from the father is good, excellent and right. We can trust what he says. We can have confidence in what he teaches. We have no reason to doubt his word. We have every reason to listen to what he says because it is true and trustworthy. Solomon challenges his readers not to forsake this teaching.

In verses 3-5 Solomon takes his readers back to his own childhood. He spoke to them about how his father had challenged him to lay hold of his words with all his heart (verse 4). His own father taught him the importance of obedience. As a young boy in his father's house, "still tender, and an only child of his mother," Solomon remembered clearly how his father had challenged him to get wisdom and understanding and never to swerve from them. This challenge of his father continued with him even to his dying day. Solomon believed in seeking the wisdom of God. This would become his lifelong pursuit. It would become his passion and mission in life. Now he challenged his own sons and anyone who would listen to him with the words his own father had spoken to him as a young boy.

In verse 6 he restates his challenge to his listeners: "Do not forsake wisdom." He reminded all who would listen to him that wisdom would protect them and if they loved wisdom, it would watch over them. According to Solomon in verse 7, wisdom was "supreme." In other words, wisdom was the principal or most important thing in life. Again we must remind ourselves that the wisdom that Solomon spoke of here was not natural wisdom and understanding but God's wisdom. You can know all there is to know about the world and still be very unwise.

Solomon spoke here about the wisdom that came from God and had its roots and motivation in the fear (reverence and respect) of God. According to Solomon there was nothing more important in life than to know how to live for God and in a right relationship with God. This was the purpose of wisdom.

Solomon challenged his readers to make the pursuit of the wisdom of God their highest pursuit. He encouraged them to get wisdom, though it cost them everything they had

(verse 7). He reminds his readers of the benefits of this wisdom in verses 8-13.

In verse 8 Solomon told his readers that if they esteemed wisdom she would exalt them. The apostle Peter, writing in 1 Peter 5:6, said:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.

This is what Solomon is telling his own readers. He is telling them to humbly turn to the wisdom of God and surrender to its instruction and guidance and they will be lifted up or exalted in God's time. If they embraced His wisdom, God would honour them. That wisdom would be a garland of grace and crown of splendour on their head.

Notice also in verse 10 that wisdom would prolong their years. Many of us have seen men and women turning their backs on God and wandering off in to sin and rebellion. Countless lives have been destroyed by rebellion against God. The God who created us knows what is best for us. Only by submitting to His wisdom can we know the fullness and blessing God intends for our lives.

Wisdom will also guide and lead us along straight paths (verse 11) so that our steps will not be hindered and we will not stumble when we run (verse 12). There are many snares along the road of life. The Word of God warns us about those snares. It shows us how the enemy wants to destroy us and our relationship with God. It warns about the tactics of the enemy. It shows us examples of men and women who have fallen before us so that we do not fall into the same trap. Its prophetic warnings challenge us to walk in the path of truth. Notice that the path wisdom takes is a straight path. This is a path with no obstacles. It is a

path that does not turn to the right or to the left. It is a path of purpose and clarity.

In verse 13 Solomon told his readers that they were to hold on to instruction and not let it go because it was their life. To reject the wisdom of God was to perish eternally. The blessing of God and the quality of our lives hinges on obedience and submission to God's wisdom. Countless men and women of faith through the ages have willingly surrendered everything to live according to the Word of God and His wisdom.

In verses 14-19 Solomon warned his people about falling into the trap of the wicked. He told them not to set their foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men (verse 14). They were to avoid this path and turn from it. The temptation would be very real for them to follow the path of the world's wisdom. Our sinful human nature longs for the path of evil. We all know the satisfaction our sinful flesh finds in sin and rebellion against God. To resist the path of wickedness would require discipline.

Solomon describes those who had fallen into the trap of evil in verses 16-17. He tells us that they are robbed of their sleep until they do something evil. They ate the bread of wickedness and drank the wine of violence. Evil has captured their minds and hearts. They could not live without it.

In verse 18-19 Solomon told his listeners that the path of the righteous was like the dawn of a new day that became brighter and brighter. The path of the ungodly was very different. The path of the wicked was a path of deep darkness where they kept stumbling because it was so dark they could not see ahead of them. There was no hint of

dawn for the wicked. Their darkness was a deep, eternal darkness with no hope.

Solomon compares the way of those who followed the wisdom of God and those who reject it. The wisdom of God was life for those who accepted it. Rejection of the wisdom led to darkness and death. For this reason, Solomon pleads with his sons and all who would listen to him to pay attention to wisdom and listen closely to its words (verse 20). They were not to let wisdom out of their sight but keep it securely locked in their heart (verse 21). The words of wisdom were life and health to all who received them (verse 22).

In verse 23 Solomon challenged his readers to guard their heart above all else because it was a wellspring of life. We have already seen that the heart was where Solomon told his people to keep the wisdom of God (verse 21). They were to guard their heart for God. They were to keep their heart focused on the wisdom that they had stored there. They were to treasure that wisdom and live in tune with it. They were to let nothing else have the attention of their heart. Their life depended on this. The wisdom of God, stored in their heart was their life. They were to let nothing strip that from them. Solomon explained how they could do this in verse 24-27.

In verse 24 Solomon told his people that if they wanted to guard their heart they would have to put perversity from their mouths and keep corrupt talk far from their lips. One of the first expressions of sin is the mouth. Even before acting, we will speak sin with our lips. Speaking to the people of his day the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 12:34:

"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

The words of our lips have their roots in our heart. Solomon is telling his readers that they were not to allow any sinful or perverse thought in their heart express itself in words. All such thoughts were to be crushed in the heart. The first way we can guard our heart is to keep it clean and free from any evil thought or attitude that could give expression through our lips (see Psalm 141:3-4).

The second way to guard our heart and honour the wisdom treasured there is found in verse 25. Here Solomon told his people to let their eyes look straight ahead. Again, speaking to the people of his day, Jesus said in Matthew 5:28:

"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

If we want to guard our hearts and honour the wisdom we have stored in them, we will have to keep our eyes from those things that would cause us to be tempted to turn from that wisdom and follow the lusts of our flesh. Guarding our hearts will require an act of discipline. We will have to make a covenant with our eyes to look straight ahead. We must not let our eyes be distracted to look away from the purpose of God.

Finally, Solomon tells us in verses 26-27 that if we want to guard our hearts we will have to make level paths for our feet. In other words we are to take only the ways that are firm and not swerve to the left or the right. The phrase "make level" in the New International Version can also

mean to “carefully consider”. The person who carefully considers his path is one who will remove all obstacles from the path so that he will not stumble. To carefully consider or to make level is to be purposeful in the direction we take. If we are to guard our hearts and honour the wisdom of God stored in them, we will give careful thought to the path we take. We will only take the ways that are firm and proven. We will not let ourselves be sidetracked from the path God has laid out for us. We will listen to the voice of wisdom and follow it intently without deviating in any way from its clear teaching.

Solomon's challenge to his readers is that they esteem wisdom as supreme. He called them to treasure the wisdom of God in their heart and guard their heart from anything that would distract them and dishonour the wisdom they treasured.

For Consideration:

- Why should the wisdom of God be our highest pursuit according to Solomon? What is the difference between the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of the wisdom of God?
- What benefits does wisdom bring, according to Solomon, in this chapter?
- What does Solomon teach us about the path of evil and wickedness in this section?
- How are we to guard our hearts? What three practical examples does Solomon give us that can help us guard our hearts?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to resist the temptations of the flesh so that you can more fully pursue the wisdom of God (the art of living a life of reverence and respect for God).
- Ask God to help you to guard your heart for Him. Ask Him to help you defeat sin before it expresses itself on your lips.
- Ask God to help you to keep your eyes from evil and your feet from straying from the path of true godly wisdom.

5

THE PATH OF THE ADULTERESS

Read Proverbs 5:1-23

The problem of marital unfaithfulness is not a new one. Even in the days of Solomon and David we have records of adultery. Solomon had a particular interest in this problem in his society. His own parents had come together as a result of an adulterous affair (see 2 Samuel 11). Solomon speaks clearly in this chapter about the dangers of adultery.

Solomon begins by calling his readers to pay close attention to wisdom and insight so that they would maintain discretion and preserve knowledge. In other words, if they paid close attention to wisdom they would be able to act in a way that was proper and right. The wisdom of God would preserve them and keep them on the path of truth and godliness.

In particular Solomon wanted to warn his readers about the adulteress. He told his listeners that the lips of an

adulterous woman drip honey and her speech was smoother than oil. Admittedly, sin does appear to be very attractive at times. When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he presented her with a fruit that was beautiful and tasty. He knew that she would not be tempted by something that did not offer her pleasure or benefit. Satan will dress up sin so that it is appealing to the flesh. This is what Solomon is telling us here. The lips of the adulteress were appealing to the young man. Things are not always the way they appear. All too many people have been tempted by the beauty of sin's exterior. Solomon will speak of this later in this book when he writes in Proverbs 16:25: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

Solomon warns us to listen to wisdom and not be fooled by the appearance of sin and evil. In verse 4 he reminded his readers that the way of the adulteress led to bitterness and destruction. Her end was as sharp as a double-edged sword. That is to say, all who touched her would be cut. They would not come away from her without suffering great damage to themselves and others.

Solomon told his people that the feet of the adulteress led straight to death and the grave (verse 5). Those who followed her and her ways would be destroyed. The adulteress gave no thought to the ways of life. That is to say, she cared nothing for the purpose and plan of God. She was so blinded to the things of God and the path of truth that she didn't even realize she was doing wrong by leading many to destruction and death.

Solomon challenged his readers to keep far from the path of the adulteress and not go near her house (verse 7-8). They would do so at the peril of their lives. In verses 9-14 he tells his readers what would happen to them if they

gave in to the temptations of the adulteress and were attracted to her beauty.

In verse 9 Solomon tells us that those who followed the path of the adulteress gave their best strength and years to one who was cruel. In other words, they gave themselves to someone who would destroy them in the end. Their strength and blessing would be stripped from them (verse 10). Strangers would feast on their wealth as the curse of God fell on them. In the end, they would groan when their flesh was worn out (verse 11). As they sat broken and defeated, they would say: "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors" (verses 12-13). They would come to realize their foolishness. They had sacrificed life to follow pleasure. They had refused the counsel and wisdom of God and now suffered the consequences of a wasted and fruitless life. In the end, they would be brought to the "brink of utter ruin"; a wasted life spent in the pursuit of pleasure and futility. Their life with the adulteress would prove to be their undoing and ruin.

Having warned his people of the danger of following the smooth ways of the adulteress, Solomon then challenges them to rejoice in their own marriage partners. In verse 15 Solomon compared marriage to a cistern. The cistern was a source of refreshing water. We are encouraged to be refreshing water to our husbands and wives. As marriage partners we ought to be an encouragement and blessing to each other. As marriage partners we have a special obligation to each other. We minister to each other and refresh each other in our times of struggle and pain.

Solomon challenged the married man and woman to drink from their own cisterns. They were not to look anywhere else for their needs to be met. They were to commit

themselves to be a cistern and well of refreshment to each other. We need to understand here that Solomon speaks particularly about the sexual relationship between a man and his wife. Even married people need encouragement and support outside of marriage as well. I have been often blessed by co-workers and friends in my walk with God. My wife as well enjoys being with her friends. Some of those friends are able to minister to her in ways that I could not possibly minister. God has created us in such a way that we need each other in the body of Christ. This does not end the day we are married. It is neither wise nor fair to expect that your husband or wife will be able to meet every one of your needs. Even as a married man or women you will still need the larger body of Christ to encourage, support and strengthen you.

Solomon is clear, however, when it comes to sexual faithfulness in marriage. In this area of our lives we are to "drink from our own cistern." The water of that cistern (an illustration of intimacy in marriage) is not to share with anyone else. "Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?" asked Solomon in verse 16. "Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers." In other words, the godly husband will be faithful to his wife alone. His wife, in turn will be faithful to him.

In verse 18 Solomon called the husband to rejoice in the wife of his youth. Her breasts were to satisfy him always. He was to be captivated or intoxicated by her love (verse 19). It should be understood that this can only be possible if we are willing to work on our relationships. All too many people expect that this delighting in each other is something that just happens naturally. This may be the case initially, but like a fire, love must be fed if it is to remain strong. This means that we need to work hard to maintain

this delight in each other. We must deal with any lack of communication. We must be willing to change our ways when they are offensive to each other. We must turn our back on everyone else. We must actively seek to rekindle the love that God has put in our heart for each other. Those who choose to delight in their spouse will find that God is more than willing to pull down the obstacles that stand in their way.

"Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife?" Solomon asked (verse 20). God has given those of us who are married a partner in whom we can delight. Can you trust Him to restore that delight? Solomon reminds his readers that God saw their ways. While they may hide their adultery from their partner and others, they could not hide it from God. God would judge those who departed from His plan for marriage. These individuals would be ensnared and perish for their lack of discipline and foolishness (verses 22-23).

The challenge of Solomon in this chapter is to learn to delight in the partner God has given us. This will require a commitment and sometimes hard work on our part. The fire of love and devotion will not remain strong if it is not tended. We will be tempted by Satan and our fleshly nature to look elsewhere but the path of adultery leads to death. Though the lips of the adulteress drip honey and are as smooth as oil, they are the gateway to destruction. We should not be fooled by the exterior beauty of sin.'

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about the exterior beauty of sin? Have you ever been attracted to sin because of its beauty?
- How does sin strip us of blessing and strength?
- The challenge of Solomon is to delight in our marriage partners. Do you delight in your partner?
- A fire untended will soon go out. This is also true for love and delight in marriage. Does your marriage need "tending?" Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to see beyond the exterior beauty of sin to the harsh reality of its cruelty.
- Ask God to keep you from the path of sexual sin and unfaithfulness.
- Ask God to help you to work more on your marriage. Ask Him to bring healing and restoration where this is necessary.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for your marriage partner. Thank Him for specific things that you appreciate about him or her.

6

QUALITIES OF A GOOD MAN

Read Proverbs 6:1-35

In Proverbs 6 wisdom continues to speak like a father to a son. Here in this chapter Solomon shows us the qualities of a good man or woman. We are encouraged to pursue all of these qualities in our personal lives and relationships. We will briefly examine each of these qualities in this meditation.

Dependability and Responsibility (verses 1-6)

The first quality, though not necessarily the most important, is the quality of dependability. Solomon gives an example of this quality in the first six verses. He speaks of an individual who puts up security for his neighbour or struck his hands in a pledge for someone else. The idea here is that this person came alongside his friend in a time of trouble and guaranteed to stand behind him in his financial obligations. The striking of the hands together was the means by which they sealed this agreement. By means of this financial arrangement, the individual committed

himself to the financial obligations of his friend. Should his friend not be able to pay, he would be responsible.

Solomon warns people who put themselves in this situation that they had fallen into their neighbour's hands. That is to say, if their neighbour should choose not to pay their debts, they would be held responsible. In verse 3 he challenged anyone in this situation to humble themselves before their neighbour and press their plea with them. In other words, they were to do their best to get free from this kind of obligation. They were not to allow themselves any sleep until they were free from their neighbour's debt. Solomon went as far as to compare this situation to that of a gazelle being hunted or a bird that was trapped in a snare. The debt and obligation they were under held them in bondage. It was possible for them to find themselves in a situation where they could no longer pay their neighbours debt and lose everything they had.

There are several things we need to consider here in this regard. First, Scripture is clear that we are to be concerned for our neighbour in their need but we cannot give when we have nothing to give. Solomon made this very clear in Proverbs 3:27-28:

Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow"—when you now have it with you.

Solomon tells us that we are to give to those in need when we have the "power to act." What we need to understand here, however, is that we are under no obligation to give what we do not have. How easy it is for us to feel guilty that we do not have more to give. This kind of guilt does not come from God. God only asks us to give when we

actually have something to give. Solomon warned his readers not to put themselves under obligations they might not be able to handle.

There is a second principle we need to see here. Paul told the Romans in Romans 13:7-8:

"Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."

God expects us to be dependable. We are to be a people who pay our debts. It is very easy for us to feel our neighbour's need to such an extent that we give so much that we find ourselves in a situation where we cannot pay our own debts. This does not honour the Lord. God expects us to pay what we owe. We must not sacrifice our testimony as believers. What kind of witness is it to the world when the believer does not pay his or her debts? God might challenge us to live a simpler life so that we have more to give but He will not ask us to give what we do not have to give.

Personally, this passage has been a real challenge to me in the ministry of book distribution. Admittedly, there have been times when I have given many more books than I could afford to give. This meant struggle for us as a family. Letters continued to come in asking for more books. I felt obligated to do more than I could afford. The Lord has shown me how this can lead to tremendous bondage and false guilt. What I had to realize was that I was trying to do more than God had called me to do. As believers we need to be wise in how we use the resources God has given us. We need to be careful not to put ourselves in situations

where we go beyond what God has called us to do and find ourselves unable to pay what we owe.

Hard work (verses 6-11)

The second quality mentioned in this chapter is that of hard work. Solomon used an illustration from the insect world. He called his readers to go to the ant and consider her ways. He reminded them of how the ant had no commander or ruler but stored up provisions for the winter. The ant worked hard and showed great wisdom in regards to providing for the needs of its colony.

Here in this section Solomon rebuked the lazy person who lay in bed all day and refused to work. He reminded him that this lifestyle was a sure way to poverty. God desires that we work to provide for our needs. We are not to sit back and live off other people's generosity.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 Paul said:

"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat."

The Christian is to be characterized by hard work. We are to use the skills and strength God provides to care for our own needs, the needs of our family and ultimately for the needs of others as well.

Honesty (verses 12-15)

The next quality of the "good man" is found in verses 12-15. Here Solomon reminded his readers that the scoundrel and villain went about with a corrupt mouth. This evil-doer "winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers." The idea here is one of deception. In other words, the scoundrel and villain were bent on deceiving others. To do this he would wink to someone else or make some gesture to indicate this deception to his friend so that together they could take advantage of their innocent victim.

These corrupt individuals plotted evil with deceit in their heart. Solomon reminds "his son" that disaster would overtake this kind of person in an instant. They would be destroyed without remedy (verse 15). God is looking for men and women of honesty and integrity whose words and actions were true and righteous.

In verse 16 Solomon told his readers that there were six things that the Lord hated and seven that were detestable to him. This phrase is poetic in nature. If we count the number of items listed here in this section we see that there are actually seven items mentioned that that Lord hates. Solomon lists these seven things God detests in verse 17-19:

- 1) Eyes that were proud and looked down on others.
- 2) A tongue that spoke lies and could not be trusted.
- 3) Hands that shed innocent blood.
- 4) A heart that devised wicked schemes.
- 5) Feet that were quick to rush into evil.
- 6) A false witness who lied.
- 7) A man who stirred up trouble between brothers.

God is looking for people who are humble, honest and righteous in all their deeds. This would be reflected in how they related to their brother or sister. Those who were

honest, humble and righteous would not look down on others. They would speak the truth at all times. They would act with justice and hate the wicked schemes of the deceitful. They would also do all they could to maintain peace between brothers and sisters.

In verse 20-24 Solomon paused for a moment, to challenge "his son" to pay close attention to his father's commands and his mother's teaching. These commands and teaching were ultimately not just their parent's ideas but the traditions and teachings of the Lord handed down by oral tradition to the next generation. Solomon told his readers that if they listened to the wisdom of God, handed down to them from their parents and put that wisdom into practice, it would guide and keep them for life.

Notice in verse 21 that they were to bind the teaching of the Lord around their neck. That is to say, they were to keep the wisdom of God as passed on to them close to their heart. Those teachings would guide them wherever they walked. They would watch over them when they slept and speak to them when they were awake. The wisdom passed on to them was like a lamp in a dark world. Its corrections would discipline them and keep them in the way of God.

There is one final quality of the "good man" that Solomon underlines here in this section. He introduces this in verse 24 when he told "his son" that by listening to the wisdom of God as passed down to him from his parents he would be protected from the immoral woman with a smooth tongue and wayward life.

Moral Faithfulness

In verse 25 Solomon warned his readers about the danger of the adulteress. He told them not to lust after her beauty or let her eyes captivate them. Sin is often disguised in beauty. Satan will make sin look good to our eyes. If you want to trap an animal you will have to make the bait attractive. We are tempted by those things that appeal to our sinful nature.

Immorality is tempting to the sinful flesh but Solomon reminds his readers that the prostitute would reduce them to a loaf of bread. In other words, they would lose everything they had and be left with only a loaf of bread to live on. Solomon compared those who fell into prostitution and adultery to a person who scooped fire into their laps. Obviously those who did this would be burned. You can't walk on hot coals without your feet being scorched! Nor can you fall into sexual sin without suffering the consequences. Solomon promised that the person who slept with another man's wife would be punished.

Solomon reminded his readers in verse 30 that people could understand why a man or woman would steal to satisfy their hunger. Under the law of the Old Testament, however, even thieves who stole to survive would have to repay sevenfold even if they lost their house and all they had. Justice demanded punishment.

In the case of a person who committed adultery, however, their situation was different. They did not commit adultery to survive but to satisfy the sinful lusts of the flesh. If the thief who stole to survive had to pay back sevenfold even if he lost everything he had, how much more severe would be the punishment for the adulterer? "Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away,"

Solomon told "his son" in verse 34. Not only this, but the husband's jealousy would be aroused and he would show no mercy when he took revenge. No bribe or any compensation would be big enough to satisfy the vengeful husband's anger. God will hold the immoral person accountable for his or her actions. Those who choose such a path will suffer the consequences. God is looking for men and women who are faithful to their marriage vows and resist the pull of the flesh to immorality.

The qualities of a good man or woman, according to this chapter then are dependability, responsibility, hard work, honesty and moral faithfulness. May the Lord challenge us all to be this kind of person.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this meditation about giving what we do not have to give? How easy is it for the enemy to make us feel false guilt in this area?
- What responsibility do we have as believers to pay our debts?
- Solomon challenges his readers to work hard. What work has God given you to provide for your family? Have you been faithful in this?
- Are you honest in all your dealings? What does this chapter teach us about honesty and integrity as believers?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be a wise steward of your money and possessions. Ask God to help you to glorify Him in your financial dealings with others.
- Ask God to show you any area of your life where you are not completely honest before Him and your brothers and sisters.
- Ask God to protect you from immorality and its temptation.
- Ask God to help you to demonstrate all the qualities described in this chapter.

7

THE YOUNG MAN AND THE ADULTERESS

Read Proverbs 7:1-27

It might seem strange to us that a man like Solomon who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3) would speak so powerfully about adultery. Here in this chapter, however, Solomon warns his readers about the dangers of this sin.

As he began his discussion of the sin of adultery, Solomon reminds "his son" to listen carefully to his instructions and keep his commands. These instructions are not Solomon's ideas, but the wisdom of God that had been given to him. It was this wisdom that would keep "his son" or anyone else from the snares of the enemy. Often the temptations and snares of the enemy were very attractive. It is because of the attractive nature of these sins and temptations that we need a guide. Human reason and visual appearance is not sufficient to show us what is right. Appearances can deceive us. Human reason is often faulty. God's wisdom alone can guide us into what is true and right.

Solomon challenged his readers to store up his commands and keep them as the apple of their eye. They were to learn to delight in the Word of the Lord. These commands were to be bound on their fingers and written on the tablet of their hearts. When we bind something on our finger we do so as a reminder. We are to do whatever it takes to keep the commands and wisdom of God in front of us. We are to write them on our heart so that wherever we go they will guide and direct. Every decision we make must be filtered first through the wisdom and commands of God.

Solomon challenged "his son" to consider wisdom to be his sister and kinsman. In saying this, Solomon is speaking about the relationship that he was to have with the wisdom of God. This wisdom was to be close to him. It was to be like a close relative who lived with him and went with him everywhere he went.

The reason why we are to keep wisdom close to us is because it will keep us from falling into the trap of the enemy. In particular Solomon told his readers that the wisdom of God would keep them from the dangerous trap of the adulteress with her seductive words. The words of the adulteress were appealing to the person who was not guided by the wisdom of God.

Solomon shared with his readers an example of a young man trapped like a bug in a spider's web. He told his readers in verse 6 that he was looking out his window on one occasion and saw a young man who lacked judgment (verse 7). He was walking down the street near the house of an unfaithful wife, at twilight as the day was coming to the end (verse 9). We can't help but see what is happening in these verses. This young man was purposeful but timid. He has obviously heard about this woman and is following the lusts of his flesh. Notice that he does not walk up to her

door in these verses. He is, however, walking in the direction of her house.

This is how it begins. This young man is open to temptation. He has not guarded himself against temptation but has chosen to put himself directly in its path. He approached the house of the adulterous woman. As believers, guided by the truth of the wisdom of God, we are to discipline ourselves to keep away from the path of temptation. There are places we should not go. There are things we need to keep ourselves from watching. There are many who choose to walk on the path of temptation. Like this young man they walk straight toward the house of the temptress.

Notice that as he approached the house, the adulterous wife came out to him, dressed like a prostitute with "crafty intent." The young man did not need to knock on her door. She was watching for him through her window. She was dressed to tempt. Like a lion waiting for her prey, she sprang out from her hiding place to trap him.

We will not have to knock on sin's door. Sin will jump out at us and ensnare us before we are aware of what happened. Peter, the apostle, tells us in 1 Peter 5:8:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

That is to say, our enemy is looking for someone to devour. He is lurking behind the bushes waiting for someone to pass by. This is what is happening in this passage. You don't have to knock on sin's door. All you need to do is walk down temptation's street.

Solomon describes the adulteress in verse 11-13. She is loud and defiant. She was not governed by the principles of God's wisdom. She boldly shook her fist at God and followed the desires of her sinful flesh. The fact that she is loud tells us that she wanted to be heard or noticed. Notice also that her feet never stayed at home. She was not content with what God had given her. She was not content to love and remain with her husband; she sought after other men. She did so in the streets and in the town square where these men would circulate. This was the kind of woman that took hold of the young man who walked down her street. Dressed as a prostitute she kissed him and lured him into her trap (verse 13).

In verse 14 the adulteress tempted the young man by telling him that she had made a fellowship offering and fulfilled her vows. Leviticus 7:15-16 tells us that the meat of the fellowship offering, when offered as a result of a vow, was to be eaten the day it was offered.

"The meat of his fellowship offering of thanksgiving must be eaten on the day it is offered; he must leave none of it till morning. "If, however, his offering is the result of a vow or is a freewill offering, the sacrifice shall be eaten on the day he offers it, but anything left over may be eaten on the next day. Any meat of the sacrifice left over till the third day must be burned up."

This being that case, the woman was tempting the young man with a great feast. The adulteress is religious. Even the mention of the sacrifices and vows she had made, may have been intended to calm any fears the young man may have had about disregarding the teaching of wisdom. Satan does not hesitate to come across as being religious if in doing so he can cause us to more easily fall into sin.

Notice in verse 15 how the adulteress personalized her temptation. She told the young man that she had come out to meet him to invite him for the feast she had prepared. She gives him the impression that she had been looking for him in particular (verse 15). Obviously, this would make him feel special and make it also more difficult to resist her temptations. The reality is that Satan cares nothing for individuals.

In verse 16 the adulteress becomes bolder in her temptation. She told the young man that she had covered her bed with the finest linens of Egypt and perfumed it with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. She invited him to drink deeply of her love until the morning. She had done her best to make sin appealing to this young man. She offered him a great feast of food. She prepared her bed with the finest luxuries and offered herself freely to him for his sensual pleasure.

In verses 19-20 she assured him that her husband would not be home. He had gone on a long journey and would not be back for some time. Everything had been planned carefully. The door was wide open for him. She had made her offer very attractive and appealing to a young man with no judgment.

The young man was enticed by her smooth talk and fell into her trap (verse 21). He followed her like an ox to slaughter or like a deer stepping into a noose (verse 22). He did not realize he was being led into a trap that would cost him his life (verse 23). Her arrow would pierce his liver and he would perish in her hands.

Solomon concluded his illustration of the young man and the adulteress by warning his readers to pay close attention to what he was saying. He pleaded with them to beware of the adulteress and her ways (verse 25). She had

tempted and led many astray. Those slain by the adulteress were a "mighty throng." That is to say, she had slain a great number of people by luring them into her house. Her house was a highway to the grave (verse 27).

Solomon very graphically shows us the terrible nature of this sin of adultery. He shows us how tempting sin can be and yet how dangerous it is. He warns us about sin's beautiful exterior. He challenges us to not be guided by what we see but by the truth of the Word (or wisdom) of God. God's wisdom is a far greater guide than our minds and eyes. Appearance and reason can be deceptive. God's word alone can protect and keep us from the sin that lurks around the corner to destroy.

For Consideration:

- Why can we not trust what we see? Why is God's Word a better guide than what we can see?
- What does Solomon tell us about the attractive exterior of sin?
- Why is it dangerous to follow the road of temptation?
- The adulteress was not content with what the Lord God had given her. Have you learned to be content with your partner? Are there any areas of your life where you are not content?
- Notice in this passage that the adulteress used religious language in her temptation. How does Satan use religion and religious language in his temptations?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to delight in the partner He has given you. Take a moment to thank the Lord for your husband or wife.
- Ask God to help you not to be deceived by the beautiful exterior of sin and temptation.
- Thank the Lord that He has given us a reliable guide to protect us from the subtle temptations of the enemy.

8

WISDOM'S CALL

Read Proverbs 8:1-36

Solomon returns to the topic of wisdom. Here in chapter 8 he reminds his readers of the benefits of the wisdom of God.

Solomon begins in verse 1 with a challenge to hear the call of wisdom. Notice that he told his readers that wisdom was calling out to them. He tells them that wisdom and understanding raised her voice as it called out. The wisdom of God is available to us all. God does not hide His wisdom but offers it to us freely. This wisdom can be seen in the creation of the world. God clearly demonstrates to us His infinite wisdom in the stars and the sea. No one can look at the creation without seeing something of the wisdom that was required to put it together. God speaks out His wisdom in the pages of Scripture. These Scriptures are available to us. They present to us the purpose and plan of God for the lives of His people. Wisdom is also revealed to us in the person of the Lord Jesus who came to demonstrate to us the heart of God. God's desire is that we understand His purpose. He does not hide His wisdom. He shouts it out for all to hear.

In verses 2-3 wisdom stands in the busy intersections of the city. She stands at the gate of the city crying out to all who would enter or leave. It is His desire that all men and women understand His purpose.

Notice in verse 5 that this wisdom will give prudence to the simple and understanding to the foolish. You do not have to have a university education to have the wisdom of God. The Lord delights to give His wisdom to the simple and the foolish. Even the simplest person can know the wisdom of God and live in His purpose.

The wisdom of God is right, true and just. When wisdom opened her mouth to speak, those who heard her could place full confidence in what she said. Her lips spoke what was right and her mouth spoke what was true (verses 6-7). Wisdom detested wickedness and evil. What wisdom spoke brought glory to God her creator. The words of God's wisdom were perfect and faultless (verse 9). There could not be a better guide for life.

According to Solomon in verse 10-11 there was nothing more precious than the wisdom of God. He challenged his readers to choose instruction in wisdom rather than silver and gold. Remember that Solomon is not speaking about natural wisdom and understanding. He speaks about the wisdom that has its roots in the fear of the Lord. This type of wisdom was more precious than rubies and there was nothing in life that could be compare to it. Those of us who live by this wisdom understand that a life lived in reverence and respect for God is the greatest life one could ever live. This is a life of blessing. A life lived in a right relationship with God is to be treasured more than anything this world can offer.

Solomon tells us in verse 12 that wisdom dwelt with prudence and possessed knowledge and discretion. In other words, wisdom taught us how to live right before God and avoid all the snares of the enemy. The wisdom of God was the source of knowledge and understanding of the purpose of life. It taught all who would listen how to live a life pleasing to God and in a right relationship with Him.

Solomon has already told his readers that wisdom was rooted in the fear of the Lord. In verse 13 he reminded them that those who found the fear of the Lord hated evil, pride and perverse speech. The wisdom of God would lead all who listened into a relationship of reverence and respect for God that hated sin, pride and evil talk.

Wisdom also offered sound counsel and judgment (verse 14). God's wisdom is the source of sound counsel in times when we do not know where to turn. It shows us God's purpose for our lives. His wisdom enables us to make correct decisions in life. As a perfect and faultless wisdom it will never mislead us.

There is power in the wisdom of God (verse 14). By means of this wisdom, Satan and his angels are defeated. Paul speaking in Ephesians 6:17 challenged his readers to put on the sword of the Spirit which was the Word of God. The Word of God is compared to a sword. It is a weapon that could be used against the enemy. Solomon is telling us that the wisdom of God is a powerful sword in our hand. By this wisdom the plans of the enemy are defeated. By it, the kingdom of Satan is pushed back. By the wisdom of God the kingdom of righteousness is advanced.

In verse 15-16 Solomon told his readers that it was by wisdom that the kings and rulers made their laws and governed the earth. Without wisdom these rulers would

amount to nothing. Power and riches without wisdom will fail.

Wisdom, according to Solomon, treated those who listened to it with honour and love. While sin destroyed all who listened to its temptations, the wisdom of God honoured all who followed it. Those who sought this wisdom would find it because it was the delight of God to reveal it to them (verse 17).

Wisdom promised riches and honour to all who would listen to her voice (verse 18). Again we need to see riches to be far more than physical wealth and prosperity. There are many people in this world who live satisfying lives but who do not have great riches. Money and possessions do not provide the riches and prosperity that Solomon speaks about here. God's wisdom will direct us in the path of true prosperity of body, soul and spirit. God's concept of prosperity is far deeper than our understanding. To underline this truth, Solomon told his readers in verse 19 that the fruit of wisdom was better than fine gold and its yield surpassed choice silver. What God has to offer those who will follow His wisdom is far superior to anything money could buy.

In verses 20-21 Solomon tells his readers that wisdom would lead them in the way of righteousness and justice. Those who loved her would find that their treasures would be full. Again we need to see here that Solomon is not speaking just about money and possessions. He has already told us that wisdom's fruit was greater than gold and silver. The fruit of wisdom was a walk of righteousness and justice. We cannot underestimate the richness of a life that is lived in a right relationship to God. Many have given all they had in this world for this treasure. Many have testified to the barrenness of a life of riches. An even greater number have testified to the richness of a walk with God. Those

who know the way of righteousness are blessed above all others. Their heart is full and satisfied. Their treasury is full. The wisdom of God points us to this fullness.

Wisdom, according to Solomon, was the first of all of God's creation. This wisdom had its source in eternity. It existed in God before the world was created (verse 23-26). Wisdom existed when the heavens were set in their place and the horizon was marked on the surface of the waters (verse 27). It existed when the clouds were put in the skies and the sea and land were given their boundaries (verses 28-29).

Wisdom was the craftsman at the Lord's side when He created the earth (verse 30). It is pictured here expressing itself in great delight through the creation of the world. The picture is an important one. From verse 30 we catch a glimpse of the great pleasure that God took in the creation of the earth and humanity. Creation was His delight. Notice that He delighted particularly in the creation of human beings in verse 31.

Solomon challenges his readers in verses 32-34 to seek after this wonderful wisdom. They were to listen to what wisdom decreed. They were not to ignore her cries. Instead, they were to be instructed by her. They were to listen and watch daily at wisdom's door (verse 34). This means that we need to take the time each day in the Word of God and to listen to the guidance of the Spirit of God. We are to read His word and listen to its instruction. Solomon promised that there would be great blessing in listening to and following the wisdom of God each day (verse 34).

Those who found wisdom, according to Solomon, found life and received favour from the Lord (verse 35). Those

who failed to find wisdom, however, did so to their own harm. In fact, those who turned from the wisdom of God loved death. Only those who choose the path that God has laid out know eternal life in God's presence. To reject God's wisdom and purpose is to choose death. From this we can see just how important it is to seek this wisdom from God.

For Consideration:

- Solomon reminds us in this chapter that the Lord delights to share His wisdom. How does wisdom call out in our day? Where can we find this wisdom of God?
- Solomon told his readers that even the simple could have the wisdom of God. What does he mean by this? What encouragement do you take in this truth?
- What riches does wisdom offer those who listen to her?
- Why does Solomon tell his readers that those who reject the wisdom of God love death? What did he mean by this?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He delights to share His heart and wisdom with the simple.
- Take a moment to consider the blessings you have received from listening to the wisdom of the Word of God. Thank the Lord for those blessings.
- Ask God to help you to seek His wisdom daily. Ask Him to give you grace to listen more to Him and His wisdom.
- Take a moment to pray for a friend or loved one who has never turned to God and accepted His purpose. Ask God to open their mind and heart to His wisdom.
- Thank the Lord that His wisdom leads to eternal life.

9

WISDOM AND FOLLY

Read Proverbs 9:1-18

There are many competing voices in our lives. Each day we are faced with decisions. In Proverbs 9 Solomon compares the call of wisdom with the call of folly and shows us the difference between them.

In verse 1 Solomon pictures wisdom as building a house. He tells us that she hewed out seven pillars for this house. There have been many different interpretations for these seven pillars. What we do understand is that the number seven in the Bible refers to perfection or completeness. This is as far as we need to take this verse. Wisdom's house was built solidly with seven pillars. It was perfect and secure. This was a house that would not fall down in the storms of life. Those who live in the house of wisdom are safe.

In verse 2, wisdom prepares a great feast. She prepared her meat and wine and set them on the table. She sent her maids out to call from the highest point of the city to anyone who would accept her invitation to come and dine at

her table (verse 3). Going to the highest point of the city would insure that all its inhabitants would hear the call.

Notice in verse 4 that this call went out to the simple and those who lacked judgment. Wisdom invited them to her feast. Wisdom only has two requirements for those who wanted to enjoy her feast. First, all who came would have to leave their simple ways. Second, they would also have to commit themselves to walk in the way of understanding (verse 6). Let's consider this in more detail.

There are two things that God requires of all who want His wisdom. First, we will have to leave our simple ways. This requires recognizing the futility of our sinful and worldly way of life. It will mean turning from our old way of thinking. This will not be easy. God's ways do not make sense to our earthly way of thinking. If we are to leave our simple ways, we will have to accept God's ways by faith. This will mean turning our backs on our worldly desires and thoughts to accept God's Word and purpose.

Second, verse 6 tells us that if we want God's wisdom we will have to learn to walk in the way of understanding. Part of leaving our simple ways is learning to walk on a new path. This will require discipline. The path of wisdom will not always be easy. It will require that we turn our backs on some friends and loved ones. It will require sacrifice. Wisdom is not only something we have in our head. It affects where our feet take us or what our eyes see. If we want to eat the feast that wisdom prepares we must be willing to leave our simple ways and walk in the path she shows us. This will mean a lot of changes and a new way of life. All who seek the wisdom of God must be willing to make these changes and commit themselves to the things God shows them.

Solomon told his readers in verses 7-9 that correction was necessary for all who wanted to grow in wisdom. None of us will ever get through life without being corrected. We all wander from the path of wisdom in some way or other and need to be brought back. Solomon told his readers that there were two possible responses to correction.

The first type of response to correction was the response of the mocker. Solomon warns us that if you correct a mocker you invite an insult. The mocker is one who does not see his or her need for the wisdom of God. They laugh at those who present the way of the Lord to them. They take offense with anyone who would correct them. When corrected they respond with cutting remarks and abuse (verse 7). Those who seek to correct a mocker find that the mocker will hate them. Mockers are proud and will not accept correction. Any correction is seen as a personal insult and they will quickly respond by trying to get back at the one who corrects them.

The second response to correction is the response of the wise man. In verse 8 Solomon told his readers that the wise man loved those who corrected him. It is important to note that wisdom is humble. The person who is wise in their own mind can become very proud. The wisdom Solomon spoke of here was not natural wisdom that puffed up but the wisdom of God that humbled. Those who trust in the wisdom of God were trusting in a source of wisdom that was not their own.

Solomon also tells us in verse 9 that when a wise person was corrected or instructed he or she would become wiser. The person who seeks God's wisdom is open to learning from God through correction. Correction is humbling. It reminds us that we are not perfect. Correction, however, is necessary if we are going to grow and learn to walk on the

right path. The wise person understands his need for correction and learns from it.

Notice, again, in verses 10-11, how Solomon reminds us that wisdom had its beginning in the fear of the Lord and the person who had knowledge understood the Holy One. Solomon made it clear that true wisdom had to do with learning to walk in the fear of the Lord. No one could have true understanding of life if they do not take the Holy One into account. There are many people in this world who do not understand this. If we try to understand life without God we miss the whole point. If we try to live outside of the fear of the Lord we miss the whole point of life. The wisdom Solomon spoke of here began with God and a personal walk with Him.

There was tremendous blessing attached to living in this type of wisdom. In verse 11 Solomon told his readers that through this wisdom, days would be lengthened. In verse 12 he told his readers that wisdom would reward them. Wisdom brings great blessing. Those who live in the fear of the Lord know what Solomon speaks about here. Those who live according to the Word of God and its principles know wonderful blessings. These blessings cannot be bought with silver or gold. Those who mock wisdom suffer loss (verse 12).

From this discussion on wisdom, Solomon turns his attention in verse 13 to folly. Like wisdom, folly too went to the highest point in the city to call out. She was loud, undisciplined and without knowledge (verse 13). Like wisdom, she called to all who passed by asking them to follow her ways. Her call is the same as the call of wisdom in verse 4: "Let all who are simple come in here!"

Both wisdom and folly cry for our attention. True wisdom requires discipline and correction but its fruit is the fruit of contentment and life. Folly appeals to the desires of our flesh. It speaks out in verse 17 saying:

"Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!

Solomon, speaking in wisdom, however, passes judgment on these words of folly in verse 18 when he says:

But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave."

What Solomon is telling us is that the call of folly was very different from the call of true wisdom. Folly offered sweet water and delicious food but this was at the cost of their lives. Folly offered temporary pleasure but would destroy them in the end.

Both folly and wisdom cried out from the highest point of the city. Their cries were similar but their fruit was very different. Wisdom offered blessings and riches that were more precious than gold and silver and lasted for eternity. Folly offered stolen food and water. This food and water was sweet and delicious but would destroy them in the end. Its pleasures were for a moment. In the end, folly would destroy them. Only a life lived under the wisdom of God could satisfy.

For Consideration:

- What does Solomon tell us about the security of the wisdom that comes from God?
- What are the two requirements for all who will seek the wisdom of God?
- What do you personally need to leave behind to know the wisdom of God? What particularly hinders your growth in wisdom?
- What is the connection between wisdom and correction in this passage?
- Though folly offered sweet and delicious food, what was the result of eating what folly offered?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the wisdom He offers. Ask Him to help you to be more willing to receive from Him.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any way in which you have not received correction that leads to greater wisdom.
- Ask the Lord for grace not to be deceived by the sweetness of folly.

10

THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Read Proverbs 10:1-32

Proverbs 10 is a collection of wise sayings that relate to the way the righteous person is to live. The righteous person is compared in this chapter to the wicked person. We see the fullness of the life of righteousness and the barrenness of the wicked person's life.

Solomon began chapter 10 by reminding his readers that a wise son would bring joy to his father but a foolish son would bring grief to his mother. We should not make too much about the use of the terms father and mother here. Solomon is using poetic language. What he is telling us is that the son or daughter who is wise is a real delight to his or her parents. Remember that the wisdom spoken of here is a wisdom that comes from God and is rooted in the fear of the Lord. There can be no greater delight and joy for godly parents than to see their children live a life of reverence and respect for the Lord God and His purpose.

Solomon goes on to compare the wise son and the foolish son. He reminds his readers, in this chapter, of the blessings attached to living a life of fear and reverence for God. We will examine the various wise sayings of Solomon in this chapter and see what he tells us about the blessing of the righteous life lived in the wisdom of God.

The Treasure of the Righteous (verses 2-5)

In verses 2-3 Solomon told his readers that ill-gotten treasure had no value. This treasure was obtained by evil means (possibly by theft or through excessive interest). What we have not honestly worked for will have no true value in our minds. What delight can we take in possessions that were taken by force from someone else? On the other hand, the man who has worked hard and honestly for what he has can look at what he has obtained with great delight and joy. To him the little he has obtained honestly is worth far more than all the ill-gotten treasures of the wicked

One of the great treasures of life is righteousness. Solomon told his readers in verse 2 that righteousness delivers from death. The treasures of the wicked have no value to him, but the fruit of righteousness is life. Those who have entered a right relationship with God have something that this world with all its treasures cannot afford. They have eternal life and eternal blessing in the presence of God.

Part of the treasure of the righteous has to do with the knowledge of the Lord's wonderful care and provision. Those who are in a right relationship with God know His provision. God cares for those who belong to Him. Like a shepherd, God cares for His own. The wicked, however, never seem to find the satisfaction they desire. There always seems to be something missing in the life of the

wicked person. There is a void that cannot be filled apart from God. Righteousness brings satisfaction and fullness.

This truth does not mean that the righteous can sit back and do nothing. God provides for His people but He also expects them to work hard. Solomon told his readers that laziness was a sure way to poverty but diligent (hard working) hands brought wealth (verse 4). The person who gathered crops in the summer would have provision for the winter but the one who slept during the harvest was disgraceful.

We need to see verses 3-4 in their context. These verses show us how God provides for the righteous. He doesn't just drop His provisions from heaven on them, He expects them to work. The righteous man is a hardworking man who experiences the blessings of the Lord in that hard work.

The Memory of the Righteous (verse 6-7)

The wicked person will eventually be overwhelmed by his evil words and deeds. The head of the righteous, however, would be crowned with blessing (verse 6).

Solomon reminded his readers that the righteous person would be remembered. People would look back on their life with respect. They would be blessed to have known the righteous person. This is not the case for the wicked. We would prefer to forget the wicked person and their evil deeds. The wicked person takes all memory of his ungodly life with him to the grave. The righteous person is remembered long after he has died.

The Security of the Righteous (verses 8-10)

In verses 8-10 we see that the righteous person is secure while the wicked person comes to ruin. "The wise in heart accept commands," Solomon told his readers. The commands spoken of here are the commands of God. The wise person lives according to the commands of God but the fool rejects God's wisdom. The fool walks in a crooked path (verse 9). That is to say, he is not guided by the principles of righteousness but goes wherever he wants. According to verse 10, the fool "winks maliciously and causes grief." He is a deceiver and winks in an attempt to deceive his neighbour. There is no security in this path. On the other hand, the man of integrity can be confident that the path he treads is secure. It is a path of blessing and honour. God will walk with him on this path. He has nothing to fear.

The Lips of the Righteous (verses 11-21)

There is a world of difference between the words of the righteous and the words of the wicked. Solomon tells his readers that the mouth of the wicked stir up violence (verse 11), dissension (verse 12) and ruin (verse 14). We don't have to think too hard to understand what Solomon is saying about the words of the wicked. We have all felt the bitter sting of those evil words in our lives. Those words have cut and insulted. They break and destroy those they touch. We have all experienced the fruit of evil words in our lives.

The words of the righteous, however, are very different. Solomon compared them in verse 11 to a fountain of life. These words are refreshing and life giving. According to verse 12, they love and cover wrong. That is to say, they are not quick to point out faults. Instead, they edify and encourage. The words of the righteous are words of

wisdom (verse 13) and knowledge (verse 14). They are words that come from God and His wisdom. They build up and direct. Unlike the words of the wicked that lack judgment (verse 13) these words are discerning words that guide and bring wise counsel.

What a pleasure it is to be in the presence of a righteous person and to listen to his or her edifying and uplifting words of wisdom. This is not the case for the evil person whose words are bitter and destructive. Solomon described this in verses 15-16 when he told his readers that the wages of the righteous brought wealth and life but the income of the wicked only brought poverty and punishment. Spend time in the presence of the righteous and listen to their words. You will soon experience something of the richness of their lives. You will come away from them richer in spirit and mind. Time spent with the evil person, however, will only reveal how poor they are. Their lips speak of riches and great things but we cannot help but come from their presence feeling empty and barren. The lips of the righteous are a source of blessing. Their words show the way of life (verse 17). The wicked who ignore the correction of the Lord can only lead people astray.

Continuing on in the same theme, Solomon told his listeners in verse 18 that the lips of the evil person were deceptive. They speak in friendly terms, but when the person isn't present, they slandered and spread gossip about him. They speak fine words when they need to, but those words come from an evil and wicked heart. God is not pleased with them (verse 20). Their words lack judgment (verse 21). That is to say, they lack an understanding of the truth of God.

Solomon reminds us that we are all capable of speaking evil words. The more we say, the more likely it is that we

will sin in what we speak. The wise person is a person of few words. The wise person will carefully weigh his words (verse 19).

According to Solomon the tongue of the righteous is choice silver. The words that come from the tongue of the righteous person are of great value because they express the wisdom of God. They build up and edify. These words direct and guide in the way of truth. They are more valuable than the finest silver.

The Delight of the Wise (verses 22-25)

The path of evil and wickedness will not bring any ultimate delight. Solomon reminded his readers that the fool found no pleasure in evil conduct (verse 23). The pleasure of sin is temporary. It will not last. It will ultimately bring us to ruin. Countless lives have been destroyed by sin and evil. They have been lured by its exterior beauty and fell prey to its devices. Sin eventually overtakes the wicked (verse 24). The storm of God's judgment will sweep them away and they will have nothing in the end.

This is not the case for the righteous. Solomon reminds us that the blessing of the Lord brought wealth to the man of understanding (verse 22). The man of understanding will find great delight in wisdom (verse 23). While the wicked would be destroyed, God will satisfy the desire of the righteous (verse 24). In the Day of Judgment the righteous would stand firm (verse 25).

The Lord satisfies the delight of the righteous. Men and women around this world are searching for delight and satisfaction. They are seeking for it in the wrong places. They look for it in the things of this world. True and lasting delight can only be found in a relationship with God. He, who has

found a right relationship with God, will also find true delight.

This life of righteousness is a life that is characterized by two things, according to Solomon, in verses 26-27. First, the life of righteousness is a disciplined life. Solomon compared the lazy person to vinegar (verse 26). Imagine taking a cup of vinegar and trying to drink it. What would be the result? Surely you would spit it quickly out of your mouth. This is what the lazy person is like to God. Solomon also compared the lazy person to smoke. Have you ever stood over a smoking fire and had a big puff of smoke suddenly rise from that fire and go straight into your eyes? This is a most unpleasant experience. The lazy person is like this. He is offensive. God expects His servants to work hard and live a disciplined life.

The second characteristic of the righteous life, according to Solomon, is the fear of the Lord. Solomon tells us that God gives life to those who walk in the fear of His name. It delights God's heart to see His people walking in reverence and respect for His name. Those who refuse to walk in the fear of the Lord will not experience the blessing of God. Their lives will be cut short (verse 27).

The Joy of the Righteous (verse 28)

In verse 28 Solomon told his readers that while the hopes of the wicked would come to nothing; the life of righteousness was a life of joy. True joy and satisfaction could only be found in walking in the wisdom of God.

The Refuge of the Righteous (verse 29-30)

The Lord God would be a refuge for the righteous. This tells us that things would not always be easy for them. There would be times when the righteous would need a refuge from the attack of their enemies. God would be that refuge for them. This was not the case for the wicked. They would be left without refuge in their time of need. This would result in their ruin.

The righteous would never be uprooted (verse 30). Their roots were deep in their God and He would keep and protect them. The wicked, however, would be driven away by the storm of God's wrath. They would not inherit His blessings.

A Final Word about the Mouth of the Righteous (verses 31-32)

Solomon concludes this chapter with a final word about the mouth of the righteous. He reminded his readers that the mouth of the righteous would bring forth wisdom (verse 31) and would know what was fitting (verse 32). In other words, when you speak to a righteous person you can be sure that he or she will give you wise and godly counsel that is appropriate to your situation. That counsel will lead you on the path of righteousness and truth.

The mouth of the wicked person was perverse and would be ultimately cut off. God would judge the evil and their harmful words. They would perish and stand before God in judgment.

Solomon shows us the blessings of righteousness. Those who follow the way of righteousness and wisdom find

blessing, delight and joy in this life and the next. They live a life that will touch many long after they die.

For Consideration:

- How is righteousness (a right relationship with God) a treasure?
- What does Solomon teach us about the importance of hard work and a disciplined life? Does this describe your life?
- How is the way of righteousness the only way of security for us?
- Compare the words of the righteous with the words of the wicked. What is the difference?
- Can we experience lasting delight and satisfaction if we do not walk in the way of righteousness? Explain

For Prayer:

- Have you discovered a right relationship with God through the Lord Jesus? Take a moment to consider the wonderful blessings that this life has brought you. Thank the Lord specifically for those blessings.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live a disciplined and hard working life. Ask Him to show you clearly what He wants you to do.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times your words were not spoken out of a right relationship with God. Ask God to enable you to speak words that uplift and bless those who hear them.

- Ask God to make your life one that brings rich blessing to others.

11

THE FRUIT AND CHARACTER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read Proverbs 11:1-31

In chapter 11 Solomon spends a significant amount of time discussing the fruit and character of the righteous person. Throughout this passage he compares the righteous person and his righteous acts with wickedness and its deeds.

In verse 1 Solomon underlines the importance of absolute honesty in business and dealings with other human beings. Here he reminded his readers that the Lord abhorred dishonest scales. In other words, God sees dishonesty as uncleanness. Accurate weights are a delight to the Lord. Righteousness will be reflected in the way we do business. Righteous people will be honest in their dealings with customers and neighbours.

Another characteristic of righteousness, according to Solomon, is humility. Pride leads only to disgrace. Solomon told his readers, however, that humility would lead to wisdom. The humble person is a person who recognizes his

or her need of God and His wisdom. This is the first step to receiving the wisdom of God. The proud do not see their need. They move in their own strength and understanding. This will only lead to disgrace and defeat. Human wisdom and understanding is insufficient for a life of godliness. Righteous people will recognize their need of God and His wisdom and humble themselves to receive it. This will result in tremendous blessing.

"The integrity of the upright guides them" said Solomon (verse 3). The righteous person is a person of integrity. Integrity has to do with moral and spiritual purity and innocence. It is the character of a person who is in a right relationship with God. The righteous person is guided by a desire to remain in that place of moral and spiritual purity before God. All his or her decisions are based on this desire to be faithful to God. This is not the case for the unfaithful person, according to Solomon. Unfaithful people are destroyed by their duplicity. Duplicity has to do with hypocrisy and insincerity. While integrity will guide the righteous person, the wickedness of the unrighteous will be their downfall. The righteous person is guided by a desire to maintain moral and spiritual purity.

According to Solomon there are many blessings of righteousness in our lives. In verses 4-11 Solomon discusses some of these blessings.

In verse 4 Solomon tells his readers that righteousness delivers from death. This is something that all the wealth of this world cannot give. The day of God's judgment is coming when He will judge the earth. All the wealth of the rich will not help them in that day. All our wealth will be stripped from us and we will stand before a holy God. All that will matter on that day is a right relationship with God (righteousness). The poor and the rich will stand on equal

footing. Those who are in a right relationship with God through His son Jesus will live in His presence. Those who have rejected Him will suffer the consequences.

Righteousness also leads us on a straight path according to Solomon in verse 5. A straight path is a path where all the obstacles have been overcome. It is a path of purpose and clear direction. What Solomon is telling us is that when we live a righteous life, we are living the life that God intended for us. It is a life of purpose and blessing. God honours those who chose to walk in the path of righteousness. The wicked, however, will be brought down and defeated by their wickedness.

In verse 6 Solomon tells us that righteousness delivers the upright. We have seen how this is true when it comes to the judgment of God. Only those who are in a right relationship with God will be spared from judgment. We need to understand, however, that righteousness also delivers us from many troubles here on this earth. Sin and wickedness will only cause heartache and pain. Righteousness will deliver us from much of that heartache.

The wicked person is often trapped by his or her evil desires (verse 6). We don't have to look very far to see how this is true. Countless people have fallen prey to the sinful desires of the flesh. This has resulted in their destruction. Righteousness teaches us what is right and godly. This will protect us from the snares of evil desires that will only harm us.

All our worldly desires will come to nothing. Our riches and achievements will end in death. When we do not set our heart on the things of God, when we die, all our hopes perish with us. This is not the case for the righteous person who does not live for this earth and its pleasures. The

righteous person lives with eternity on his or her mind. When they die, they have a wonderful hope of eternal life in the presence of their Lord and Saviour.

God will protect the righteous and rescue them from trouble. It is true that the righteous will have trouble in this life but God is not blind to their need. God will reach out to them in their need and deliver them. In the end, judgment will come on the wicked. God will punish them and deliver the righteous (verse 8)

In verse 9 Solomon tells us that the righteous will escape the mouth of the godless. The mouth of the godless is filled with lies and deceit. Wickedness cries out to all who will listen. It offers pleasures, prestige and power. There are many who hear the call of wickedness and are deceived. This has resulted in the destruction of many homes and families. Countless lives have been ruined by the lure of sin and its appealing words.

Solomon tells us that the righteous will be protected from the appealing words flowing from the mouth of the godless. Through knowledge they will be rescued. The knowledge spoken of here is the knowledge of God and His Word. God and His Word will keep the righteous safe and protect them from the trap of the evil-doer's words.

Another blessing of righteousness can be seen in what it does for the city in which the righteous live. Verse 10 tells us that when the righteous prosper, the whole city rejoices and when the wicked perish there are shouts of joy. The health of a city is in its righteousness. We have all seen cities filled with ungodliness. These cities are dark and barren. They are held under the curse of God. Violence and crime abound. They are not pleasant places to live. When righteousness triumphs in a city, however, the picture is

quite different. The blessing of God falls and prosperity fills its streets. Righteousness causes a city to rejoice. A city is blessed by the presence of righteous people. Solomon tells us that their blessing on that city will cause it to be exalted. God hears the prayers of the righteous in the city and extends His hand to honour that city. This is not the case for the wicked. Their words will only destroy a city and bring it to ruin (verse 11).

In verses 12-13 Solomon speaks to us about the words of the righteous. He reminds his readers that the man of understanding (spiritual and moral understanding) will hold his tongue but the person who lacks judgment derides his neighbor. In other words, righteous people will be careful in the use of their words. They know the power of words to destroy. They will carefully measure their words so that they do not cause damage. The unrighteous person, on the other hand, multiplies words that bring destruction and ruin for many.

The words of a righteous person are not only measured, they are also trustworthy. A gossip will betray a confidence. A gossip will spread stories about his or her neighbor whether those stories have been confirmed or not. A righteous person, however, is trustworthy and knows how to keep a secret. You can put your trust and confidence in a righteous person. Righteous people will not gossip or spread stories. Their words are measured. They are careful about what they say.

In verses 14 to 16 Solomon gives us yet two other qualities of righteousness. In verse 14 he tells us that for the lack of guidance a nation falls but many advisors make victory sure. The righteous person is not a "loner." Righteous people see their need of wisdom as it comes from God and from advisers. There is a temptation to be proud for us all.

We believe that if we need help it is an indication of weakness. The reality of the matter is that God has designed the church in such a way that not one of us has all the gifts necessary to expand His kingdom. We need each other. We need the experience and wisdom that God has given to others. This means that we will have to listen to each other and learn from each other. Only as we learn to work with others can we be assured of victory. The righteous person will see his or her need of others and seek their advice and support.

Another quality of the righteous person is kindness. Verses 15-17 describe this kindness. Verse 15 begins with a warning. Some people feel that kindness means that we have to reach out to everyone who needs help. I have had times when I have said "no" to a person seeking help of one form or another. I have done this because I did not feel that it was the way God would have me use my resources. I have at times fallen into the trap of giving too much. In this case I put my own family under undue strain because of giving when I really had nothing to give.

Solomon warns us about putting up security for another. That is, to stand with someone in their financial struggle by legally binding ourselves to them and their financial problem. To do this, we risk losing all we have because of their problem. If we put ourselves in this situation we tie up our money so that it cannot be used as God intended. Solomon warns us that doing this will cause us heartache.

Having warned us about putting ourselves under a legal agreement with our brother or sister in need, Solomon then moved on to remind us that a kind-hearted woman gained respect but a ruthless man only gained wealth. It is an honourable thing to be kind. Those who open their hearts in kindness will gain respect which is of greater value than

wealth. Kindness will benefit the person who is kind but those who are cruel and unkind will only bring trouble on themselves.

There is a great benefit and blessing in kindness. The righteous person will be kind but he or she will not sacrifice their responsibility before God to pay their own bills and provide for their families. They will not bind themselves under legal obligations that will keep them from being wise with the resources that God has given.

In verse 18, Solomon returns to a discussion on the benefits of righteousness. He told his readers in verse 18 that while the wicked man earned deceptive wages, the person who sowed righteousness would reap a sure reward. The wages of the wicked would be taken from them but the fruit of righteousness would last forever.

The righteous person experiences a satisfying life but the one who pursued evil rushes to his or her death (verse 19). Those who are in a right relationship with God know eternal life. They also know quality of life here on this earth. Those who turn from righteousness, however, pursue a life that leads to death (see Romans 6:23).

The righteous person delights the heart of God but He detests those who have a perverse heart (verse 20). What a blessing it is to know that the Lord delights in us and that His blessing is on us because He loves us.

Verse 21 tells us that the righteous would go free but the wicked would be judged. Another benefit of righteousness has to do with knowing that we will stand before God in the Day of Judgment and be declared innocent. When we consider the eternal punishment that awaits those who turn from God, what a privilege we have to know that because

of what the Lord Jesus has done, we will be declared righteous and set free to enjoy the benefits of eternity in the presence of our Lord.

The righteousness that Solomon speaks about in this chapter is not an external righteousness only. There are those whose righteousness consists of outward actions only. Solomon reminded his readers in verse 22 that a beautiful woman with no discretion was like a gold ring in a pig's snout. Imagine seeing a pig with a gold ring in his snout. Will that gold ring change the pig's nature? Will he stop wallowing in the mud just because he has a gold ring in his snout? A pig is a pig and will always have a pig's nature even if you dress him up with a gold ring. External beauty does not make a person wise or discerning nor will religious or kind actions make a person righteous. Righteousness comes from the heart. God does not look at the outward appearance but on the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

In verse 23 Solomon promised that the desire of the righteous would end in good but the hope of the wicked would end in wrath. The greatest desire of the righteous person is for God and His purposes. The righteous person is in tune with God and His desire and wants exactly what God wants. The wicked seek after their own interests. Their hope is in the things of this world. Because they do not seek God and His ways, the only true certainty for them is the wrath of God. The righteous, however, will be fully satisfied in their God and His purposes.

In verses 24-28 Solomon returns to a discussion of how the righteous person uses his or her possessions. We are told in verse 24 that the person who gives freely gains even more but the one who withholds unduly will come to poverty. There are two things we need to understand from this verse.

First, God delights to bless those who use His resources wisely. Someone once said: "God will get His resources to you if He can get them through you." In other words, God will bless those who are generous with what He gives. God has chosen not to distribute His resources equally. This is because He wants us to share in the blessing of generosity. He has chosen to use us to distribute His wealth. The problem is that we are not all wise stewards of that wealth. Sometimes we are tempted to keep what we should give. Solomon tells us that God will bless those who give. We don't give in order to get more. We give because this is the heart of God for us. We give to share in the expansion of God's kingdom. God delights to use us as instruments of blessing to others. If we will be the vessels of blessing to others, God will fill those vessels so we will have enough to share.

Solomon tells us that the one who "withholds unduly" will come to poverty. The King James Version of the Bible translates this phrase: "withholdeth more than is meet." It is important that we understand what Solomon is telling us here. There are times when we simply cannot give. Solomon is not telling us that we have to give everything we have. He is telling us that we are not to unduly withhold or we are not to withhold from others more than is proper. We are to give when we have the power to give but we should not give when doing that will cause undue strain on our own family or loved ones. The apostle Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:8:

"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

God only requires us to give what He has purposed for us to give. It is easy for us to fall into false guilt when we are

asked to give. We must give generously but we must also give with wisdom. If by giving we fail to provide for our own family or render ourselves incapable of paying what we owe to others, then we have been unfaithful. On the other hand, those who withhold blessing unduly will find that their blessing will fail. God blesses those who give generously when they have the power to do so. God promises that He will prosper a generous person and refresh those who refresh others (verse 25). Riches kept longer than they should be kept will quickly become a burden.

In verse 26 Solomon told his readers that the person who is willing to sell would be crowned with blessing but the one who hoarded would be cursed by people. People who keep what they should be giving will only incur the anger of those who need what they have. On the other hand, people respect and honour those who are willing to sell what they have so that others might have what they need.

It is important that we notice that generosity is often associated with giving freely without cost. Here Solomon speaks of a generous person selling. The generous person is willing to share what he has. Sometimes he does this freely and sometimes he does this at a cost to the person receiving the article.

The person who seeks good would find goodwill (verse 27). In other words, when people act kindly and generously, they will receive the good wishes of their neighbours and friends. This was not the case for the wicked. Those who lived wickedly would only receive the wickedness they sought. They would be judged by God. What they did would eventually come back at them and destroy them.

Anyone who trusted in riches and holds on to them would fall (verse 28). This was not the case for the righteous.

They are generous and share their riches with others. God's blessing was on them because of this. They would prosper like a green leaf. Stagnant water will breed bacteria but a flowing river remains fresh and filled with life. This is how it is with riches. If we keep them they will, like a stagnant pool of water, be the breeding ground for all kind of sickness and disease. If we share those riches, they will be life-giving not only for us but for others as well.

In verse 29 Solomon warned his readers that the person who troubled his family would only inherit the wind. Imagine that you had a rebellious son who lived a life of drunkenness and immorality. Would you leave all you had to that son when you died? Would he not only waste his inheritance on drinking and immorality? Would you not instead give what you had worked so hard to achieve to someone who would use it wisely. "The fool will be servant to the wise," Solomon told his readers. In other words, this foolish son would lose his inheritance and be subject to someone who would use his parent's inheritance wisely.

Solomon is telling us here that we reap what we sow. God will bless those who wisely use His resources. If we are faithful and wise servants, God will bless and use us even more. If we are not, He will give His blessing to someone else.

Solomon concludes this chapter with a reminder to his readers of the fruit of righteousness. In verse 30 he tells us that the fruit of righteousness is a tree of life. We read about the tree of life in both Genesis and Revelation. Revelation 22:2 tells us that this tree had the power to heal the nations. From Genesis 2:9 we understand that it imparted the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, it was a tree that revealed God's wisdom to humankind. Eating from the tree gave eternal life (Genesis 3:22). The

righteous symbolically ate from the tree of life. The righteous were those who tasted the fruit of God's wisdom and found life in that wisdom. Solomon reminds us that the fruit of this tree was so wonderful that it needed to be shared with others. The wise person would share what he discovered in God and His wisdom in an attempt to rescue the souls of men and women from the path of destruction.

Solomon has attempted in this chapter to show us the character and fruit of a righteous life. He reminded the righteous that they would be delivered from death and trouble in this life. They would know lasting pleasure and delight and be rewarded by God. These blessings were present realities for the righteous. The experience of the ungodly would be very different. Their future was very bleak. For this reason the righteous and generous person would share what he had found in God in an attempt to win those who did not know the truth of God's wisdom.

For Consideration:

- Solomon tells us that the righteous person was a person of integrity, honesty, humility, generosity and kindness. Are all these qualities demonstrated in your life? What area needs work?
- Solomon reminds us that the words of the righteous are measured. What did he mean by this? Do your words reflect that you are a child of God?
- What affect does righteousness have on our communities? What affect does wickedness have?
- What does Solomon tell us about the fruit of righteousness in our lives? What blessings have you personally experienced from walking with God?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the different characteristics of righteousness mentioned in this chapter. Ask God to show you any area of weakness in your life. Ask Him to teach you and strengthen you in this area.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for some of the blessing He has given you as you have been learning to walk with Him in righteousness.

12

HUMILITY, DISCIPLINE AND DILIGENCE

Read Proverbs 12:1-28

Solomon's vast wisdom is evident in how he speaks to so many different life issues. Here in chapter 12 Solomon speaks to the issues of knowledge, compassion, discipline, honesty and diligence. We will examine these issues separately in this meditation.

Discipline and Correction (verse 1)

Solomon understood that as human beings we would wander from the path of wisdom. There is not one of us who does not need to be corrected. It takes humility to accept correction. The person who accepts it, however, will learn and grow. Solomon goes even further when he challenges us to love discipline or correction. If we want to grow in our walk with the Lord God we need correction. We should not be afraid of the Lord's discipline because it will lead us into a deeper understanding of His truth and ways. "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge," said Solomon. He

actually calls the person who refused correction “stupid” because by refusing correction they refused to learn.

Favour and Stability (verse 2-3)

A good man, according to Solomon, obtained favour from the Lord. We need to understand goodness in the context of this book. Solomon has been speaking about wisdom and righteousness. The good man is one who walks in the way of the Lord. The good man has learned the art of living a life of reverence and respect for God and His ways. This sort of man will obtain favour from the Lord. The word favour here can also be translated by the words pleasure, delight and acceptance. In other words, the person who lives a life of righteousness and goodness will delight the heart of the Lord. This is not the same for a crafty or deceitful man. He will be condemned.

Solomon reminds us that a man or woman cannot be established through wickedness. The Lord Jesus told a parable of a man who build his house on the sand in Matthew 7:26. He explained to his listeners that this person was like a person who did not listen to His words. Anyone who builds his or her life on wickedness and not on the Word of God will find that they have built on a very feeble foundation. All their riches and achievements will be wiped out in the day of God's judgment. Only what is built on God and His word will last. Those who walk righteously will be secure. They will stand in the Day of Judgment. They will know the presence and enabling of God in their lives. God will keep and protect those who belong to Him and walk in His ways.

A Wife of Noble Character (verse 4)

Solomon speaks in verse 4 about a wife of noble character (virtuous, KJV). He tells us that she is her husband's crown. The word translated "noble" is used in the Old Testament to refer to armies that were valiant and strong. It is also used to speak of wealth. What Solomon is telling his male readers here is that if they found a strong, virtuous and able woman, they found a woman of tremendous value. They could be proud of such a woman. It might be easy to assume that the Old Testament puts down women. This is not the case. Solomon clearly tells us that a strong woman who is capable and discerning is a woman to be honoured. She is a delight to her husband and he can be proud of her. A shameful woman, however, is like decay in the bones of her husband. We are not told what this shamefulness is but we can assume that it is the opposite of being noble. That is to say, this woman may be lazy, weak and foolish in behaviour and insight. Such a woman is a burden to her husband.

The Just Way of the Righteous (verses 5, 6)

In verse 5 Solomon tells us that the plans of the righteous person are just. That is to say, they are fair and good. The righteous man is concerned for those around him. You can trust the advice of the righteous person. This is not the case for the unrighteous. They are deceitful in their plans. Their concern is only for themselves and their own advancement. They will not hesitate to lie and cheat to get ahead. According to Solomon, their words are like wild animals lying in wait for a victim to pass by (verse 6). While the words of the unrighteous and wicked are violent and destructive, the words of the righteous person rescue men and women from the ungodly. Their words bless and uplift.

The Judgment of the Wicked (7, 8)

There is no future in wickedness and evil. While it is not always evident, the wicked will be overthrown and be no more. Admittedly, there are times when we see the wicked prosper in this life. Sometimes they seem to get away with their evil ways. Solomon reminds us that God sees everything these wicked people do. He will judge evil and wickedness. The righteous will stand in the Day of Judgment. According to verse 8 the man of wisdom will be praised but the person with a warped mind will be despised.

Reality is Better than Pretending (verse 9)

In verse 9 Solomon tells us that it is better to be nobody and have a servant than to pretend to be someone and have no food. There are people who want others to think that they are better than they really are. They pretend to be someone special so that people will think highly of them. The fact of the matter is that pretending does not change reality. You can pretend to be rich but it will not change the amount of money in your bank account.

There are people who live in a fantasy world. Maybe you have met them. They are always chasing after something better. They don't seem to be able to accept what they have. They are so busy chasing after the ideal that they don't have time to enjoy what they already have. Solomon tells us that it is better to put aside some of those fanciful ideas and learn to appreciate what we have than to live our lives in a pretend world that will never be ours to enjoy. He is challenging us to be content and learn to enjoy what the Lord God has given us.

The Effect of Righteousness (verse 10)

Righteousness affects every part of a person's life. In verse 10 Solomon tells his readers that a righteous man cares for the needs of his animal. Righteousness will be evident in many different ways in our lives. The righteousness of some can only be seen in their church life. They attend church faithfully but that same righteousness is not visible in their business life or their private lives. Solomon tells us that true righteousness affects every part of a person's life and is visible even in the smallest things.

According to Solomon, the kindest acts of the wicked person are cruel. Often behind the kind deeds of an unrighteous person is a hidden motive. The wicked person, for example will show kindness to a friend because they are looking for something for themselves. These sorts of actions, according to Solomon, were cruel. They take advantage of people and look kind but in reality they were self centered and selfish.

Hard Work and Responsibility (verses 11-12)

God created us to work. When He put Adam in the Garden of Eden He gave him the responsibility to till the soil so that it would produce fruit. God expected Adam to work for his food. He chose to bless the efforts of his hands. It is for this reason that Solomon tells us that the person who works his land will have abundant food but the one who chases fantasies lacked wisdom and judgment. God answers prayer but He also expects us to work. Often the provision of the Lord will come through hard work. We cannot sit back and do nothing and expect that God will give us all we need. To do so would be foolish. It is the general purpose of God that we work for what we get. Solomon

tells us in verse 12 that God would bless the labours of the righteous person.

According to Solomon, the wicked desire the plunder of evil men. Instead of honest work, the wicked steal or live off someone else. We have all met people who are always trying to get something for free. These individuals are not willing to work. Instead, they take all they can get from the hard work of others. We are challenged to work hard so we can contribute to the needs of others.

The Words of the Righteous (verses 13-14)

"An evil man," said Solomon, "is trapped by his sinful talk" (verse 13). In other words, the words of the evil man will ultimately be his downfall. The evil person will be judged by his or her words. Those words will often come back at them. Their dishonesty will be discovered. Their slander and gossip will eventually cause people to turn from them. Their betraying words will cause them to lose friends. People will no longer trust them. Beyond this, they will be judged by God for their hypocrisy and deceit.

This is not the case for the righteous person. The righteous person escapes the trouble that comes to the wicked person because of their words. The words of the righteous person are true and honest. You can trust what a righteous person says. They will not gossip or slander. Instead, they build up and encourage. Solomon told his listeners in verse 14 that "from the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things." Just like a hard worker is rewarded by God for his or her hard work, so God rewards the righteous person for their good and gracious words.

Advice (verse 15)

Verse 15 tells us that the wise person listens to advice but the fool does what seems right to him. If we are to listen to advice, the first thing we need to do is recognize that we need it. This requires humility. The fool is a proud person who fails to recognize his or her need. The wise person, however, will be careful to listen to advice. Wise people have become wise because they have learned from others. How easy it is to feel that a need for advice is a sign of weakness. The reality of the matter is that we never outgrow our need for advice and counsel. Those in leadership, in particular, need to learn how to listen to others and seek their advice. We are never too old to learn from others. Notice that though this person is already described as being wise, they are still listening to advice.

Patience with Others (verse 16)

In verse 16 Solomon tells his readers that a prudent man overlooked an insult but the fool showed his annoyance at once. There are times when we speak words out of frustration and anger. What happens when someone responds to our angry words with more anger? To express anger with someone who has insulted us will only invite more problems.

The wise person overlooks an insult. If we overlook an insult two things happen. First, realizing that we are not going to respond, the person insulting us will quickly walk away and say no more. Second, if we overlook an insult we give the person who insulted us reason to consider what they have been saying about us. Responding to someone who insults only reinforces their opinion of us. When we respond in kindness instead they may come to realize that their words have no foundation.

Words (verses 17-19)

Solomon reminds us of the power of words in verse 18. He tells us that reckless words can pierce like a sword. Who among us has not felt the destructive power of words? Words have the power to destroy reputations and friendships. They can discourage and hinder. Like a sword they cut, wound and kill.

Wise people will be careful in how they use their words. They will use their words to heal and bless. The wise person is one who has learned how to use his or her words to build up and encourage.

Solomon reminds us that truthful lips will last forever but the lying tongue would last only for a moment. Those who practice lies, deceit and dishonesty will one day be judged and destroyed. They will be exposed for who they are.

Promoting Peace (verse 20)

There are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who insult and plot evil against their neighbour and there are those who promote peace. Solomon gives us a quick glimpse into the hearts of these two types of people. In the heart of the one who plots evil is deceit. These individuals have no rest. They constantly seek to get ahead of their neighbour by deceiving and lying. This is a stormy heart of confusion and chaos. In the heart of the person who promotes peace the bright sunshine of joy floods their being. These are individuals who seek the good of their neighbour. This heart flourishes and rejoices. Again we see the wonderful benefit of righteousness.

Protection for the Righteous (verse 21)

Solomon tells us that no harm falls on the righteous but the wicked will have their fill of trouble (verse 21). We should not see here that the righteous person will never have problems. There will be plenty of problems in the life of the righteous. Those problems will often come to them from the ungodly.

What we need to understand is that the Lord will be with the righteous. He will keep them and preserve them in the midst of their trials and difficulties. Their desire for God and His ways will keep the righteous from trouble that comes to the ungodly who wander from the path of righteousness. Righteousness and wisdom keep us from falling into the trap of Satan. God's Word, as the guide for the righteous, will keep them on the path of security and safety even though they may suffer for it.

Those who turn from the wisdom of God and His righteousness will find themselves on a path that leads to trouble and despair. There is no hope for the wicked apart from judgment and destruction. While the path of righteousness may be a difficult path to tread, it is the path of security, safety and blessing.

Truthfulness (verse 22)

Solomon makes it clear in verse 22 that the Lord detests lying lips. Honesty and truthfulness are very dear to the heart of God. Everything that God does is honest and true. He has an intense hatred for anything that is dishonest. There are times when absolute truthfulness will be difficult. An understanding of God's intense hatred for dishonesty however, should motivate us to speak what is true.

Keeping Knowledge to Oneself (verse 23)

"A prudent man keeps knowledge to himself." Solomon tells us in verse 23, "but the fool blurts out folly." This is not to say that we are not to share the knowledge God gives us with others. The wise or prudent will not be quick to respond. They will carefully consider what they need to say before sharing their insights. The fool, however, in an attempt to appear wise, is quick to give his advice. He does not take the time to consider the nature of the problem but has a pat answer for all of life's problems. His advice only betrays his lack of understanding.

Diligence (verse 24)

Diligence relates to hard work, trustworthiness and perseverance. Solomon tells us in verse 24 that those who are diligent will rule but the lazy person will end up being a slave. Again we see the importance of hard work. We cannot expect that things will come to us without having to work for them. This is not God's way. Admittedly, there are times when our human efforts will only hinder the blessing of the Lord. At the same time, however, God expects us to be diligent and hard workers. His kingdom is advanced as we faithfully serve in His strength and direction.

God will bless the efforts of our hands if those efforts are being directed and anointed by His Holy Spirit. We should not expect that things will change if we are not willing to work toward making those changes. Some time ago I wrestled with a personal problem in my life. When I finally came to accept that I needed to make some changes in my life I surrendered the matter to God telling Him that I needed His healing and direction. As I prayed, the Lord spoke to my heart and told me that He would heal but that I needed to obey. In other words, I would find victory over

this issue as I learned to walk in obedience. Over the course of the next few months I struggled with obedience in this matter. It was not easy to discipline myself to be obedient. It meant learning how to walk in a new way. It meant expressing things that did not come naturally to me. As I obeyed however, God blessed. I learned over those months that victory does not always come without effort. Sometimes victory comes through hard work and discipline.

Victory in the Christian life will sometimes be through great struggle and hard work. We should not expect victory without diligence, hard work and perseverance. It is diligent hands that will rule, Solomon tells us in verse 24. Expect to work hard. Persevere in obedience to God and His leading and you will be honoured.

The Anxious Heart (verse 25)

Anxiety is a terrible thing. Personally I have wrestled with anxiety all my life. Anxiety causes undue stress. It has a tendency to exaggerate problems and their outcome. It can paralyze us so that we are unable to move ahead. Fear of the unknown or imagined can overwhelm us. I suppose that all of us have experienced this type of anxiety at one time or another. Solomon tells us that anxiety, "weighs a man down." 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to cast all our anxiety on the Lord God because He cares for us.

Solomon tells us also that a cure for anxiety is the kind word of a friend. Words have the ability to minister and calm the troubled soul. They can quiet our fears and give us confidence and hope. Sometimes all we need is a simple word of encouragement to keep us going.

Friendships (verse 26)

Verse 26 has been translated in various ways in different Bible translations. The NIV tells us that "A righteous man is cautious in friendship," but adds in a footnote another possible translation: "a guide to his neighbour." The New King James Version translates "The righteous should choose his friends carefully." The New Living Translation uses the phrase "The godly give good advice to their friends."

While there is some question among translators as to the best way to translate this verse, the idea is that the righteous person is careful about the kind of friends he or she keeps and will treat those friends with great respect and dignity. This is not the case for the wicked. They choose friends that will lead them astray or that they can lead into their evil ways. The friends we have will be an influence either for good or bad in our lives. The righteous person will be cautious as to who he chooses as a friend.

Prized Possessions (verse 27)

"The lazy person does not roast his game," Solomon tells us in verse 27. The diligent man however, "prizes his possessions." What Solomon is telling us here is that the lazy person does not care for what he or she has. The lazy person doesn't even have the time or energy to properly cook his food so that he can enjoy it. He sacrifices the enjoyment of his possessions because he is too lazy to make the effort. The hard working person will care for his possessions. He will have many years of enjoyment in the labours of his hands and has a deeper sense of the value of those things he has worked hard to obtain.

The Way of the Righteous (verse 28)

Solomon concludes this chapter by telling his readers that the way of the righteous brings life and immortality. The way of the righteous was the path to God. What Solomon is telling us is that the righteous person is one who honours God in his life. He lives in the fear of the Lord and in reverence for His name. This is the path of true wisdom. It is also the path of life.

For Consideration:

- What does Solomon teach us here about accepting correction and advice?
- What does verse 4 teach us about Solomon's view of women?
- What do we learn here about the words of the righteous?
- What does verse 9 teach us about being content with what God has given? Are you content with what God has given you?
- Solomon reminds us that true righteousness will impact every aspect of our lives. How does this righteousness impact how we use our words, or how we respect creation?
- What do we learn about the importance of hard work in this chapter?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you humility to accept correction and advice.

- Ask the Lord to guard your lips so that they only speak what is true and uplifting. Ask Him to give you wisdom to know when you need to be silent.
- Ask the Lord to reveal anything in your life that is not in line with what Solomon is teaching in this chapter. Ask Him to forgive you for any particular shortcomings.

13

PROSPERITY, CORRECTION AND INTEGRITY

Read Proverbs 13:1-25

In chapter 13 of the book of Proverbs, Solomon shares his insight on a variety of subjects. In particular, he shares his experience on prosperity, correction and integrity.

Instruction (verse 1)

"A wise son heeds his father's instruction," Solomon told his readers. Notice that those who are wise do not have all the answers. Wise people realize that they still have much to learn. They will listen to instruction and gain understanding. They are not too proud to admit their need. The mocker, on the other hand, does not listen to rebuke. To listen to instruction is to admit a lack of understanding and knowledge. The mocker is too proud to admit that he or she does not understand. They will stubbornly remain on the wrong path rather than admit they are wrong. The wise person will listen to instructions and learn from them.

Enjoying Good Things (verses 2-3)

In verse 2 Solomon told his readers that from the fruit of the lips a man enjoyed good things. In other words, the words of a good person bring blessing. The words we speak are a reflection of what is in our heart. Speaking to the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said in Matthew 12:34:

"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

The righteous person speaks words that come from a heart that has been touched by God. Those words are words that bring blessing. They are words of encouragement and edification. Those who sit with a righteous person will be blessed by his or her words. This is not the case for a wicked and unfaithful person. The words of an unfaithful person are words of violence. These words harm, destroy and tear down. They come from a heart that is overcome with bitterness and rebellion.

Solomon told his readers in verse 3 that the person who guarded his lips guarded life. In other words, the words we speak will either judge or condemn us. This is because our words are a reflection of our heart. Those who speak rashly will come to ruin. The words of the wicked cannot be trusted. They are proud and dishonest. They say what is convenient and not what is true. They will be exposed for who they are.

Satisfaction (verse 4)

Solomon told his readers in verse 4 that the desire of the diligent would be fully satisfied. This does not mean that if we are trustworthy and hardworking we will get whatever we want. There have been many times in my life when I thought I wanted something only to find out that when I finally received it, it was not what I thought it would be. There are all kinds of things in this world that attract our attention but they do not satisfy our desire. Many men and women around this world attest to the fact that though they had everything they could ever want they were not satisfied.

Solomon promises that the desires of the diligent would be fully satisfied. The diligent are those who seek the Lord and His heart. They live for the Lord and trust in Him. Those whose heart is set on knowing and serving their God will know full satisfaction. They may have nothing in this world but their deepest desires have been satisfied.

Solomon made it very clear that the lazy person would get nothing (verse 4). God delights in pouring out His blessing but He particularly delights to pour that blessing on those who are diligent. He expects us to be faithful, trustworthy and hard working. Solomon tells us that laziness will only bring God's judgment. God expects us to work hard and be diligent. This is the clear teaching of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25:26-29. Speaking to a lazy servant he said:

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. '"Take the talent from

him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

This is a real challenge for us. Those who do not faithfully use what God has given them will find that even what they have will be taken from them. Would you hire a person who was lazy? Neither will God bless those who are not diligent in serving Him.

Integrity (verses 5-6)

"The righteous hate what is false," Solomon said in verse 5. What we need to see here is that those who love the Lord also love truth. "Hate" is a strong word but it shows the intensity of God's feelings toward falsehood and lies. The hatred of the righteous for falsehood is such that they will see it as an enemy. They strive to bring integrity and honesty into their society and workplace.

Notice in verse 6 that righteousness guards the man of integrity. In other words, righteousness kept him or her in their integrity. Righteousness is a shield against falsehood and dishonesty. Those who walk in holiness and righteousness will hate falsehood. Their relationship with God will protect them from deceit.

The wicked who delight in falsehood will only bring shame and disgrace to a society or workplace. It is a shameful thing to be dishonest and unreliable. A society that is based on dishonesty and deceit will not stand. It will be judged. The blessing of God will be removed. The sinner will be judged and overthrown (verse 6).

The Dangers of Riches (verse 7-8)

In verses 7-8 Solomon reminds us of the dangers of prosperity and riches. Here in these two verses he reminds his readers of three dangers in particular.

In verse 7 Solomon tells us that there were people who pretended to be rich when they were really poor. People pretend to be rich because they are not content with what they have. They want people to think they are important because of their money and possessions. These people base their value on the amount of money they have. Riches can lead to discontentment and pride.

Solomon also tells us that there were those who pretended to be poor but had everything. Why would a rich person pretend to be poor? In part, the reason may have something to do with greed. The rich person does not want others to know what he or she has because they do not want to share it. Instead they keep what they have a secret. They hoard up their wealth and keep it all for themselves. Solomon is telling us that the second danger of riches and wealth is that they can lead to greed.

The third danger of riches and wealth has to do with the temptation to corruption. To explain what he means Solomon used the illustration of a person who was kidnapped. His captors demand a ransom for his life. What does the rich person do in a situation like this? The rich person will pay the price required to his wicked captors and send them on their way profiting from their sin.

Imagine, now, that the person who was kidnapped was poor and had no money for a ransom. The situation would be quite different. The poor man "hears no threat." The

poor person is not tempted to use his or her money in ways that will promote evil.

Solomon tells his readers here that with money comes great temptation. A pool of water becomes stagnant and breeds bacteria when it has no outlet. So it is with those who hoard their money. They will find that their money will quickly begin to breed all kinds of temptations.

The Light of the Righteous (verse 9)

"The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out," Solomon tells us in verse 9. The blessing of God is on the life of those who honor Him but those who pursue evil will be judged. We do not always see this immediately. There are times in this life when it seems that the wicked prosper. While this is often the case on this earth, this prosperity will not last. The Lord will judge sin and evil. The wicked will always be judged.

Taking Advice (verse 10)

In verse 10 Solomon returned to a discussion on taking advice. He tells us that the wise will take advice but the proud breed quarrels. The wise person is one who understands he or she needs others and their experience. Wise people know that they do not have all the answers. They learn from the experience and knowledge of others. This is not the case for the proud. The proud cannot take advice. The proud does not want others to think they need help and counsel. They resent anyone who tries to tell them what to do. This will lead to tension, bitterness and quarrels.

A good leader is one who realizes his or her need of counsel and advice. The wise pastor will listen to those God has placed under his authority.

Little by Little (verse 11)

In verse 11 Solomon told his readers that dishonest money would dwindle away. There may be two reasons for this. First, those who obtain money by dishonest means do not fully appreciate the value of that money. They have not had to work hard for it and do not care for what they have. Second, their money dwindles away because they are not in a right relationship with God and are under His curse. They experience what the people of Haggai's day experienced.

"You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." (Haggai 1:6)

This is not the case for the righteous person who works hard for his or her money. Those who work hard to earn an honest living understand the value of the money they have earned. They are wise stewards of what God has given them. They use it wisely. God honours their hard work and pours His blessing on them.

Hope Deferred (verse 12)

Have you ever prayed for something for a long time and did not see an answer? When I was young I remember waiting for a package to arrive in the mail. Every day I watched to see if it had arrived. It seemed like it took forever. Sometimes we long to see God doing something but it seems that He is not answering our prayer. How discouraging this can be.

What a difference it makes, however, when our longing is fulfilled. Solomon compared this to a person eating from the Tree of Life. This tree, according to Genesis and Revelation, gives life and healing. Like a mother in labour forgets the pain of her labour at the sight of her new born baby, so the fulfilling of a longing brings healing and life back to those whose heart was sick.

What is your hope and heart cry today? Don't lose hope. Wait on the Lord and keep your burden before Him. The day may yet come when you will see its fulfillment and all the pain and struggle will be worth it.

Instruction, Teaching and Understanding (verses 13-15)

Solomon returns again to the importance of listening to instruction. He told us in verse 13 that those who refused to be instructed would suffer. There were great blessings in listening to instruction. The teaching of the wise was a fountain of life (verse 14). In other words, those who listened to wise instruction would be refreshed by this life giving fountain and preserved from the snare of death. In verse 15 Solomon also reminded his readers that the one who listened to good understanding would gain favour. They would gain favour with God and with people. People would respect them for their humility to listen but also for

the growing wisdom and discernment, gained through listening to instruction.

Those who refused to listen to wisdom, teaching and understanding would suffer the consequences of their pride. Without instruction in wisdom and understanding they would fall into the snare of death (verse 14). Their path would be difficult because they were not guided by wisdom and discernment.

Acting out of Knowledge (verse 16)

The prudent man was a man who acted out of knowledge. Notice that knowledge is to be acted on. Knowledge that is stored in the brain but never works its way into life is of very little use. The difference between the prudent man and the fool has to do with the application of knowledge. The prudent and wise man applies knowledge to life. The fool may have a great accumulation of knowledge in his head. You can have great intelligence and still be a fool because the knowledge you have is not acted out in life. The fool is recognized by his inability to apply knowledge to life.

Trustworthiness (verse 17)

Trustworthiness is very important in our society and workplace. Solomon tells us that the trustworthy envoy brings healing. Imagine what our society would be like without people we could trust. Trust is vital for every society and relationship. Trustworthy people bring healing to our society. They restore confidence and health to relationships. A wicked person who cannot be trusted only brings trouble, broken relationships and a breakdown of society.

Discipline and Correction (verse 18-19)

The person who ignores discipline will come to poverty and shame. We all need to be disciplined and corrected. Not one of us is able to live a perfect life. Wise people will seek correction because they know that correction will only make them better. In the end, the person who accepts correction will be honoured.

"A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul," Solomon tells his readers in verse 19. The problem with our longings, however, is that they do not come easy. Victory is not won without a battle. The diploma only comes after long hours of study and discipline. The race is won only after strict training. The fulfilling of a longing is very sweet to the soul. Solomon reminds us, however, that the fool does not want to turn from evil. That is, he will not be corrected. He wants his own way. This will only act as a barrier to his longing. Only those who accept correction and discipline can experience the sweetness of a fulfilled longing.

Companions (verse 20-21)

The friends we have will influence us either for good or for evil. Solomon reminded his people in verse 20 that those who walked with wise people would themselves grow wise. It is not difficult to see how this is true. Peer pressure is a very powerful force. We would do well to choose friends who can be a positive influence on us for righteousness.

The Inheritance of the Righteous (verse 21-22)

Solomon reminds us that the companion of fools will come to ruin. "Misfortune pursues the sinner," he told his readers in verse 21, "but prosperity is the reward of the righteous." There is blessing in living a life of righteousness. God will honour those who follow Him. They will leave an inheritance for their children (verse 22). The wealth of the sinner, however, will ultimately be given over to the righteous. This may not always happen in this life but we can be sure that the wealth of the wicked will be stripped from them. Only those who walk with God and serve Him will know the fullness of blessing that God has reserved for them alone. The wicked will be stripped of everything and judged eternally.

Injustice (verse 23)

As if to remind us that this inheritance of the righteous will not always be evident in this life, Solomon tells us that while a poor man's field may produce abundant food, injustice sweeps it away. We are living in a world filled with injustice and evil. Things happen in this world that are difficult to understand. Sometimes it seems that evil rules. Through injustice, the poor are stripped of the little blessings they have in life. We need to be encouraged in verses 21-22. While injustice reigns in this world, God will bless those who are faithful to Him. Injustice will be defeated. God will strip the wicked of unjust gains and give them to those who love and obey Him.

Discipline (verse 24)

Again, Solomon underlines the importance of correction and discipline in our lives. Parents who love their children will discipline and correct them. Imagine a parent who did

not train or correct their child. What would the child be like when he grew up? The parent who loves his or her child will do everything they can to train that child in the way he or she should go. This will sometimes mean correction and discipline. While that correction is not always pleasant it is for the good of the child. The same is true for us in our relationship with God. God will correct and discipline us as well. He does so for our good. All who accept this correction will be better for it.

Contentment (verse 25)

Solomon concluded this chapter with a final word about the blessing of living a righteous life. "The righteous eat to their hearts' content," he told his readers. God will care for His people. We need to understand this in the context of what Solomon tells us about injustice in verse 23. Sin and evil have affected this world tremendously. There are times when the righteous do suffer. Solomon is telling us that God's blessing is on those who love Him and He will care for them. God will deal with injustice and evil that strips His people of their needs. In the end, the wicked will be punished and go hungry.

For Consideration:

- Does being wise mean that we have an answer for everything? What does Solomon teach us about the need to accept instruction and correction?
- What is the difference between having our desires satisfied and getting what we think we want in life?
- How important is trustworthiness? What impact does trustworthiness have on a society?

- What does Solomon teach us about the dangers of riches? What particular challenge do you take from this?
- How important are the friends we choose? How do they impact the type of life we enjoy?
- What do we learn here about ultimate justice? Will we always see justice in this life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more open to learn from others.
- Have you been satisfied in the Lord? If not, ask Him to strip away anything that would distract you from complete satisfaction in Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is completely trustworthy and just. Thank Him that He will always deal with sin and evil.
- Ask God to show you His purpose for your life. Ask Him to give you grace to work faithfully toward that purpose.
- Ask God to restore truth and justice to your society.

14

WISDOM, DISCERNMENT AND JOY

Read Proverbs 14:1-17

The Wise Woman (verse 1)

Solomon begins chapter 14 with a word about a wise woman. Scattered throughout this book of Proverbs are passages that speak about his deep admiration of wise and strong women. Here in verse 1 Solomon elevates the woman of wisdom. Notice that he tells us that the wise woman built her house. He recognized the vital role of the woman in the family unit. As a wise woman she managed her household well. Her family was indebted to her for her skills and ability. Her efforts served to strengthen and build the members of her household.

So many problems have come about in our society because the family unit is not as strong as it needs to be. Solomon takes a moment here to recognize the

tremendous value of a woman who manages her home with skill and wisdom. He also condemns the woman who does not take this role seriously.

Fearing the Lord (verse 2)

The fear of the Lord will affect how we walk. Solomon tells us in verse 2 that the person whose walk is upright fears the Lord but the one whose ways are devious despise the Lord. To fear the Lord is to reverence and respect His ways. You cannot say that you fear the Lord if you are not walking in His path. No one who does not live in obedience to God can be in a right relationship with Him. Solomon goes as far as to say that the person who does not walk in a manner that respects and reverences God, despises Him. That is to say, they treat God with disrespect and openly dishonour His name.

We can measure our fear of the Lord by the life we live. Does our life reflect His heart? Do we walk in a way that brings Him honour and glory? The person who loves and respects God will demonstrate this in how he or she lives.

The Lips of the Wise (verse 3)

There is another way that our fear of the Lord is proven. Solomon tells us in verse 3 that the lips of the wise will protect them but the talk of the fool brings a rod to his back. In other words, those who fear the Lord will demonstrate reverence and respect for His name in the use of their words.

Notice that Solomon tells his readers that the lips of the wise protect them. This is quite obvious from a practical point of view. The liar and deceiver will be punished not

only in this life but also in the judgment to come. The person whose words are true and honest generally does not have anything to fear.

The Right Tools (verse 4)

"Where there is no oxen the manger is empty," Solomon told his readers in verse 4, "but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest." When a farmer does not have strong oxen to help plow the fields, the harvest is not likely to be very good. The barns will be empty in the day of the harvest.

Solomon is telling us that that if we want to see a good harvest we need to have the right tools. The tool of the farmer was his oxen. The farmer understood the value of those oxen and cared for them because he knew his harvest depended on their health. This principle also applies to other areas of life. For a number of years now I have been writing these devotional commentaries. I have been doing this for a very particular reason. It is my desire to provide believers around the world with the tools they need for growth and maturity in their walk with God. Without the right tools, the work will suffer. If the work of the kingdom of God is to be advanced, we need to take advantage of the tools God has given us for its advancement.

Truth (verse 5)

God is seeking people who are true witnesses. As His servants we are to be absolutely honest in our dealings with others and in what we speak. This means that people should be able to count on what we say. They should be able to trust to be people of integrity.

Knowledge (verse 6)

Knowledge comes easy to the discerning (verse 6). The mocker, however, seeks wisdom but cannot find it. Solomon tells us that there are two types of people in the world.

First, there are those who are mockers. These individuals do not take God into account. They live their lives in human wisdom. They see God as a crutch for the weak. They look to science, medicine and technology for their answers. While these individuals are very wise in the ways of the world, true knowledge escapes them because they do not turn to God and His Word.

The second type of person is the discerning. These people understand their need of God. They look to God for answers to life. They are obedient to the Word of God and seek God's purpose and ways in that Word. Solomon tells us that these individuals find the wisdom and understanding they seek. They find meaning and purpose in the Word of God.

As wise as mockers may be in the eyes of this world, they will lose everything in the end. They are walking down a path that leads to destruction.

Fools (verses 7-9)

In verses 7-9 Solomon tells his reader to stay away from the fool. We need to understand here that the fool does not necessarily lack intelligence. The fool can be very intelligent in the eyes of this world. Solomon tells us in verse 7 that we will not find knowledge on the lips of the fool. The knowledge Solomon speaks about here is not worldly knowledge but true spiritual understanding and wisdom.

We have all had intelligent teachers who have taught us much about this world but who know nothing about spiritual matters. Solomon is challenging us to seek the company of those who know the Lord and love His ways.

In verse 8 Solomon reminds us that the fool's folly is deceptive but the prudent give thought to their ways. This tells us something about those who do not seek God for their wisdom and understanding. They live in deception. Not only are they deceived themselves but they also deceive others. Those who love the Lord and His ways are wise. They are careful to give thought to their ways. They submit their ways and words to the Lord and His purposes.

According to verse 9 the fool mocks the idea of "making amends for sin." The fool does not submit to the Lord God and His ways. Their concept of sin has been distorted because it is not governed by the Word of God. They do not see the need to repent of sin and be made right with God. This is very dangerous. The result is an abundance of sin and corruption in society.

The righteous, on the other hand, see the need of repentance and reconciliation. They will do their best to live in harmony with God, His Word and their fellow citizen. This will have a tremendous impact on their society. Wisdom accepts God's purpose and will.

Bitterness and Joy (verse 10)

Each heart knows its own bitterness and no one else can share its joy. Paul tells us in Romans 12:15 that we are to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." It is clear from this that God has called us to share the joy and sorrow of our brother and sister. Having said

this, however, we need to understand what Solomon tells us in verse 10.

"Each heart knows its own bitterness." None of us will ever be able to walk through life with no struggle or pain. No one, apart from God can fully understand our experience of that pain. People respond differently to similar situations in life. We need to remember this when we counsel or seek to comfort those who are suffering. We cannot expect everyone will respond like we do to problems. Each heart knows its own bitterness.

What is true for bitterness is also true for our joy. While we can comfort and encourage each other, our experiences of joy and sorrow will differ from one person to another. God has created us differently. None of us are the same. There is a joy and there is a sorrow that is unique to each person and no one else can really know but that person and God.

The Righteous will Flourish (verse 11)

Solomon reminds us in verse 11 that the house of the wicked will be destroyed but the tent of the upright will flourish. Notice the words used here. The wicked are living in houses while the righteous are living in tents. While the wicked may seem to prosper, their luxurious houses will be destroyed. Their wealth and prosperity will not last. The righteous may not have as much money or comfort as the wicked but their future is secure. They will flourish even though they do not have what the wicked have.

We need to see that prosperity in God's eyes is not about money and worldly possessions. The righteous in this verse do not have what the evil person does, but they are flourishing in God's eyes. To flourish in this sense has to

do more with our relationship to God and our riches in Him than it does with what this world offers. We can have everything this world has to offer and still not flourish.

Outward Appearance (verse 12)

Solomon challenges us not to be deceived by outward appearance and worldly logic. Satan will dress up sin to make it attractive. He will make sin and rebellion seem logical. I have often spoken with individuals who were deceived by Satan in this way. They tried to justify their sinful or careless action by logical explanations and careful human reason. Satan used this careful reasoning in the Garden of Eden. He made the fruit of the tree look attractive. He showed Eve all the benefits of eating from that tree. When she ate she took all of humanity with her into sin.

Solomon reminds us that we need a better guide than human wisdom and sight. Our eyes and our minds can be deceived. Only God's Word can guide us through this world and protect us from the snares Satan has set before us.

Laughter and Grief (verse 13)

Continuing on in the same theme as verse 12, Solomon tells us that not everything is what it appears to be. He tells us in verse 13 that even in laughter the heart can ache. We have all met individuals who appeared to be happy and joyful people who carried a deep pain in their heart.

Joy may end in grief. Imagine the joy of a mother who gives birth to her newborn child. As the years pass however, that joy is turned to grief as the child wanders in rebellion. Things are not always what they appear to be in this sinful

world. Even our joy and happiness can be stripped from us in an instant. How thankful we need to be that those who love the Lord have a hope of something better. In the presence of God we will have perfect joy and peace. No heartache will hide behind our laughter.

Faithfulness will be Rewarded (verse 14)

While this life is filled with uncertainties, God promises to reward our faithfulness. God is not blind to our actions. In His time He will reward those who remain faithful to Him.

Think About It (verse 15)

In verse 15 Solomon challenges his readers to give careful thought to their steps. In light of the fact that not everything is what it appears to be on the outside, we need to be careful to submit everything to the microscope of God's Word. The simple person will believe anything but prudent and wise people will consider what they hear and submit it to the teaching of true wisdom as found in God's Word.

Hotheadedness (verses 16-17)

Wise people are those who have submitted themselves and their actions to God. They reject sinful ways. This is not the case for the fool. The fool is "hotheaded and reckless." They are not in control of their emotions. They are quick tempered and respond out of anger and bitterness. While the wise person is guided by God's Word, the fool is governed by emotions.

For Consideration:

- Solomon recognizes the importance of family in verse 1. What have you been doing to strengthen your family?
- How do our actions show what we think about God?
- What tools has God given you for maturity and service? Are there people around you that lack those tools? What can you do about it?
- What is the difference between worldly knowledge and the truth of God?
- What does Solomon tell us about the deception of evil? Why is it important that we submit everything to the microscope of God's Word?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you discerning eyes to see the deceit of Satan in this world.
- Thank the Lord that He has given you His Word to be your guide.
- Do you know people who are being deceived by the enemy? Ask God to open their eyes to the truth.

15

WEALTH, FRIENDSHIP AND BLESSING

Read Proverbs 14:18-35

It is true that often in this life the wicked seem to prosper. In Proverbs 14:18, however, Solomon reminds us of the temporary nature of the blessings of the wicked.

The Inheritance of the Simple (verse 18)

"The simple inherit folly," Solomon said. The simple are those who refuse to walk in the ways of the Lord. They are simple because their minds have been closed to the truth. They live for this world and its pleasures but know nothing of the richer blessings of eternity. These people, says Solomon, will inherit folly. In other words, they will look back on a life, lived in luxury and comfort and realize how foolish they were to ignore the realities of the eternal kingdom of God.

The wise person, on the other hand, is crowned with knowledge. He has a true understanding of life and its

meaning. He has knowledge of God and His kingdom. He does not live for the temporary pleasures of this world but for eternity.

Solomon reminds us that evil people who do not acknowledge God will one day bow in the presence of those who are good. They have their time on this earth. They may rule over the righteous and oppress them. The day is coming when they will take their place at the feet of those who love the Lord. They will be judged for their evil and the righteous will rule over them.

We ought never to envy those who are evil. They may have everything their heart desires in this life but they will perish in the end.

Friends for the Rich (verses 20-21)

Human nature is such that it admires those who are wealthy according to the world's standard. When we see someone who is rich and influential we want to know them. We see them as being important and consider it an honour to be their friend. This is not the case with the poor. Human nature tends to push aside the poor. Who would boast of being a friend of a person who had nothing? The poor are often shunned but rich people have many friends.

How important it is for us to be aware of this tendency. Jesus is described in Matthew 11:19 as being a friend of sinners. He was aware of the needs of the poor and often reached out to them. Solomon went on in verse 21 to tell us that the person who despised his neighbour sinned. The context would lead us to believe that this neighbor was poor. To despise a neighbor because he or she is poor is sin. Solomon challenged his readers instead to be kind to their needy neighbour (verse 21).

Planning what is Good (verse 22)

Continuing on in the theme of showing compassion and kindness to one's needy neighbor, Solomon told his readers in verse 22 that those who plotted evil would go astray but those who planned to do good would find love and faithfulness. There were those who oppressed their needy neighbour. Maybe they did not like them in their neighborhood and did what they could to get rid of them. Maybe they denied them justice. Maybe they simply despised them and ignored their needs when they had the power to help them. Solomon reminds us that those who did this strayed from the purpose of God. They would be judged as transgressors of God's Word.

On the other hand, those who planned what was good would find love and faithfulness. Notice that there is purposefulness in verse 22. These individuals see the need that is before them and choose to do something about it. They plan to do good for their neighbour and carry that plan through. Those who do this will find love and faithfulness. They will know the love and faithful provision of the Lord for their efforts. They will also know the love and faithfulness of the needy they help.

Hard Work (verse 23)

In the book of Proverbs Solomon elevates the importance of hard work. Here in verse 23 he reminded his readers that the person who worked hard would bring in a profit. There were those who had big plans. They spoke of those plans and boasted of great things they would do. Those people did not see their plans accomplished, however, because they did not work hard to make them happen.

If we want to see things happen we need to work to see them happen. While God is not dependent on us to accomplish His purposes, He does expect us to work for what we get. Unless I work hard to write these books they will never be a blessing to people around the world. We can sit back and pray for blessing but if we are not willing to be the channel, how will that blessing come? God promises to reward our efforts for the sake of His kingdom. We cannot expect fruit if we do not plant seeds and cultivate the soil. God calls us to be hard working servants. He delights to bless the wise efforts of our hands.

The Wealth of the Wise (verse 24)

"The wealth of the wise is their crown," Solomon tells us in verse 24. We need to see here that the individuals Solomon speaks about are both wise and wealthy. Solomon is not speaking here about wealthy people who do not know God and His ways. In the context of these verses Solomon has been speaking about the profit of hard work (see verse 23). The wealth of those who reverence and respect God has come to them through hard and honest efforts. Solomon is telling his readers that God rewards the hard and honest work of the wise with His blessing. The wise who have worked hard for what they receive will wear those blessings like a crown. These blessings are the reward of hard and diligent work.

This is not the case for the fool. Their wealth has not been obtained by following God and His Word. They are not motivated to honour God and live for Him. Their riches will never satisfy. Without God in their lives, those riches will only be a hindrance. They will one day be taken from them and they will stand before God with nothing. This, according to Solomon, was folly. When we do not live for God,

even our money and possessions have no ultimate meaning or purpose.

A Truthful Witness (verse 25)

Solomon tells us in verse 25 that a truthful witness saves lives but a false witness is deceitful. False witnesses will condemn the innocent. They do not care whether an innocent person lives or dies. Their only concern is for themselves and their own interest. The truthful witness, on the other hand, is concerned for truth. He will not see the innocent condemned. His concern is for justice.

The Security of Those Who Fear the Lord (verses 26-27)

Those who fear God have built their lives on a secure foundation. The fear of God is a secure fortress (verse 26). Those who respect and honour the Lord God will find security in their obedience and love for the Lord. God surrounds those who live in obedience to Him. He is a refuge for all who love and honour Him.

The fear of the Lord is also like a fountain of life. Those who reverence and respect the Lord will not only find security in Him but also refreshing and renewing. The Lord refreshes those who reverence and respect His name. This refreshing of the Lord will keep us from the snare of death (verse 27). Imagine a person walking through the desert. He is parched and dry and does not know how he will be able to take another step. There before him, however, is a fountain of living water. As he drinks that water, he is refreshed and renewed. His life is spared and he is given strength to continue his journey. Those who fear the Lord, Solomon tells us, will know this refreshing in the desert of life.

The King's Subjects

We have already seen how Solomon reminded us that a rich person has many friends (see verse 20-21). Here in verse 28, however, he reminds us that a large population was the glory of the king and without any subjects, the prince would be ruined. What kind of king would Solomon have been had he ruled over a kingdom with no citizens? No one would take him seriously. Even the servants of the king's court were important. Without these servants, the king would be ruined. The king cannot defeat his enemy without soldiers. Solomon is telling us here that every person is important. The servant is just as important as the leader. Even those who appear to be small and insignificant are important and the king's success depends on them. How careful we need to be not to look down on anyone.

Patience (verse 29)

We are reminded in verse 29 that "a patient man has great understanding but a quick-tempered man displays folly." What problem is solved by losing our temper? We only create further problems when we become angry. A patient person will wait for the right time. He demonstrates compassion and respect for others. He is not rushed to get his own way. The patient person builds relationships. He wins more friends than the man who gets angry because he does not get his way.

Peace (verse 30)

How easy it is to envy what others have. This will only make our lives miserable. Instead of envying what others have, we need to learn to be content with what God has given. If we are at peace with our lot in life, our life will be easier. Peace and contentment with what we have, gives life to our body. Discontent, on the other hand, only leads to bitterness and strife which in turn will destroy us.

Kindness (verse 31)

Kind people are content with what they have. Because they are at peace with what they have, they are willing to share with others. They have no need to accumulate more than they need.

Solomon reminds us that the one who oppressed the poor showed contempt for their Maker. God does not bless every person in the same way. He gives more to some than others. He gives some people far more than they need and allows others to have less than they need. Why does God not give equally to everyone? Obviously, the reason is so that those who have more than they need can share in the privilege of giving to those who have less. What a privilege it is for us to share in this ministry of giving. God delights to use us as His co-workers in ministering to those in need. When we show contempt for the poor, we are not only refusing to see them as God sees them, but we are also refusing to use God's resources as He intended.

When we have more than we need, we can be sure that this is not without reason. God wants to use us to be instruments of blessing to someone else. To keep what is not ours to keep, is to show contempt for God and the

blessings He intended for someone else. Those who show kindness with their wealth honour God by using His resources for the purpose for which they were intended.

The Refuge of the Righteous (verse 32)

Those who love the Lord and are in a right relationship with Him have an assurance beyond this life. They know that God promises them eternal life in His presence. Death is not an end for the righteous. Even if the righteous person loses his life, he still has the hope and comfort of eternal life. This is not the case for the wicked. They have no such hope. They are brought down to judgment.

Wisdom and its Benefits (verse 33-34)

In verse 33 Solomon tells us that "wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning and even among fools she lets herself be known." Solomon may be saying that the wisdom of the discerning is evident even to those who do not follow the Lord. The blessing of God that comes from this wisdom is evident even to the fool. This interpretation fits what Solomon says in verse 34. Here he told his people that righteousness exalted a nation. The wisdom of those that lived according to the righteous principles of God had an effect on the nation as a whole. When God blessed a nation because of His people, even the fool benefited from that blessing. The presence of godly people, like light and salt, enhanced the lives of all who lived in that community.

A Gentile woman came to Jesus one day seeking His touch. Jesus responded to her in Matthew 7:27:

"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

Hearing this, the woman responded: "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Matthew 7:28). In other words, even those who do not follow the Lord and His ways benefit from the blessing of the Lord on His people.

The wisdom of the wise and the benefits that come to those who live godly lives will be evident and experienced to some extent even by those who do not love God. Unbelieving children in godly homes enjoy the blessings of God on their parents. A nation will experience the fruit of the blessing God pours on His people in their midst. Righteousness will exalt a nation.

A Wise Servant is a Delight (verse 35)

A wise servant will delight the heart of the king but a shameful servant will only incur his wrath. Those who live according to the wisdom of God will know God's wonderful blessing. They will delight His heart. In a similar way, those who live a godly life will be a blessing and delight to their nation. As believers, we ought to be a delight to those we meet. We are light in a dark society and salt in a decaying world.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this passage about the futility of life without God?

- What challenge do you find here about being a friend to the poor and needy?
- Have you ever found yourself judging someone based on their wealth and influence in society? Why is this wrong?
- What does Solomon teach us about contentment and peace with what God has given us?
- What effect does righteousness have on our society?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be a friend to those in need. Ask Him to help you to use what He has given to minister to others.
- Thank God that He delights to bless our efforts for the kingdom. Ask Him to show you how He would have you serve Him.
- Thank the Lord for the security and refreshing He gives those who live in the fear of His name.

16

WORDS, CORRECTION AND CONTENTMENT

Read Proverbs 15:1-33

In chapter 15 Solomon speaks on a variety of subjects. He begins with some thoughts about words.

Words (verses 1-4)

In verses 1-4 Solomon has several things to say about words. In verse 1 he reminds us that the way we use words is very important. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger," he tells us. A gentle answer is an answer that takes into account the person who is receiving the word. We can speak the truth in a harsh way. We need to speak truth but we should also learn how to speak truth in love, considering how it will be received by the person to whom we speak. There are those who feel that as long as what they say is true they don't have to worry about their intentions. This is not the case. You can preach the truth from the pulpit with bitterness in your heart. You can hurt a person unnecessarily, depending on

how you speak that truth. To speak with gentleness is to consider how the person to whom we speak will receive the word. It is true that the truth will sometimes hurt but it is not our intention to hurt people with our words. A sharp knife can be very useful to the surgeon but in the wrong hands it can also kill. The same is true for our words. A gentle answer will soothe a troubled spirit but truth spoken without respect and consideration for the person for whom it is intended can stir up trouble.

Solomon reminds us in verse 2 that the mouth of the fool spills out foolishness. Fools do not weigh their words. They say whatever comes to their mind. They do not consider the outcome. The wise person, however, speaks words of knowledge. These words are carefully weighed.

How often have we spoken words without discernment? To speak whatever comes to our mind without discerning the usefulness and benefit of those words is foolish. The words that come from our mouths should be words of wisdom and knowledge. We need to consider that the eyes of the Lord are everywhere (verse 3). He sees what we do and hears what we speak. We will give an account to Him for our actions and words. We need to be careful to consider the words we speak.

The tongue is a powerful tool. Words have the potential to bring life and healing but they also have the power to crush and destroy (verse 4). It may be that we will have to answer to God more for our careless words than for anything else. A careless word spoken to our spouse or children can affect them for life. How many people have never reached their potential because someone told them they would never amount to anything? How many people, on the other hand, have taken steps of faith and moved on to great things because they were encouraged by a word from a

brother or sister? We need to learn how to use our words so that our tongues bring healing and life. We will be judged for the damage our words have caused.

Correction (verse 5)

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon repeatedly challenges his readers to listen to correction and to accept discipline. He reminds us that it is only a fool who spurns his father's discipline. Correction and discipline are the means by which God draws us closer to Himself and imparts greater wisdom. It is not easy to be corrected but those who accept it will benefit.

The Treasure of the Righteous (verse 6)

Solomon tells us in verse 6 that the house of the righteous contains great treasure. We should *not* see from this that the righteous will be wealthy in this world's goods. To limit treasure to money and possessions is to miss the teaching of the Scripture as a whole. The wealth of the believer is far greater than what this world offers. He who has all the wealth of the world but does not have Christ has nothing. The treasure of the righteous is far greater than worldly wealth. The righteous have the blessing of salvation and peace with God. They know the fellowship of His Spirit and walk in His blessing. The house of the righteous is filled with blessing even though they may not have money and possessions.

This is not the case for the wicked. Their income only brings them trouble. What this world offers will never satisfy. The fool may have all that this world has to offer and still be discontent and unsatisfied.

Lips of the Wise (verse 7)

Solomon returns to the use of words in verse 7. Here he simply repeats what he said in verse 2, reminding us that the lips of the wise spread knowledge. The knowledge spoken of here is not worldly knowledge. There are many people who have great understanding of this world. These individuals, however, do not know the Lord and His purposes. Those who do fear the Lord, however, will be people who honour Him in the way they use their words. When they speak, they speak from a heart that is in tune with God and His purposes. They speak a wisdom that is not of this world. They share a wisdom that this world needs to hear. They do not hide what God has given them but share freely the purpose of God for life with all who will listen.

What God Detests (verses 8-9)

In verses 8-9 Solomon tells us that there are several things God detests. In verse 8 he tells us that that Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked. We should not see the sacrifice of the wicked to be a pagan sacrifice to a foreign god. The sacrifice Solomon refers to may be a legitimate sacrifice to the Lord God. God does not look merely at the outward action but also at the heart of the person bringing a sacrifice. When He sees a wicked person coming into the temple to worship with a sinful heart, He refused their sacrifice. Solomon goes as far as to say that God detested the sacrifice of the person who came before Him with a sinful heart.

Solomon tells us in verse 8, however, that the prayer of the righteous pleases the Lord. What is important here is the condition of the heart. God is more interested in the motivation of the heart than He is in the outward actions. God

detested the ways of the wicked but loved those who pursue righteousness from their heart (verse 9).

Correction (verses 10-12)

Once again Solomon returns to the importance of correction and discipline in our lives. He reminded his readers that discipline would await those who left the path (verse 10). This discipline would not be pleasant but the person who hated correction would die. Discipline is a necessary part of life. Without it we wander down the wrong path and perish. Parents who love their child will correct them. This is how it is with God. He disciplines us because He has great plans for our lives. His desire is that nothing hinder us from accomplishing His purposes.

In verse 11 Solomon tells us that Death and Destruction lie open before the Lord. What we should understand is that hell and the grave are open to the Lord's all seeing eye. He sees what is taking place in these places of horrible torment. These places are presently unseen to our human eye but not hidden from God. God knows all about the path of Death and Destruction. He knows when we are heading directly for that path and will not hesitate to stop us by correcting and disciplining us for our good. According to verse 12 it is only the mocker who will resent such correction from God. Would you resent someone who interrupted your schedule to save your life? Would you resent someone who wounded you to spare you from even greater harm? So it is with the correction of the Lord. His correction may be painful, but only the fool would resent being corrected by God who has their best interests at heart.

The Happy Heart (verses 13-15)

Solomon reminds us of the importance of a happy heart. When our heart is happy it will be reflected in our face (verse 13). People will see the happiness of our heart in our behaviour. What a powerful testimony this is to a world seeking meaning and happiness.

When our heart aches our whole spirit is crushed. This too is evident in how we act and look. It is hard to hide a crushed spirit. Those who live under oppression will find that their days are "wretched" (verse 14). Oppression wears out the mind and body. This oppression can be in many forms. For some it comes through the abusive actions of those around them. For others it comes through worry, bitterness or anger in their lives. All these things can drag a person down and make their lives very difficult. Each day becomes a burden. A cheerful heart, on the other hand, is a continual feast. It refreshes and restores. It brings delight and joy to the whole being.

Sandwiched between verses 13 and 15 which speak of the cheerful and happy heart is Solomon's challenge to his readers in verse 14: "The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly." In the context of this discussion on the happy heart we should understand that those who have a discerning heart will seek to find this happy heart that Solomon speaks about. They will learn to enjoy the continual feast that comes from a happy heart rooted in a relationship with the Creator.

Less is More (verses 16-17)

Wealth will not buy a happy and contented heart. In fact, sometimes our wealth stands in the way of our experience of happiness. In verse 16-17 Solomon told his readers that it was better to have little and live in the fear of the Lord than to have great wealth and live in turmoil. It was better to have a simple meal of vegetables, where there was love, than to feast on a fatted calf where there was hatred. He is telling us that we can have everything this world has to offer and still not be content and satisfied. This world's riches cannot buy a right relationship with God nor can it buy the love and devotion of close friends. Contentment and happiness can only come in the context of the fear of the Lord. That is to say, we can only know true satisfaction in the context of a right relationship with our Saviour and in contentment with what He has given.

Patience (verse 18)

Those who are hot-tempered stir up dissension (verse 18). The anger and bitterness of the hot-tempered person will only cause problems and make people angry. Their bitterness and anger is fuel for the fire. Patience, however, will put out that fire and calm a quarrel.

Laziness and Hard Work (verse 19)

Solomon describes the path of the righteous as a highway. A highway is cleared from obstacles. This is not the path of the lazy person. His path is blocked with thorns. Thorns can be removed from the path. The lazy person, however, is unwilling to put the effort into clearing them from the path. I am not sure what thorns are in your path today. In the strength of the Lord those obstacles can be removed. This may require effort on our part but the righteous person

sees the importance of removing all obstacles that hinder his walk in the ways of the Lord.

Foolishness (verse 20-21)

Foolishness and sinful ways may bring pleasure and delight for a moment but that delight is only for a moment (verse 20). This world offers "happiness" and "satisfaction" but we should not be deceived by what the world seeks to sell as happiness and satisfaction. "Folly delights a man who lacks judgment," Solomon told his readers in verse 21. The wise person is not deceived by the advertisements of this world. The wise person will bring joy to his father because he listens to his instruction. The fool turns his back on the wisdom of his mother to seek the things of this world. The "man of understanding keeps a straight course," Solomon says to us in verse 21. That is to say, the wise person will not let the temporary pleasure of sin mislead him. Instead he will choose to walk in the way of the Lord without veering from it.

Taking Advice (verse 22)

None of us are able to get through this life without others. Only fools feel that they know everything. Solomon reminds us that the sure way to fail in our plans is to refuse the counsel of others. It is not easy to seek advice. To seek advice requires that we be humble enough to realize we need that advice. If we want to succeed in life, however, we will learn to listen to others and their advice.

A Timely Word (verse 23)

While there is great blessing in receiving advice (verse 22) there is also great blessing for those who give advice. "A man finds joy in giving an apt reply," Solomon told his readers. Solomon, as one of the wisest men of his day, would have often given advice to those who came to him. He saw how people responded to his words of wisdom and advice. He saw them leave his presence encouraged and blessed because they listened. He also experienced the joy of being able to offer a timely word to those who needed it.

The Path of the Righteous (verse 24)

Those who walk in the path of righteousness keep their lives from going down to the grave. While we will all have to die, Solomon is telling us that those who walk in the path of righteousness will preserve themselves from a premature death. Sin will keep us from experiencing the fullness of life as God intended.

Pride (verse 25)

Pride is a terrible thing in the eyes of the Lord. God will judge those who are proud but preserve those who love and trust Him. He preserves the widow's boundaries so they are not taken from her. He takes up the defense of the humble. This is not the case for the proud. God's hand is against the proud. The proud live for themselves. They do not see their need of the Lord. Solomon tells us that God will tear down the house of the proud.

Pure Thoughts (verse 26)

God looks beyond our outward actions and appearance to the thoughts of our heart. There is not a thought that God does not hear and know about. Solomon tells his readers in verse 26 that the Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked but delights in those who are pure and pleasing to Him. How many thoughts run through our mind each day? Those thoughts are not voiced to anyone but they are known to God. Do our thoughts bring delight to God or do they grieve His heart?

Greed (verse 27)

Another thing that God detests is greed. Solomon told his readers in verse 27 that the greedy person would bring trouble to his family. The greedy person is one who does not want to part with his money and possessions. This type of person will not spend even what is necessary to provide for the comfort of the family. The family of the greedy person will suffer.

There is another thing that greed will do. Greed will also lead to corruption and dishonesty. In verse 27 Solomon gives an example of a person who takes a bribe. Because of their love for money and possessions, the greedy person is willing to be dishonest to make money. This leads to trouble and judgment. Solomon reminded his readers that those who hated bribes would live and be spared God's judgment.

More Words (verse 28)

In verse 28 Solomon repeats what he told us in verses 1-4. Words have a powerful impact on those around us. The

righteous person will be careful in how he or she uses words. While the fool gushes out whatever comes to his or her mind, the righteous person considers his words before speaking them. He considers whether the words he speaks will be helpful for those who hear them. This requires tremendous effort and discipline on the part of the righteous but when we understand the importance and impact our words can have, we will want to be careful about what we speak.

The Prayer of the Righteous (verse 29)

While we cannot merit our salvation by means of our good works, we can experience a deeper sense of intimacy with God by walking in obedience. Solomon reminds us in verse 29 that the Lord is far from the wicked. Their wickedness drives the presence of God from them. This is also true for the believer who lives in sin. Sin will keep us from experiencing the blessing of God in our lives and hinder the experience of intimacy with Him.

Those who walk with the Lord in righteousness will know deep fellowship with their Saviour. God will hear their prayers. When Solomon speaks about the Lord hearing the prayer of the righteous he is not just saying that God hears the words the righteous speak, he is telling us that God answers those prayers. He pours out His blessing on those who walk in righteousness.

Cheerfulness (verse 30)

In verse 30 Solomon again reminds us of the importance of cheerfulness. He told us in verse 15 that a happy heart made the face cheerful. Here he takes this a step further. In verse 30 he tells us that that cheerful face can restore the heart. Sometimes words are not necessary. A

reassuring and cheerful look from another person can make our day. Maybe this comes from a person you met on the way to work. Maybe it is the smile of a long-time friend. Somehow their presence changes things for you. You were comforted and reassured. Your heart was given confidence and joy was restored. Our cheerful disposition will have an impact on those around us for good.

In a similar way good news can bring health and healing to our bones. Good news rejoices the heart and gives life. Bad news will weigh heavily on us and wears us down but good news will lighten our step.

Rebuke and Discipline (verse 31-32)

It is hard to miss what Solomon feels about correction and discipline. Solomon was one of the wisest men who ever lived. He knew more about the world than others in his day. If there was anyone who could have gone without the advice and counsel of others it would have been him. He reminds us, however, that those who listen to life-giving rebuke will be at home with the wise. In other words, the wise person will listen to rebuke. Those who refuse discipline only harm themselves. If you want to grow in understanding and wisdom, then you will need to be corrected. It is true that God gives wisdom to His people but He does this often through correction and discipline.

Solomon concludes this section by reminding us that true wisdom comes from the fear of the Lord. In other words, we can never understand life apart from God and a correct relationship with Him. Only those who have a longing to know God and walk in His purpose know true wisdom.

"Humility comes before honour," Solomon told his readers in verse 33. If we want to be honoured and walk in the

wisdom of God, we will need to learn first to walk in humility. The humble person is one who accepts the discipline of the Lord and learns to walk in the fear of the Lord. This person will grow in wisdom and knowledge. This person will be honoured by God.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the importance of our words? What does it mean to consider our words before we speak? What harm can be done by our words? What blessing can we bring through our words?
- Why is correction and discipline important in our relationship with God? What is the connection between correction and wisdom?
- Can this world bring us true satisfaction and contentment? Where does true happiness and contentment come from?
- What does Solomon tell us about the importance of happiness and contentment in this life? Should we strive to be happy and content? What will be the benefit in our life and the lives of other?
- What is the importance of humility? What is the promise of God for the humble? What is the connection between humility, correction and discipline?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to walk in humility before Him, accepting His correction and discipline.
- Is your heart a cheerful and happy heart? If not, ask God to remove anything that would keep you from experiencing true happiness and contentment in life.
- Thank the Lord that He loves you enough to discipline and correct you.
- Ask God to forgive you for words you have spoken that hurt others. Ask Him to help you to consider your words before you speak.

17

The Ways of the Righteous

Read Proverbs 16:1-33

The Plans of the Heart (verse 1)

There have been many things I have wanted to do in my life. Not all of those plans come from God or are in His purpose. "To man belong the plans of the heart," Solomon tells us. As human beings we make all kinds of plans. Our agendas are full. We have all kinds of ideas and dreams. Solomon reminds us, however, that "from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue." In other words, it is the decree of the Lord that will come to pass. All our plans amount to nothing if God is not in them.

Notice also that God weighs the motives of our hearts in the plans we make. God is concerned about our intentions. Sometimes those motives are hidden from our own eyes. How many times have we had a passion to do something for the Lord only to discover that our motives were not for the Lord but for ourselves? Not only do we need to seek God about our plans, but we also need Him to reveal any secret motive we might have that would dishonour His name.

In verse 3 Solomon challenges his readers to commit whatever they did to the Lord and their plans would succeed. When we commit what we do to the Lord, we are

doing two things. First, we are seeking His permission to do what we do (verse 1). Second, we are submitting our attitude and motives to the Lord for examination (verse 2). The person who commits his or her ways to the Lord desires only to do what the Lord permits. Solomon promises that when we seek God about our plans they will succeed.

In verse 4 Solomon tells us that the Lord worked out everything for His own end. Not everyone will commit their plans to God. There will be those who seek to carry through their own ideas. God will use even the wicked plans of evil people to accomplish His greater purposes. Even the wicked and their ways will one day be judged and bring honour to the Lord God.

Pride (verse 5)

Those who do not commit their plans to the Lord are proud. They lift themselves up above Him and His purposes. They want their own way and their own agenda. Solomon reminds the proud that God detests their pride and will punish them for their arrogance.

Love, Faithfulness and the Fear of the Lord (verse 6)

In verse 6 Solomon told his readers that sin was atoned for through love and faithfulness. I don't believe that Solomon is speaking here about salvation. We know, however, that it was through the love and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus that our sins were atoned. Atonement has to do with reconciling two parties. Imagine that, because of an offense, a division is caused between two brothers. How will this division be healed? In some cases a fine must be paid. In other cases a wrong must be made right. In almost every case an apology needs to be made. When these things are

done, then the wrong can be atoned or made right and both parties can be reconciled.

Here in verse 6 Solomon tells us that it is through love and faithfulness that sin is atoned for. In other words, when we prove our love and faithfulness to someone, relationships are restored. Imagine that a husband has been unfaithful to his wife. How can this wrong be made right? Ultimately the only way this can be made right again is for him to prove his love and faithfulness to his wife over time. In time, she will see that he is sincere and truly loves her. The same is true in other relationships. If you have hurt a brother or sister, than make it your goal to love them and be faithful to them in every way. Prove your faithfulness and love to them and you will have regained a friend.

Solomon reminds us that the fear of the Lord will protect us from falling again. "Through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil" (verse 6). When we live in the fear of the Lord, we will avoid conflicts with people around us that require atonement.

At Peace with the Enemy (verse 7)

Again in verse 7 Solomon tells us that when our ways are pleasing to the Lord, His blessing will fall on our plans. When we walk in God's ways, He goes before us to prepare the way. Even our enemies will live at peace with us. God will blind their eyes or calm their anger so that His purposes in us will be accomplished.

We should not see from this that we will never have enemies. The life of the righteous is not always easy. We will always have enemies. What Solomon is telling us, however, is that God will give us victory. These enemies will not be able to hinder God's purpose for us.

Righteousness (verse 8)

In verse 8 Solomon reminds us that it is better to have little with righteousness than to obtain great wealth through injustice. There are those who are not content with God's plans. In their discontent, they resort to injustice to obtain what they want. These individuals live under the curse of God. They will be judged by God and lose all they have. Contentment in God's purpose has great benefit. The ungodly pursue what God has not given. The righteous learn to be happy with what God has given.

The Plans of Man (verse 9)

Again in verse 9 Solomon reminds us that while we all make plans in our heart, it is God's purpose that unfolds. We can make all the plans we want but only what God allows will come to pass.

We need to be careful that we do not take this statement of Solomon too far. There are those who feel that they can do as they please and as long as God does not stop them they must be in His will. God will not always stop us from sinning. We can make decisions that are not in agreement with the purpose of God in our lives. In this case, we will suffer the consequences but God's overall purpose will still be accomplished. God is not threatened by the detours we take in life. A clear example of this is seen in the children of Israel wandering through the wilderness. God's purpose was to take them to the Promised Land. Because of their sins, the journey took forty years. They could have arrived much sooner but the detour prolonged their journey. They still arrived in the Promised Land, but the journey was long and hard and many people left their lives in that barren wasteland. God can take you the direct route or through a

barren wasteland. He will accomplish His purpose but your decisions will often determine the route He will take you.

The Ways of the King (verses 10-15)

In verses 10-15 Solomon speaks about God's purpose for the king. He speaks here about a righteous king as God's representative on the earth. Solomon tells us several things about a righteous king in this passage.

First, the lips of a righteous king speak as an oracle and were never to betray justice (verse 10). In other words, the king was God's representative to bring justice to his country. He acted on God's behalf to punish sinful behaviour or to reward faithfulness. The king was to govern justly. All people were to be treated fairly. No one would receive special favour. Evil in all its forms was to be punished without exception.

Second, the king was to be honest in his dealings (verse 11). Solomon reminds him that honest scales and balances were from the Lord.

Third, the king's throne was to be established through righteousness. Righteousness has to do with living in a way that pleases God. The king was to rule in righteousness. He was to do everything in a way that honoured his Lord. All his decisions were to be in accordance with the purpose of God. The king was subject to God and would give an account to Him. He was not to tolerate ungodliness in his kingdom but was to fight for righteousness.

Fourth, the king was to be honest in his speech. He was to value the man who was honest. How easy it would be for the king to surround himself with those who would help him

advance his kingdom by whatever means. Solomon reminded the king that neither he nor anyone who served him was to be dishonest in their dealings with the citizens of his kingdom. Absolute honesty was to be the rule. Those who were honest were to be honoured. How we need to see this honesty in our land today.

The king's wrath, according to Solomon, was a messenger of death (verse 14). In other words, when the king was angry with a subject he had the power to take that subject's life. He was God's representative to bring justice and punish evil. The wise person would do everything not to incur the wrath of the king. On the other hand, when the king's face brightened it meant life for his subjects. He had the power to show his favour toward those who honoured him and respected his reign.

Wisdom Better than Gold (verse 16)

Wisdom is better than gold, Solomon told his readers in verses 16. Wisdom, as we have said, is the art of living a life of reverence and respect for God. We can have all the gold in the world but if we are not right with God, all this will amount to nothing in the end. Nothing can be compared to knowing God and walking in His wisdom.

The Highway of the Upright (verse 17)

Those who love the Lord and walk in His ways will avoid evil and keep their life. The ways of the Lord are perfect. Those who delight in His ways will be spared much evil. God will direct them on the path they need to take.

Pride and Destruction (verse 18-20)

There are those who, in their pride, refuse to submit to God and His purpose. In verse 18 Solomon made it clear that these individuals would suffer the consequences of their pride. "Pride goes before destruction," Solomon warned. The sure way to fall and never get back up is to allow your spirit to become proud and arrogant. As Solomon said in verse 5:

"The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished."

According to Solomon, it is better to be lowly and oppressed than to share in the plunder of the proud. The oppression of the humble only lasted for a moment but the judgment of the proud would be for eternity.

Those who were humble enough to receive instructions would prosper (verse 20). Those who trusted the Lord would be blessed. This was not the way of the proud. They felt that they were in control of their own destiny. They thought only of themselves and their comforts. They did not feel the need of the Lord. Only those who recognized their need and humbled themselves under His hand would know His blessing. The proud would be judged.

The Wise in Heart (verses 21)

There is a connection between wisdom and discernment. Solomon told his readers in verse 21 that the wise of heart were called discerning. Discernment is the ability to recognize truth from error. The discerning person is a person of understanding and good judgment. The wise person has

the ability to discern good from evil. This ability comes because he is learning from God and His word.

One of the things that amazes me is how what is perceived to be evil in one generation can so quickly become acceptable in the next generation. Our human concept of what is wrong changes from one generation to the next. It is only in the unchanging wisdom of the Lord that we can have true discernment. His Word will reveal what is right and what is wrong.

Learning and Understanding (verse 21-22)

Notice also in verse 21 that Solomon tells us that pleasant words promote instruction. In other words, when we make learning a pleasant thing for our students they are more likely to learn. When study is difficult and the teacher is harsh, students are not likely to enjoy their education. The wise teacher will seek ways to make learning a pleasant experience.

This is especially true when we consider the fact that "understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it but folly brings punishment to fools." The wise teacher, understanding the importance of learning, will do her best to encourage her students to greater heights. This is especially true for those who instruct in the ways of the Lord. This type of understanding is life for all who possess it. It is a fountain of refreshment and renewing. Those who walk away from this knowledge and understanding of God will suffer.

The Heart and the Mouth (verse 23-24)

The wise person's words come from a heart that has been touched by God. The heart is the source of our motivation and love for God. It reveals our true character. The sincere and godly character of a wise person is reflected in how he or she speaks. Their words are not idle or vain words. Each word is carefully weighed out and worth listening to. The words of the wise person promote instruction (verse 23).

Another thing about the words of the wise person is that they are pleasant to hear and promote healing of the bones. Because the words of the wise person are carefully weighed before they are spoken, they bring godly instruction and healing. The words of the wise person encourage and refresh. They also correct and warn when necessary.

Do all our words bring instruction in holiness, encouragement and refreshing? We would do well to put our words to the test. The words from the lips of a wise person reflect his or her heart. Their words are spoken with this intent. Nothing ungodly will leave their mouth.

The Way that Seems Right (verse 25)

Wisdom and discernment are very important if we are to live the way the Lord would have us live. This is especially true when we understand that things are not always as they appear. Solomon reminds us in verse 25 that there is a way that seems right but that way leads to death.

Satan has always been a master of disguise and deceit. From the very beginning he has been a father of lies. Any hunter knows that if you want to trap an animal you need

to do so by deception. The trap must be hidden, the bait must be attractive. This is how the enemy works. He will make things look attractive in an attempt to lure us into the trap he has prepared. Only those who have discernment will see those traps for what they are. The wisdom we need is found in the pages of the Scriptures and through the leading of God's Holy Spirit. We are wise if we follow this leading and instruction. It will keep us from falling into the carefully disguised traps of Satan.

The Labourer's Appetite (verse 26)

"The labourer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on" (verse 26). A rich person does not have to work to provide for their basic needs. This is not the case for a labourer. This person knows that if he or she does not work hard there will be no food on the table. Their hunger motivates them to work hard. Their hunger will motivate them to be disciplined and persevere when times are hard. When we have a reason to work, motivation will not be a problem.

The Ways of the Scoundrel (verse 27-30)

In verses 27-30 Solomon warns his readers about the ways of the ungodly. He has several things to say about them in these verses.

First, the ungodly person plans evil (verse 27). You don't have to think too hard to understand what Solomon is saying here. Listen to what your unbelieving friends are saying. Listen to the unbeliever at your workplace. It will not be long before you hear them planning to do ungodly things. They are not governed by the ways of God. They delight in evil.

Second, the speech of the ungodly is like a scorching fire (verse 27). The words of the righteous instruct and heal but the words of the ungodly burn like fire. Their words criticize and condemn. Their words mock and tear down. They are not careful about what they say. They say whatever comes from their heart.

Third, the ungodly stirs up dissension and separates close friends (verse 28). This takes place through their words. Verse 28 mentions gossip as a tool of wickedness. A story is worth more than a friendship to the ungodly. These people use their words as weapons to devour and destroy each other. This breaks up friendships and brings division among brothers and sisters.

Fourth, the ungodly will not hesitate to entice their neighbours and lead them down a path that is not good for them (verse 29). This is because the ungodly are not guided by the wisdom of God. They are motivated by their own pleasure. They invite people to join them in their evil plans. They lead their neighbour astray. Notice in verse 30 that they wink their eye, plotting perversity and evil. That is to say, they deceive, lie and manipulate to get whatever their heart wants.

We need wisdom and discernment to avoid the traps the ungodly set on our path. Those who are not guided by the wisdom of God will quickly fall into their trap.

Gray Hair (verse 31)

Solomon challenged his readers in verse 31 to respect those who were older among them. Gray hair, according to Solomon, was a crown of splendour. With gray hair came wisdom and understanding. This shows us that while wisdom is a gift from God and is contained in the

Scriptures, there is also an aspect to wisdom that comes only from years of experience with God and His Word.

Solomon told his readers that gray hair is attained by a righteous life. Solomon speaks very particularly here about those who have lived a righteous life. We need to honour the elderly among us who have lived faithfully for the Lord. These individuals have much to teach us about walking in a way that reverences and respects the Lord. We must also learn to draw from the wisdom of those who have lived longer than us. Their experience with God and His Word has much to teach us in our walk.

Patience (verse 32)

In verse 32 Solomon reminds us of the importance of patience. Patience is better than a warrior. The older I grow the more I realize that everything has a time. I have seen those who have, through impatience, taken positions or responsibilities they were not ready to assume. I have also seen those who had waited for a long time to be released into ministry. When they took that responsibility, God's blessing was on them. I have seen people wear themselves out with worry over a particular issue, to no avail. I have also seen God work in a miraculous ways for those who waited on Him.

Solomon challenges us to be patient. The person who is patient is willing to wait for God to move in His time. The impatient person feels it is necessary to take matters into their own hands. Waiting on God and His timing will always bring blessing.

Every Decision from the Lord (verse 33)

Solomon concludes this chapter with a word about God's sovereignty. He reminds us that while we cast the lot into the lap it is God who determines how that lot will fall. We can worry and burn ourselves out over issues in life. We can make our plans but only what God permits will take place. He is in control of all circumstances. How much better it is for us to wait patiently on Him and move as He leads.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between our plans and God's purposes? Do they always agree?
- Is God's purpose hindered by the "detours" we take in life? Explain.
- What does Solomon teach us about the ways of the king in verses 10-15? What does this teach us about the qualities of a good leader?
- What does God feel about pride? What is the result of pride in our lives and society?
- Why do you suppose Satan disguises his ways? What does this teach us about the importance of wisdom and discernment?
- Why is patience important? Have you always been patient? What was the result?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to enable you to surrender your plans to Him.
- Thank the Lord while we may suffer for our sin, His purposes will still be accomplished.
- Ask God to give you greater patience to wait on Him and His ways.

18

INTEGRITY, JUSTICE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Read Proverbs 17:1-28

Peace is Better than Feasting (verse 1)

Solomon spends a certain amount of time in chapter 17 speaking about relationships. He begins in verse 1 by reminding us of the importance of peace and quiet. Solomon told his readers in verse 1 that it was better to eat a dry crust of bread with peace than to have a house full of feasting and strife. This really needs no explanation. The poor person who lives at peace with his friends and neighbours has far more blessing than the rich person whose friends only seek to take advantage of him. Riches will not buy peace of mind. Money is not the measure of true prosperity. Peaceful and quiet relationships are of more value than money and possessions.

A Wise Servant (verse 2)

Position in life is not always important. A servant who is wise and faithful will be recognized as being of greater value than a disgraceful son. People are recognized for their character. Faithfulness will be rewarded. Even the poor and uneducated will be recognized for their faithfulness and diligence.

God is not particularly interested in where I was educated or the type of family I come from. He is interested in my faithfulness and obedience to Him and His Word. You might not have a high position in society. You might not be formally educated or trained but by your faithfulness and diligence you prove your worth and will be rewarded.

The Testing of the Heart (verse 3)

God is not deceived by our outward appearance or position. He is interested in our heart. Solomon reminds us that God will test and purify our hearts. He reminded his readers in verse 3 of how silver was put in a melting pot so the impurities could be removed. Gold was put in a hot furnace to be purified. The heart, however, God reserved for Himself. In other words, God Himself tested and purified the heart.

The process of testing the heart is not an easy one. This testing will come through various means. It may come from suffering and pain. It may come through prolonged periods of not hearing from God. In all this, however, God's purpose is to purge out any impurities.

Evil Lips (verse 4)

Solomon often spoke of evil lips and tongues. Here in verse 4, however, he spoke about those who listen to evil lips and malicious tongues. He reminded his readers that it was only the wicked person who listened to evil lips. It was the liar who paid attention to malicious tongues. We often comfort ourselves with the fact that we have not spoken evil, but do we listen to evil? What we need to understand is that it is the evil heart that delights to hear evil words. If you find yourself delighting in inappropriate remarks and jokes you need to examine your heart to see why this delights you so much. Solomon reminds us that what we listen to is an indication of the condition of our heart.

Mocking the Poor (verse 5)

Solomon was a rich man. In his day, he was the richest man on the earth. Notice what he tells his readers in verse 5, however. He reminds them that whoever mocked the poor showed contempt for their Maker. Solomon understood that the rich person and the poor both had the same Creator. God did not judge people by their money and possessions. To mock the poor person was to insult the God who created them.

Instead of mocking and looking down on someone who has less than we do, we are to have hearts of compassion toward them. Solomon warns his readers about "gloating over" disaster in others. Those who gloat over someone else's disaster look down on them as if they deserved the disaster that came their way. These individuals judge people on the basis of physical wealth and position. When disaster takes away a person's wealth and possessions the evil person thinks less of them. To judge a person's value

based on money or possessions is sinful and, according to Solomon, shows contempt for God.

Parents and Children (verse 6)

Grandchildren are a real delight to the aged. They are an indication that their family line will continue for years to come. Parents too are the pride of their children (verse 6). It is true that not all parents have been good parents. There is a connection, however, between parent and child that is difficult to break. The child looks up to their parents and will be influenced by them more than any other person in life. The challenge for us as parents and grandparents is to be godly examples our children can look up to and respect.

Arrogant and Lying Lips (verse 7)

Someone once said: "There is one thing worse than being a fool and that is opening your mouth and proving it." Solomon put it this way: "Arrogant lips are unsuited to the fool." A fool really has nothing to boast about. Foolishness is not something to be proud of yet there are those who prove their foolishness by boasting of their lifestyle and foolish decisions. I have met unbelievers who boasted of their sinful ways and foolish decisions. They tell stories of their foolish and evil ways in an attempt to get people to respect them. In reality they boast of immorality, irresponsibility and insensitivity.

Arrogance and the fool are like a leader with lying lips. You cannot trust what they say or do. A ruler should be one we can trust. He or she ought to be one whose word is dependable. No one wants to follow someone they know will deceive them?

Bribes (verse 8)

There are those who use bribery as a means to get anything they want in life. In verse 8 Solomon describes such a person. To this person, a bribe is a charm. If they want something they will bribe someone to get it. They will offer them money or a favour to bend the rules or speed up the process. They think that if they bribe people they can get whatever they want from them. Solomon tells us to beware of this type of person.

Covering an Offense (verse 9)

There are times in life when we will have to overlook offenses. We have all had people offend us. When we are offended, we are faced with one of two possibilities. First, we can overlook that offense and forgive the person who has offended us. Second, we can carry that offense with us everywhere we go and tell everyone we meet about what has happened to us.

If we are willing to cover the offense and forgive the person who has offended us, we will promote love and healing of relationships. If, on the other hand, we refuse forgiveness and repeat this matter to others, we will separate close friends and destroy all hope of the relationship being healed.

It is not easy to forgive an offense. We feel like justice needs to be done. We feel somehow that the other person needs to realize the depth of hurt they have caused. We want them to pay somehow for what they have done. Sometimes we feel that if we forgive and cover the offense, we are justifying what that person has done. The alternative, however, is worse. By refusing to forgive we not only

harm ourselves but risk harming many other people with our hard and rebellious attitude.

Rebuke (verse 10)

A discerning and wise person will not hesitate to receive a rebuke. This type of person realizes that rebuke and correction is the key to growing in wisdom and discernment. The wise person will not resist correction and rebuke. This is not the case for a fool. The fool hates to be corrected. A gentle rebuke will change a wise person more than one hundred lashes to the back of a fool. You can beat a fool and he will still not change his ways.

An Evil Man (verse 11)

God will judge those who are bent on rebellion. While His timing is not the same as ours, God will punish the evil person for their rebellion. Solomon tells us that a merciless official will be sent against the person bent on evil. God sees those who mock His ways and live in rebellion. In time, He will judge them without mercy. Evil will not triumph.

A Fool in his Folly (verse 12)

A foolish person acting out their foolish ways can cause great harm to a society. These individuals will not listen to reason or correction. They are not governed by principles of righteousness. Solomon tells us that it would be much better to meet an angry mother bear robbed of her cubs than an unreasonable fool acting out his foolishness. A foolish person does what they want with no regard for reason, righteousness or common sense. Because they are not guided by the wisdom of God they promote evil. This

results in the decay of moral principles in our society and leads ultimately to its downfall.

Paying Evil for Evil (verse 13)

We have already seen in verse 9 how Solomon challenged his readers to cover up offenses. He develops this further in verse 13 when he warns that the person who pays back evil for good will find that evil will never leave his house. It is hard to imagine why a person would want to pay back evil for a good done to them. Maybe they do so by speaking evil of the one who has blessed them. Maybe they try to take advantage of the person who has shown them kindness. The person who repays evil for good promotes a very disturbing kind of evil. It is an evil that curses the one who blesses. These people will live under the curse of God. That curse will not leave their home until they repent of their sinfulness.

Have you ever complained about what God is doing in your life? Have you ever disrespected parents who have provided for your needs? Have you spoken evil of your spiritual leaders? This verse ought to be a warning to us of the dangers of repaying evil for good.

Dropping a Matter (verse 14)

The desire to be right often is so strong in us that we will fight to prove our point. What we fail to take into account is that our fighting to prove our point can cause great damage. Solomon compared this to breaching a dam. What happens when a dam is broken open? All the water stored behind that dam bursts through in destructive power over everything in its way. It is better to stop an argument before that takes place. To prove we are right we are sometimes

ready to risk causing great damage. Of what use is it to be right if in the process we do great wrong?

Justice (verse 15)

All this talk about overlooking faults and dropping a matter might cause us to wonder if God really is a God of justice. Solomon reassured his readers in verse 15 that God was indeed a God of justice. He would not let the guilty go free.

We need to realize that there are times when our pursuit of justice can cause greater injustice to be done. The older I get the more I realize that life's decisions are not always clear.

Legalism pursues the sinner without taking anything but law into account. The legalist will not drop a matter until justice has been done. Solomon tells us that God despises the acquitting of the guilty. It does not bring Him delight to know that sinners are getting away with their sin. The problem, however, is that we often try to take the responsibility of judging on ourselves. There are times when we need to leave the judgment to God. Injustice and evil abound all around us. What we need to understand is that God will judge. The guilty will account for their actions. This means that we are free to forgive, drop a matter and move on, leaving judgment of the matter to Him.

Money and the Fool (verse 16)

We have already seen in this chapter that money cannot buy peace (verse 1). Solomon reminds us in verse 16 that money is of no benefit to the fool. The fool may have all his or her heart desires in this world but they will lose it all in the end and stand before a holy God to be judged.

Wisdom is of far greater value than money. Wisdom is the art of living in reverence and respect for God. It has benefits in this life and the life to come that far outweigh anything that money can buy.

Friends and Brothers (verse 17)

A true friend is one who loves at all times. You can count on friends to be there when you need them. Even when things are strained in the relationship friends will stick with each other and work things out. The same is true in our family relationships. Brothers are born to support and encourage each other in difficult times. While we may not always get along with family members, in times of difficulty, a family comes together. What Solomon is saying here is a general principle. There will always be exceptions to this principle but generally speaking there is a bond between family and friends that cannot easily be broken.

Pledges and Securities (verse 18)

In verse 18, Solomon reminds us that while family and friends come together in times of difficulty, the person who puts up security for his neighbour or strikes hands in a pledge lacks judgment. We need to examine verse 18 in light of verse 17 about friends and brothers loving and supporting each other. Imagine that you have a friend or family member who falls on hard times and is in real need of money. What do you do in this situation? Obviously, you will do whatever you can to help them. We need to be careful, however, about how we help. Solomon warns us about putting up security or making a pledge. In doing this, we take on our friend or family member's financial problems ourselves. We give their creditors the right to demand that we pay any debt our friend cannot pay. There are two problems with doing this. First, this does not encourage

our friend to take responsibility to pay his debt and could be the source of division between friends or family members. Second, by putting ourselves under this type of legal obligation, we risk not being able to pay our own bills and provide for our own family. By helping our friend we could very well be hurting our own family for whom God has given us primary responsibility.

While we are to do all we can to help our brother or sister in need, we need to be careful that in doing so we do not fall into a greater sin of not caring for those under our responsibility. This same principle can be applied to a variety of other areas of life. Imagine the father who spends so much time at work that he has no more time for his wife and family. God expects us to care for our families. Only a fool would destroy his or her own family to help a neighbour. The challenge here is to give what we can to help our neighbour without harming those whom God has put under our responsibility.

Quarrels (verse 19)

"He who builds a high gate invites destruction," Solomon wrote in verse 19. Why would a person build a high gate? There may be a variety of reasons for this. The context indicates, however, that it has something to do with quarrels. Imagine that two neighbours have a dispute. In order to resolve this dispute, one neighbor puts up a high fence around his property. What is the result? That high fence is a constant reminder of the unresolved dispute between them. It does nothing to solve the problem but only invites further quarreling and disputes.

There are all kinds of high gates we can build in our relationships. They don't have to be physical gates. They can

be attitudes or actions that keep us from resolving the matter that separates us.

Solomon tells us that the person who loves a quarrel loves sin. We all know where a quarrel leads. A quarrel is like a burst dam (verse 14). When a quarrel breaks out we can never tell what the result will be. It is fertile soil for all kinds of evil. Words are spoken and deeds done that we regret for years. Quarrels are breeding ground for sin and evil. The challenge is to pull down those high gates that keep us from resolving our dispute.

Perversity and Deceit (verse 20)

"A man of perverse heart does not prosper," writes Solomon in verse 20. A perverse heart is a crooked, twisted or perverted heart. It does not walk in the ways of God but deviates from the path. It is not governed by the truth of God's Word. God's blessing will not be on such a heart. Those who have a perverse heart may have money and possessions but they will not prosper. They will be living under the curse of God. Their heart and soul will be empty.

The same is true for the person whose tongue is deceitful. They will fall into trouble. The time will come when their lies will be exposed. Even in this life evil and wickedness will strip away their blessing. A deceitful tongue will have a direct influence on the quality of our life.

A Fool for a Son (verse 21)

"There is no joy for the father of a fool," Solomon wrote. A foolish child will only bring grief to his parents. Fools should never think that their foolishness is only affecting their life. Foolishness touches everyone we come in contact with in life. A foolish son grieves the heart of his parents. Foolish parents grieve their children. Foolish labourers grieve their employers. The fool will never know how many people are directly or indirectly affected by their foolishness. Fools will have to answer to God for the negative impact they have on countless people in this life.

A Cheerful Heart (verse 22)

A crushed spirit dries up the bones but a cheerful heart is good medicine. When our spirit is crushed we do not have energy or interest in life. Personally, when I am feeling down, relationships with others suffer. I am not able to minister to them as I should.

What a difference, however, when my heart is rejoicing and cheerful. Cheerfulness seems to give us energy to bless others. Cheerfulness is contagious. Those who have a cheerful heart want to bless and encourage others. They want others to experience the happiness they themselves are feeling. God has designed us to be happy. We are most healthy when we are cheerful. We need to seek a cheerful heart.

More about Bribes (verse 23)

Solomon reminds us of the evil of bribes. There are those who accept bribes in secret for the purpose of perverting the course of justice. This is an evil practice. Those who love the Lord will live for Him and walk in His path. They will hate all injustice and dishonesty. They will have nothing to do with distorting justice through bribes even if they suffer for it themselves.

A Discerning Man (verse 24-25)

A discerning person will keep his or her eyes on wisdom. That wisdom is found in the Word of God and the direction of His Spirit. The wise person will not get distracted by everything that comes his or her way. The fool, however, seems to move from one thing to another. They appear to be open-minded, but in reality they have no direction or conviction. Because the fool will not listen to the wisdom of his father or mother, he will only bring grief and bitterness to their heart.

In our day "open mindedness" is seen as a positive thing. The reality of the matter is that those who are open to everything have no convictions. Open mindedness can be a great hindrance and curse to a society. Imagine a man trying to get from point A to point B by following every road that he came to. Would it not be wiser for him to open a map and find the road that will lead him straight to his destination? If he wants to get from one place to another, he has to be narrow minded. Not just any road will take him where he wants to go. He needs to be purposeful and disciplined. This is the way of wisdom.

More about Justice (verse 26)

In our society innocent people suffer unjustly. Solomon saw this happen in his day as well. He saw innocent people being punished for doing right. He also saw officials being flogged because they were people of integrity. We see corruption and dishonesty all around us in business, politics and relationships. Dishonesty and injustice has become so much part of our culture that we mock those who seek to live in absolute honesty. Those who are not willing to "bend the truth" are refused a position. In a very real way, innocent and honest people are being punished. Solomon tells us that this is not a good thing for a society. We know that our society is under the judgment of God when we see good and honest people suffering for their integrity.

Use of Words (verse 27-28)

Solomon concludes chapter 17 with some thoughts about the use of words. He challenges his readers to use words with restraint. The reality of the matter is that the more we talk, the more we risk falling into sin. Those who have great knowledge are people who will be careful in how they use their words. They know how much damage can be caused by those who do not use their words carefully. They will discipline themselves to be even-tempered so that in anger they do not say things they will regret. Solomon reminds us that even a fool will be thought wise if he closes his mouth and does not speak. Our speech reveals our true nature.

For Consideration:

- What is true wealth? Does money have anything to do with true prosperity? What does Solomon teach us about this in verse 1?
- What does verse 2 teach us about the importance of being faithful?
- If we enjoy listening to evil, what does this say about our heart?
- How easy is it to judge someone on the basis of their wealth or position in society?
- What does Solomon teach us about dropping a matter and covering up an offense?
- Why is it important that we use words with restraint?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to cover the offenses of those who hurt you. Thank Him that He has done this for you.
- Ask God to give you a cheerful heart.
- Ask God to give you wisdom to know how to use your words.

19

WORDS, WEALTH AND FRIENDSHIPS

Read Proverbs 18:1-24

An Unfriendly Man (verse 1)

What is the reason for unfriendliness? Solomon told his readers in verse 1 that unfriendliness and selfishness walk hand in hand. There is great wisdom in this statement. Unfriendly people can often fall into the temptation of thinking only of themselves. They do not want to make an effort for anyone else. They do not reach out in acts of compassion and kindness. They do not think of the needs of other people.

Unfriendliness will also blind us and keep us from making sound judgments. Our decisions will not be based on what is right and godly but on what pleases us and makes our life more comfortable. Unfriendliness will cause us to lose sight of the problems of other people. The decisions and judgments of an unfriendly person will be stained with

selfish motives. Unfriendliness is not just a personality trait; it can also be a sin that should be confessed.

The Fool's Delight (verse 2)

In verse 2 Solomon reminds us of the fool and his opinions. He told his readers that while the fool had no interest in taking the time to understand things, he still had an opinion about them and delighted to share that opinion. I have met people who tell me all kinds of things about God, even though they have never once read the entire Bible. These individuals speak about God and His characteristics but they do not speak from understanding. They share their uninformed opinions with passion but they are not based on a true understanding of the Scriptures that teach about God.

Solomon tells us that the fool has many opinions. He may speak with passion and seem to be wise, but what he speaks does not come from understanding. He has never taken the time to consider the things he speaks about. The challenge is for us to refrain from speaking on matters we know nothing about.

Wickedness and Shame (verse 3)

What is the fruit of wickedness and shameful activities? Solomon tells us that wickedness will lead to contempt and shameful activities will lead to disgrace. With wickedness comes contempt. This contempt relates to how others feel toward the wicked person or possibly even how the wicked person will ultimately feel about themselves. Wicked people will not be respected nor can they respect themselves. They will be seen with contempt. The same is true for those who bring shame to a society. These individuals will be disgraced.

Words (verse 4)

"The words of a man's mouth are like deep waters but wisdom is like a bubbling brook" Solomon told his readers in verse 4. Solomon seems to be comparing human wisdom to God's wisdom in this verse. Human wisdom, according to Solomon was like deep waters. Deep water can be very dangerous. Many people have been drowned in the deep water of the sea. The wisdom of God, on the other hand, is like a bubbling brook. The bubbling brook is a source of refreshing water. Compare the man sitting quietly by a refreshing brook to the man thrashing about and ready to drown in the deep waters of the sea. God's wisdom, like the bubbling brook, is intended to bring us peace and refreshing.

Injustice (verse 5)

There were those in Solomon's day who showed favour to wicked people. Even wicked people have friends. Possibly the money of the wicked enabled them to purchase favours from those in authority. This corruption of justice meant that the innocent were suffering unjustly. Solomon reminded his readers that that this was not a good thing. Any society that allows this sort of injustice will suffer the consequences of their actions.

The Lips of the Fool (verses 6-8)

In verses 6-8 Solomon has several things to say about the words of the fool. Notice first in verse 6 that the lips of the fool bring strife. The words of the fool cause confusion and discord. The fool's words divide brothers and sisters.

Second, the mouth of the fool "invites a beating" (verse 6). The fool says things for which he needs to be punished. Because his words are harmful and divisive, the fool needs to be stopped. He is beaten so that he will not continue to hurt people with his words.

Third, the fool's mouth is his undoing (verse 7). Solomon tells us that his lips are a snare for his soul. The fool will be judged by his words. The fool will have to answer to God for careless and hurtful words spoken without thought. How careful we need to be with our words.

Solomon reminds his readers in verse 8 that the words of a fool will sometimes be received with delight. "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts," he said in verse 8. In other words, people delight to hear gossip. They take it in like delicious food. The fool will not have a problem finding people who will listen to him. The problem, however, is that he will have to answer to God for every idle and hurtful word he speaks. He will also have to answer for the damage his words caused in the lives of those he offended.

Slackness (verse 9)

God has designed things in this world in such a way that we need to work for our needs. Those who are lazy and refuse to do their part only hinder others. Imagine that you have at your workplace one individual who refuses to work. What will be the result at the workplace? Others will have to work even harder. The work will suffer because one person does not do his or her part. The person who is slack or lazy needs to realize that he is hindering others. Our laziness does not affect ourselves alone. The person who is lazy is related to the one who destroys in that he hurts others by his laziness.

The Name of the Lord (verse 10)

Solomon compared the name of the Lord to a strong tower in verse 10. A strong tower was a place where a person could find safety. The enemy could not penetrate that tower. This is what the name of the Lord is like. His name is powerful and strong. Satan and his angels flee at the authority of His name. Nature bows to the authority of the name of the Lord. Kings and worldly powers will one day bow down and confess that His name is above all other names. The angels of heaven worship His name. Those who are protected by His name are safe from their enemies. There is no greater authority than this name. No power of hell or earth can challenge the authority of this name.

The Wealth of the Rich (verse 11-12)

Solomon noticed how the rich of his day placed their confidence in their wealth. Notice how he told his readers that to the rich their wealth was a fortified city. They saw it as an unscalable wall. They hid themselves behind their wealth believing that nothing could touch them.

In verse 12, however, Solomon reminds his readers that the pride of the wealthy was the first sign of a downfall. "Before his downfall a man's heart is proud," Solomon reminded his listeners. God hates pride and will not hesitate to humble those who fall into it. While pride is a sure sign of coming judgment, humility, on the other hand, would be honoured. God will lift up the humble but defeat the proud.

Answering Before Listening (verse 13)

We have all had the experience of having people answer us without really understanding what we were saying. Solomon told his readers in verse 13 that they were to listen before they answered. While this should go without saying, how often have we stepped out into something without seeking advice? Solomon reminds us of the foolishness of making decisions or answering before we have truly understood the implications of our decisions.

The challenge of this verse to us is to see the importance of understanding where our brother or sister is coming from. Those who are involved in counseling understand the importance of listening to those they counsel. Before answering or giving advice to someone, we need to be sure we understand their problem. Someone once said that God gave us two ears but only one mouth so we need to learn to listen twice as much as we speak. There is wisdom in this advice.

A Crushed Spirit (verse 14)

The attitude of our heart is very important. I have met individuals who were in tremendous pain and yet the joy of the Lord was evident in their lives. I was involved for some years in a small church planting effort in a rural community where I live. One of the members of that group was dying of bone cancer. She had every human reason for despair. Her body was filled with pain. She was, however, filled with the joy of the Lord until her death. She seemed to brighten up the room. She was a source of blessing and encouragement to all of us in her dying days. Her spirit was not crushed by the load she bore. Instead, she found strength and encouragement in the Lord her God. Our spirit will sustain us in sickness (verse 14). I have also met

individuals who have given up hope. They did not have the strength of spirit to continue living. They became discouraged and overwhelmed by their problems. Their spirit was crushed and life did not have any more meaning. They give into death and defeat. "A crushed spirit, who can bear," Solomon asked.

The Heart of the Discerning (verse 15)

Those who are discerning and wise will seek knowledge. The knowledge Solomon speaks about here is not mere worldly knowledge, although this may be important. We need to understand that there are those who know much about this world who are not wise. Universities all over this world are filled with brilliant minds that are not wise in the Biblical sense. The knowledge that Solomon speaks of is the knowledge of God and His purposes. Those who seek to know God and understand His ways are wise and discerning people. They desire to know God more and understand His heart for them. This knowledge is not simply for the purpose of filling their minds but to enable them to walk in a closer and more intimate way with their God.

The Power of a Gift (verse 16)

It is amazing what a gift can do to soften a heart. Solomon noticed in his life that there were those who used gifts as a means to get what they wanted in life. "A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great," Solomon told his readers. While gifts are not wrong in themselves, they can be given with wrong motives. I remember standing in line in a customs office in a country where we lived for some time. As I stood there I watched various individuals secretly hand cash to the person behind the desk in an attempt to gain favour so they would not have to pay taxes on the goods they were receiving.

Over and over again the customs officer received their gifts and bent the rules.

Solomon is reminding us of the nature of human beings. We give gifts in order to prosper our own ends. This was widely practiced even in Solomon's day. It still is in our day. This means that those who have money and influence are able to pervert justice and gain favour while those who refuse to bribe suffer.

Settling Disputes (verses 17-19)

Solomon has several things to say about settling disputes in verses 17-19. In verse 17 he told his readers that the first person to present his case appeared to be right until the second person came to question him.

Some time ago I ministered in a church that had experienced severe division. The division was such that the church could no longer grow. God had called me there to help sort out the problems and help the church move ahead. I remember listening to the leaders share their understanding of the problems they had with certain individuals. What they said made sense to me until I sat down with these people individually. I realized that neither party had a complete understanding of the problem. How easy it is to listen only to one side of a problem. Listening to both sides of the issue will often give us a totally different perspective. If we are going to deal with disputes, we will need to open our mind to see both sides of the problem.

The second thing Solomon has to say about settling disputes is in verse 18. Here he told his readers that casting the lot could settle disputes and keep strong opponents apart. We should understand here that in the mind of the Israelite, the casting of the lots was a way of determining

the will of the Lord. The decision of the lot was not a result of chance but a way to determine the will of the Lord. Solomon makes this clear in Proverbs 16:33:

"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."

In Joshua 19:1, 10, 17 we see that the tribes of Israel were assigned their land by the casting of lots. In Acts 1:26 the disciple who would replace Judas was chosen by the casting of lots. If we are to understand what Solomon is telling us here, we need to do so in the context of the Jewish mindset. When I was a young boy growing up we would toss a coin in the air and guess on which side it would fall. This was our way of determining who went first at a game we would play. The Israelites would do a similar thing in their day but they would commit the decision to the Lord and accept whatever the lot determined to be the will of the Lord.

Solomon is telling us that when both parties commit themselves to do the will of the Lord, something as simple as the casting of lots can settle a dispute. In casting the lots both parties commit the decision to the Lord and let Him determine what they should do. Disputes can be settled if we are willing to let the Lord be the final authority and speak His will.

In verse 19 Solomon told his readers that an offended brother was more unyielding than a fortified city and that disputes between brothers and sisters were like barred gates. Those who are offended are often unwilling to listen to those who have offended them. When I offend a brother or sister I am building a wall between us. Sometimes that wall of offense is so thick that the offended brother or sister is unwilling to listen to anything we have to say. They

refuse to be reconciled. That wall can be very difficult to break down. In some cases, reconciliation may never come between offended parties. We would do well to give careful thought to what we say or do lest we be an offense to a brother or sister.

The Power of the Tongue (verse 20-21)

The tongue is a powerful tool. Solomon tells us in verse 21 that the tongue has the power of life and death. I remember a message spoken to all first year Bible College students at a Bible School I attended many years ago on this passage. The professor reminded each of us that by our words we could invite our brother to live, be blessed and encouraged or to die, be cursed and discouraged. What a challenge this is to us today. Our words will either build up our brother and sister or tear them down. How many people have gone on to do great things because of a word of encouragement offered in a time of decision? How many people, on the other hand, have turned from the way because of a hurtful or discouraging word? There are children who have gone through life believing a lie told to them by some careless adult. That careless word stripped them of any desire to do anything with their life, it invited them to die. Words are very powerful.

In verse 20 Solomon tells us that "from the fruit of his mouth a man's stomach is filled; with the harvest from his lips he is satisfied." There are two things we need to say by way of interpretation. First, God has determined that our words be such powerful tools for the kingdom that He will bless and honour those who used them correctly. We are blessed according to how we use our words. God honours those who use their words for the sake of the kingdom. "From the fruit of our mouth our stomach is filled." In other

words, when we speak truth and godliness from our mouth, God honours that and provides for our need.

Second, Solomon told his readers that a person will be satisfied with the harvest from his lips. I picture here a farmer who sits back and looks over the harvest at the end of the year. He realizes that all the seeds he planted are now producing fruit. It is with great delight that he watches the seeds grow and bring their fruit. The same is true for the person who plants words of encouragement and blessing in the lives of those they meet. The day will come when those seeds will begin to grow and produce fruit. What a joy it is to watch those words take root and produce abundant fruit in those we have encouraged and blessed. There is tremendous satisfaction in seeing the fruit of our words. God is pleased to use words to produce an abundant harvest.

Finding a Wife (verse 22)

Solomon was a man of many wives. It is quite interesting that he tells his readers that the person who found a wife (singular) found a good thing and received favour from the Lord. In other words, a good wife was a real blessing from the Lord.

Let me say here that there are times when we fail to see these good qualities of our husband or wife. God does not make a mistake when He puts a husband and wife together. He does so for a reason. He does so, so that we will complement each other in the work He has for us to do. Unfortunately, we do not always learn to work together and complement each other.

The challenge of this verse is two-fold. First, I need to ask myself if I am a "good" husband to my wife. This may

require making some changes so that I am in line with God's purposes for me as husband. Second, do I recognize and accept the qualities God has given my wife? If God has put us together, we can be sure that there is a purpose in this. We need to pray that God will help us to see the good qualities He has given to our husband or wife. We may very well be more favoured than we realize.

Relationships (verses 23-24)

As Solomon concludes this final section of chapter 18, he has some things to say about relationships. Notice first in verse 23 that sometimes relationships are formed on the basis of money and status in society. "A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly" (verse 23). This is a reality in our sinful world. A poor person cannot find friendship and compassion in a rich person. While there are always exceptions to this rule, the reality of the matter is that we seem to form friendships and relationships with those who are of equal status in society. Those who have money find it much harder to be friends with those who have none. Sometimes they may even resent them for having less.

Notice secondly in verse 24 that Solomon reminded his readers that the person who had too many friends would come to ruin. There may be a simple reason for this. The person who has too many friends will not be able to please them all. Trying to please all his or her friends will only lead to problems and competition. This in turn will bring ruin. It is important that we choose our friends carefully. It is better to have fewer friends who stand with us and share our vision than to have many and come to ruin.

There is a friend, Solomon told his readers, that is closer than a brother. This type of friend sticks with us no matter

what. He shares our heart and has our interest in mind. Ultimately, the Lord Jesus is that friend for all of us but God also gives us brothers and sisters who will stand with us as well. We would do well to be this kind of friend for others.

For Consideration:

- Is unfriendliness a character trait or a sin? Explain.
- What do we learn about the importance of listening and understanding before making decisions or offering advice?
- What does Solomon teach us about the importance of our words? How do our words affect others?
- How does the attitude of our spirit affect how we face difficulty?
- How do friends influence us? Why is it important that we choose our friends wisely?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a more friendly nature that seeks to reach out and bless others.
- Ask God to give you the ability to use your words wisely to build up those you meet.
- Are you facing a trial or difficulty right now? Ask the Lord to give you a right attitude toward that problem or trial.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for your marriage partner. Thank Him for putting him or her in your life. Ask God to show you their "good" qualities.

- Ask the Lord to give you friends that will stand with you and bless you in God's purpose and plan for your life.

FRIENDS, TRUTH AND DISCIPLINE

Read Proverbs 19:1-29

Poor and Blameless (verse 1)

According to Solomon, it was better to be poor and have a blameless walk than to be a fool with perverse lips. The poor man who lived a blameless life could lie down at night and sleep in peace. His conscience was clear before his Maker. This was not the case for the fool who did not guard his tongue. The man who did not watch what he said could not live at peace with his neighbour or with his God. He was guilty in the words he spoke. He would have the guilt of godless and hurtful words on his heart. No wealth could ease this guilt. He might hide his guilt with drink and possessions but he would still have to answer to God. He would be judged and found guilty before God. Better to have nothing in life than to be guilty before God for careless words.

Zeal without Knowledge (verse 2)

It is a wonderful thing to be zealous. We need more people zealous for the things of the Lord. We need to see people who are excited to worship and serve our wonderful and awesome God. Solomon reminds us that zeal, however, must be combined with knowledge if it is to be healthy and long lasting.

Some time ago I spoke with a pastor who told me that when he came to his church all the people wanted to do was study the Bible. He told me that he quickly dealt with this by shifting the focus to worshipping the Lord. While worshipping God is wonderful and important, I reminded him that it was the Scriptures that fueled worship. We need to know the God we worship. We need to understand His ways. If we are going to sustain zeal for worship and service we need to anchor it in a clear understanding of the Word. The truth that God gives us in His Word will build us up and strengthen our worship and service.

Solomon warns his readers that being hasty can cause us to miss the mark. We need to take the time to understand and consider the options or implications of what we are doing lest our lack of understanding lead us down the wrong path.

Raging Folly (verse 3)

The fool is someone who refuses to accept understanding and correction. The fool may be a very intelligent person. In verse 3 Solomon tells us that foolishness, however, will ruin the fool's life. Maybe their lifestyle has ruined their family and left them poor and hungry. The decisions of the fool leave him standing before a holy God who will judge. The fool sees the fruit of his actions and decisions but does

not care. Despite what has happened in his life, the fool still rages in his heart against the Lord. That is to say, he refuses to listen to God. He stands defiantly and shakes his fist at God. He refuses to learn from his errors. He turns his back on God knowing full well that this will mean his ruin. The fool is not ready to listen, be corrected or change his ways. He would rather go to the grave a broken man than change.

Wealth and Friends (verse 4, 6-7)

While Solomon told his readers earlier that he would rather be right with God than rich (verse 1), he reminds us in verse 4 that the rich man will have more friends than the poor man. Everyone wants to know a rich person. Nobody boasts about knowing a poor person. Somehow, when we are friends with rich people, we feel that our own position in society is raised. We feel that people will respect us more because of who we know.

"A poor man's friend deserts him," Solomon tells us (verse 4). What social or financial benefit is there for me to know a poor person? The poor person cannot help me when I am in financial need. The poor person will not give me a higher standing in society. When things get difficult, the poor man's friends desert him. When opportunity presents us with a chance to move up in society the poor man's friends will think nothing of leaving them behind to advance their own cause.

In verse 6 Solomon told his readers that those who give gifts will have many friends. Everyone likes people who make life more comfortable for them. A poor person, however, who can give no gifts or special favour, will be shunned. Even when the poor man looks for them they will

not be found. They do not want to associate with him in his poverty (verse 7).

Solomon is telling us that many friendships are based on selfish motives. We are friends with people who can help us or make our lives more comfortable. We have, for the most part, lost the art of loving unconditionally. We love for what we can get. Jesus taught us a different love. He came to love the unlovely. He gave Himself to those who had nothing to offer in return.

Justice for False Witnesses (verse 5, 9)

In verses 5 and 9 Solomon reminds us that false witnesses will not go unpunished. Verse 5 tells us that they will not go free. Verse 9 tells us that they will perish. The day is coming when these false witnesses will stand before God to give an account of their words. This may not happen immediately but we can be sure that God is not blind to their evil and the harm they have caused others by their deceit and lies.

Prosperity and wisdom (verse 8)

There is a blessing attached to getting wisdom and understanding. Solomon tells us that the person who gets wisdom loves his own soul. That is to say, he or she is living in a way that will prosper their soul. The wise person is one who seeks the will and heart of God. That person will experience the blessing of God in his life. He will know His favour and guidance.

Fools and Luxury (verse 10)

"It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury," Solomon tells us in verse 10. Imagine a fool with much wealth. How would that wealth be used? His wealth would be wasted? There is something else about a fool and his wealth. It will never bring satisfaction, nor will it save him from eternal judgment. The fool places his confidence in wealth. This is like putting one's trust in a sinking ship. The fool's wealth will not last nor will it satisfy his soul.

The same is true for a slave who rules over princes according to Solomon. We need to understand that Solomon is not expressing any prejudice against the poor slave. What he is showing us here is that background and training is important. The slave did not grow up being trained to govern. The prince, however, from the time of his birth was being groomed for leadership. Solomon is telling us that training and preparation for leadership is important. We don't send a soldier into battle without first training him or her in how to fight. We don't trust our lives to an unskilled and untrained doctor. Nor do we give the leadership of a nation to someone with no experience.

Patience (verse 11)

Patience is an important virtue in life. The wise person will learn patience. Patience is the fruit of wisdom in our lives. Solomon gives us an example of what he means by this in verse 11. He speaks of a person who has been offended by a brother or sister. The wise person will be patient with the person who has offended him and overlook the offense. In doing this he brings peace and forgiveness into the relationship. The impatient person, however, by responding in a negative or critical way, will only cause more damage and invite further offense.

The King's Favour (verse 12)

In verse 12, Solomon reminds us of the wisdom of respecting those in authority over us. The king's rage is like the roar of the lion. That is to say, it is a terrifying thing when the king is angry. He has the power and authority to punish and execute justice. On the other hand, what a blessing it is to know the favour of the king. His favour is like the dew that refreshes. This same principle is true for our relationship with God. To know His anger is a terrifying thing. The blessing of knowing His favour cannot be measured. Those who are wise will do everything to live a life that will please and honour those in authority over them. This is also true of their relationship with God.

Foolish Sons and Quarrelsome Wives (verse 13)

Not all close relationships are positive and helpful. The relationship between a father and a son is one such relationship. A foolish son can be the ruin of his father. The foolish and disobedient son can be a source of much grief and agony for a father.

Another such relationship is the relationship between a husband and wife. This ought to be the most blessed of all earthly relationships. Imagine, however, that the wife is a quarrelsome wife who is constantly looking for ways to argue with her husband. Maybe she is always finding fault with him and is never happy with what he does. What kind of life will this couple have? Solomon compares this to the sound of a constant dripping that never stops. The relationship that was intended for mutual blessing now becomes a burden and trial.

What Solomon is telling us is that even the closest relationships need work. Close relationships can destroy us if

we do not take care to respect each other and work out any problems that come between us.

A Prudent Wife (verse 14)

While Solomon compared a quarrelsome wife to a constant dripping in verse 13 he recognized the tremendous blessing of a prudent wife. He reminds us that while we can inherit houses and wealth from parents, a prudent wife is a blessing directly from God. Solomon valued a prudent and wise wife more than all the wealth and houses he had. The prudent wife is one who lives according to the wisdom of God. She has learned the art of living a life that respects and reverences God in all things. Her heart is to please God. This is reflected in every aspect of her life. A godly wife is a treasure to be valued more than anything this world can offer.

Laziness (verse 15)

God has determined in His wisdom that we are to be partakers of His blessing through hard work. This is not to say that He will always make us work for what we get. He is also a God of grace who gives us what we have not worked for. The reality of the matter, however, is that we cannot sit back, do nothing and expect that God will give us all we need. Laziness causes a man to sleep instead of working. The result is that he does not have food on his table. He cannot blame God for this. God provided the opportunity to work but he was too lazy to take that work. "The shiftless man goes hungry," Solomon said. The shiftless man is one who is idle or slack. That man should not assume that God will fill his table with food. If he is not willing to work, he should expect that his table will be empty.

In verse 24 Solomon illustrates this point even more. Here he tells his readers that laziness is self-destructive. The lazy person does not have the energy necessary to even lift his own food to his mouth. Lazy people will not take the time or make the effort to care for themselves. This may mean that they will not get the proper exercise or food. They will not take the time in the Word of God nor will they exert themselves to be obedient to God and His leading. Ultimately, they will have to answer to God for their laziness. In this life they will never reach their potential but will be sickly and weak. Laziness is an enemy that needs to be defeated before it destroys us.

Obey Instructions and Live (verse 16, 20)

In verse 16 Solomon tells us that the person who obeyed instructions guarded his life but he who was contemptuous (proud, rebellious or argumentative) would die. There are those who do not like being told what to do. They want to do things their own way. The experiences of other people do not seem to help them. They are destined to learn the hard way by falling into the traps that others have warned them about.

Solomon reminds these people that it would be better for them to learn to listen to instructions. We need each other. If we do not listen to the instructions of those who have gone before us, we will likely fall into the same traps they fell into. Their instruction and experience can be of great benefit to us. We would do well to listen. In verse 20 Solomon makes it very clear that the person who listened to instruction would learn wisdom.

Kind to the Poor (verse 17)

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done," Solomon told his readers in verse 17. We live in a world that seems to be quite imbalanced. There are those who seem to have far more than they need and those who have far less than they need. God has from the very beginning allowed this seeming imbalance. He does so, so that we can enter the joy and blessing of giving. God gives us more than we need so that we can experience the joy of giving to those who don't have.

Solomon told his readers that those who gave to the poor were loaning to God. God would repay them for what they had given to those in need. God's blessing would be on them for their acts of kindness. God delights in ministering to the poor. He is looking for people who will be channels of His blessing to the needy. If we will be channels, God will supply the resources necessary. We will also be blessed in the process.

Discipline (verse 18, 25, 29)

Discipline is a necessary part of life. When we refuse to correct those we love and allow them to continue on their evil path, we hasten their death. Would you not do what you could to stop a person from traveling down a path that would mean certain destruction? Correction and discipline are never easy but they are necessary. The future of our children depends on correction. As they learn from discipline they correct their ways and are restored to the path of life. Correction and discipline will save us from a life of sorrow and destruction.

In verse 25 Solomon reminded us that while the experience of discipline is not easy it is for our good. "Flog a mocker, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke a discerning man, and he will gain knowledge," Solomon told his readers. The purpose of discipline is to give understanding. While the flogging will never be pleasant, the reward will be greater understanding. This in turn will preserve the person being disciplined from great sorrow and harm in the future.

Penalties are prepared for mockers and beatings for the backs of fools, Solomon said in verse 29. Where would our society be if there was no means of punishing those who did wrong? Justice must be applied. For the good of our society we cannot allow sin and evil to remain unpunished.

A Hot-tempered Man (verse 19)

The hot-tempered man is a person who needs to be disciplined. We have all met individuals like this. These individuals have no control over their temper. They are easily angered. When they get angry there is no way of knowing what they are capable of doing. In anger they lash out at those who have offended them.

Solomon noticed that this kind of man could be punished for his angry outbursts but he would not learn from it. The next time someone offended or upset him he would fall into the same trap.

How important it is for us to get to the root of our problems. We can train branches by correcting them but if the root is bad, the fruit also will be bad. Correction does not always change the heart. Only God can change the heart.

Man's Plans and God's Purposes (verse 21)

God is Lord over all our plans. We can make all the plans we want but we have no control over our destiny. In an instant, all our plans can be stripped from us. Only what God allows will take place. How foolish it is to think that we can control our destiny. Our lives are in the hands of the Lord. He gives and takes life as He pleases. He blesses or strips His blessings from us as he sees fit. It is for us to submit to His plan.

There is another thing we need to see here. We can make all the plans we want but none of those plans will change God's overall purpose. God has a plan for this world and our plans will not hinder that purpose. No plan of evil man or demon will ever be able to change the course of God's purpose for those who love Him.

This does not mean that we can do as we please. The shape and colour of our lives will change according to the decisions we make in life. You can make bad decisions that will have dangerous implications on your life. You can make foolish decisions that will result in a wasted life for which you will have to give an account to God. God's purpose for this universe will not be changed, however, by the decisions we make. Sin will be defeated, justice and righteousness will triumph. Nothing we do will affect this great overall plan of God. We will suffer the consequences of our decisions but God's plans are above ours and will prevail.

Unfailing Love (verse 22)

What a blessing it is to know that we are loved. Every person on this earth needs to be loved. What an even greater blessing it is to know that no matter what we do or what happens to us, we will still be loved. Unfailing love is a

blessing beyond all others in this life. Unfailing love brings security and comfort to our hearts. This is the type of love the Lord God has for His people. We can fall into deep sin and His love will not diminish. His love for us is not dependent on how much money we have or how much we have served Him. It is unconditional and never failing. Solomon often fell into sin but he also knew that reality of God's unfailing love.

Better to be Poor than a Liar (verse 22)

Notice in verse 22 that Solomon told his readers that it was better to be poor than to be a liar. The poor can sleep with a good conscience at night if they worked hard and lived in integrity of heart. This is not the case for the liar. Liars know they are guilty. They may hide their guilt but they cannot remove the sting of their conscience. They know they have hurt many people. They know they have made many enemies. They cannot have peace of mind. While the poor man sleeps the restful sleep of innocence, the liar lies awake at night with guilt and a nagging conscience.

The Fear of the Lord (verse 23)

We have seen from verse 22 that the liar has no peace. In verse 23 Solomon reminded his readers that the way to rest content and untouched by trouble is to learn the art of fearing the Lord. As we have said so many times in this commentary, the fear of the Lord is the art of living a life of respect and reverence to God. Those who live their lives in reverence and respect for God will have no need for concern. They live in harmony with their Creator. These individuals can rest contentedly. They will be untouched by trouble. This does not mean that they will never experience trouble in life. Trouble may abound all around those

who fear the Lord but the Lord enables them to face that trouble with peace and contentment.

The Son who Brings Shame (verse 26-27)

In verse 26, Solomon spoke to mature children. These children had grown up and were likely on their own. Solomon told these children that they were not to rob their parents or drive them out. Likely Solomon is referring to an older child who does not want the care and burden of his parents in their old age. He does not want the responsibility of providing for them in their final years. Instead of providing for his parents in their time of need, he uses his time and money for himself. There is indication here that this son even sends his parents away from his home to fend for themselves. According to Solomon, this person was guilty of robbing his parents of the care they had earned. The child who refuses to reach out to his parents in their time of need brings shame and disgrace to himself and his parents. He would answer to God for his disrespect. Jesus speaks about a similar thing in Mark 7:9-13.

Not only did this son show disrespect for his parents, but by refusing to listen to instruction, he wandered dangerously from the path of knowledge (verse 27). He would find himself on a path that leads to judgment and destruction.

Corrupt Witnesses

There have always been those who have been willing to twist the truth even though this meant serious consequences for an innocent party. These individuals do not hesitate to lie to protect themselves or make others look bad. They care nothing for justice or truth. They "gulp down evil" like cheap wine. They are evil people who will one day face their Maker and answer for their sinful actions.

For Consideration:

- Solomon tells us that a right relationship with God is of greater value than wealth and possessions in life. Do you agree with this? Do you know of modern day examples to prove Solomon's point?
- Solomon reminds us in this chapter that even close relationships can turn sour if we do not work hard on them. Do you have relationships that need some work? Explain.
- What does this passage teach us about the heart of God for the poor?
- How important is discipline and correction in life? What happens to those who refuse correction?
- What is the connection between contentment and the fear of the Lord in this chapter? Can we truly be content if we are not walking in the fear of the Lord?

For Prayer:

- Have you ever found yourself judging people on the basis of their position in society or what they could contribute to your life? Ask God to help you to see people as He sees them.
- Thank the Lord for His discipline and correction. Ask Him to change your heart and not just your behaviour.
- Thank the Lord that His purposes will never change even though we have often fallen short of His standard.

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything in this chapter you need to work on. Ask for grace to walk in victory.

21

HONESTY, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE

Read Proverbs 20:1-30

Wine and Beer (verse 1)

Solomon begins chapter 20 with a word about wine and beer. "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler," he said. Solomon warns his people about the danger of over indulging in alcoholic beverages. Countless lives have been ruined by the abuse of alcohol. Solomon called his people to be aware of the danger of misusing these drinks. Those who are led astray by them are not wise.

The King's Wrath (verses 2-3)

As a king, Solomon understood the power that was in his hands. He reminded his listeners that it was not wise to anger the king. To do so would be to risk one's life. Only the fool would get a king angry.

What is true of the king is also true of other relationships. "It is to a man's honour to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel," Solomon said in verse 3. How tempting it is to try to prove we are right. There have been times in my life when I have felt very strongly about an issue. I truly believed that I was right and the other person needed to change. I have, in those times, stood my ground and fought to prove my point. More often than not I have only succeeded in causing strife and the problem was not resolved.

There are times when it is better not to say anything than speak out and cause strife. Jesus taught us that when we are wronged we need to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). The apostle Paul challenged his readers to live at peace with each other in as much as it was possible (Romans 12:17). The call to peace and turning the other cheek is often ignored in an attempt to be "right." We fight for our rights and willingly risk offending each other in the process. Solomon challenges us to seek peace and avoid strife and quarrels. Sometimes this will mean dying to ourselves and humbling ourselves before our brother or sister.

Laziness (verse 4)

"A sluggard does not plow in season," Solomon tells us. In other words, the lazy person is not disciplined. By the time they get around to plowing their fields, it is so late in the season that there is not enough time for their crops to grow. When the time for harvest comes, they look but find nothing.

We cannot expect to harvest if we do not plant in time for the harvest. There are opportunities we miss because we have delayed too long or put off doing what we should have done. This principle is true in our ministry for the Lord

as well. Have you ever felt the Lord leading you to speak to a person and put it off only to find that that person had fallen into a sin that may have been avoided if you had listened to the Lord? Has the Lord ever asked you to speak to a person and you put it off only to find that he or she needed wisdom or encouragement? It is quite possible for us to become spiritually lazy. This will affect our personal harvest. Many of us will stand before God and realize that we had wasted so much time and effort. Solomon challenges us to diligence and discipline.

The Purposes of a Man's Heart (verse 5)

In verse 5 Solomon reminds us that the purposes of a person's heart are like deep waters. It is not always easy to discern the heart of the Lord for our lives. Even after many years of life I am still not sure I understand who God has made me to be and what His purposes are for me. How you ever wondered why you respond in a certain way or why something is important to you and not so to someone else? We are very complex people. God's purposes for us are not always easy to discern. There are things I struggle with in life that my wife does not struggle with. I am different from every other person on this earth. God has created me in a very unique way for a unique purpose. God's purposes for us are like deep waters in that they are sometimes very complicated to our simple minds.

Solomon reminds us, however, that the man of understanding will draw those purposes out. That is to say, he will tap into what God is doing. Wise people will take the time to understand what God is doing in them and surrender to that purpose. They will understand that God has made them in a special way for a special purpose. They will take the time to understand this and get in line with God's plan for their lives.

A Faithful Man (verse 6)

It is very easy to say that we love with unfailing love but words are easy to speak. The test of unfailing love is not in words but in actions. There are times when that love will be tried. Will I love when things are difficult? Will I love when things are not going my way? Will I be faithful to my wife when my needs are not being met? Will I stand with my friends when they turn their back on me? Solomon reminds us that there are many people who claim to have unfailing love but fewer demonstrate this in the tough times.

The Righteous Man (verse 7)

The righteous man leads a blameless life. In saying this Solomon is not saying that this man is perfect. None of us can live a perfect life. Blamelessness does not mean perfection. The blameless man is one who, when he falls, makes things right. He refuses to remain in sin. Just this morning I had to phone my wife to apologize for being insensitive to her before I left in the morning. A blameless man will repent and be reconciled with those he has offended. He will not allow sin to remain in his life. He will get up when he falls. He will return to the path of righteousness when he has wandered from it. He does not live in known sin.

Solomon tells us that the children of this kind of man will be blessed. They will be blessed because God's blessing will be on this man and his family. They will be blessed because they have a godly example to follow. Our actions as parents will have an impact on the lives of our children.

The Judgment of the King (verses 8-9)

A good and wise king will seek to weed out evil from his kingdom. He will be watching what is happening in his kingdom and do his best to bring it in line with the laws of the land and the purposes of God.

Having said this, Solomon told his readers that not one of them could say that they had a pure heart and were without sin. If we know that the king searches out sin and evil in his kingdom, will we not do our best to live a godly life? The same is true in our relationship with God. The Lord God will judge sin and evil. Like the king mentioned in these verses, His all-seeing eyes search throughout the land to root out and destroy sin and rebellion. Knowing this would we not do our best to live lives that will please Him?

Differing Weights (verse 10, 23)

The Lord God sees everything and knows everything we do. He even knows the thoughts and intents of our heart. In verses 10 and 23 Solomon reminded his readers that the Lord hated differing weights and measures. That is to say, God expects us to be honest in all we do. Like the king of verse 8, the Lord God searches throughout the land for those who practice dishonesty. His all-seeing eye will judge those who are dishonest.

Actions (verse 11-12)

What we do shows our true character more than the words we speak. Solomon tells us that even a child is judged by his or her actions. A child has not had years to prove themselves to others but their character is still judged by their

actions. How much more will adults be judged by their actions?

The Lord God made ears to hear and eyes to see (verse 12). This verse may be connected with verse 11. Could it be that Solomon is telling us that what we do with our eyes and ears will show our true character? What delights your eyes and ears? This will show you what is in your heart. When you see with your eyes the need all around you, what will be your response? When you hear gossip with your ears, what will you do with it? When you neighbour cries out to you for help in a time of difficulty, will you respond or will you block your ears? Our actions will reveal our character.

Hard Work (verse 13)

Solomon extols the value of hard work. Here in verse 13 he spoke to those who loved to sleep. He told them that if they loved their sleep too much they would grow poor. God has determined that we should work for our food. While He does bless us with gifts we have not worked for, it is His purpose for us to work.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 Paul challenged the Thessalonians on this matter.

"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat."

God expects us all to do our part. We are not to depend on others if we can provide for our own needs. Idleness and laziness are not godly. Solomon challenges us, like Paul, to be responsible and work hard to provide for our own needs and those of our family.

Words and Actions (verse 14)

"It's no good, it's no good!" says the buyer (verse 14). The picture here is a market. The buyer is trying to get the seller to drop his price. In order to do this he will look for every possible fault he can find with the object he wants to buy expecting that the seller will lower his price. While the buyer really wants the object, he pretends not to like it in hopes that he will get a better deal. When the article is purchased he goes home to boast of how wonderful it really is. He quickly forgets all the faults he discovered.

What we say on the outside and what we think on the inside are not always the same. We need to be aware of this in our dealings with people. Sometimes people do not want to admit their needs or are too ashamed to share their real feelings. Wise people will not just listen to what a person is saying but they will also watch their actions. The buyer arguing with the seller about his product obviously is doing so because he wants to buy the product. The wise person will look beyond these words.

There are many people crying out for help whose words say that everything is alright but their actions and attitudes betray them. We should not be fooled by what people say.

Lips that Speak Knowledge (verse 15)

Even in Solomon's day there were people who did not understand the true meaning of life. While gold and rubies were in abundance, those who spoke true knowledge were rare. Solomon placed more value on knowledge than on gold and rubies.

The knowledge that Solomon is speaking about here is not earthly knowledge. There were many wise men in his day who understood the things of this world. The knowledge Solomon speaks about is the knowledge of God and His purposes. This is what brought delight to his heart. Solomon grieved that there were so few people who understood the meaning of life and walked in the knowledge of God. Not much has changed over the years.

Putting up Security (verse 16)

In Proverbs 6:1-3 Solomon warned his readers not to put up security for their neighbour. In doing so, they would put themselves under a burden they could not handle. Here in verse 16 Solomon warns his readers again about the practice of covering the debt of a stranger. "Take the garment of one who puts up security for a stranger," he told his readers. Let's take a moment to consider what Solomon is saying here.

A person who guarantees the loan of a total stranger is foolish and irresponsible with his money. He does not know whether that stranger will repay what he owes. Imagine that a man put up security for a wayward and immoral woman. What does this tell us about him? Will a wayward or immoral woman pay him back what she owes? Can she be trusted when her lifestyle is immoral and wayward? Solomon is telling us that the person who is so

foolish with their money as to stand behind total strangers and immoral people cannot be trusted. For this reason he told his readers that if ever one had to enter an agreement with such a person, they were to be sure to take their garment as a guarantee that they would get something from them.

Solomon is telling us that we need to be wise with our resources. God does not want us to be foolish in how we use what He has given. We should not put ourselves in a situation where we could lose what He has given us. These verses also speak to the practice of gambling. God calls us to be wise and careful stewards of His blessings and not risk losing everything by foolish decisions.

Fraud (verse 17)

There are those who gain wealth by dishonest means. Some of these individuals live in great wealth and ease. They may enjoy their big cars and homes. They may travel all around the world and experience all their heart desires. Solomon told these individuals, however, in verse 17, that their possessions would end up like gravel in their mouth. Their delight in these things would not last. They would quickly become tired of them. The world and all its riches would never bring true satisfaction.

Advice (verse 18)

None of us can live without others. God has designed us in such a way that we need each other. He has given gifts to the church in such a way that no one has all the gifts. For the church to move ahead as it should, each person is important.

In verse 18 Solomon challenged his listeners to make plans by seeking advice. If they were to wage war, they were to obtain guidance. As wise as Solomon was, he knew how much he needed the advice and counsel of others. He challenges us to do the same. None of us should think that we have all the answers. Before making any decision, it is wise to seek counsel and advice.

Gossip (verse 19)

We need to be careful with the words we speak. With the multiplying of words comes a greater chance of sinning. A gossip is one who spreads stories about others. The person who loves to talk will very quickly fall into the sin of gossip. By spreading stories about others we break confidence with them. Solomon warns us about building relationships with those who speak too much. Sooner or later these individuals will hurt us with their lips. The challenge for us here is to be careful about the words we speak lest we fall into the sin of gossiping and betraying the confidence of those who have confided in us.

Respect for Parents (verse 20)

God expects that we honour our parents. The relationship between parent and child is a sacred relationship. There are serious consequences for those who curse their parents. Solomon told his readers that their lamp would be snuffed out. The harsh judgment of the Lord would fall on the person who cursed his parents (see Deuteronomy 5:16). Any society that does not respect parents will soon find itself on a path of destruction. If children do not respect the authority of parents neither will they respect others who are in authority over them. The result will be devastating for the society as a whole.

Inheritance Quickly Gained (verse 21)

"An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning will not be blessed at the end," Solomon said in verse 21. We do not appreciate what we do not have to work for in life. We do not treat what we have received easily with respect. Those who have worked hard for their possessions usually take care of them more and understand more of their true value.

Waiting on the Lord (verse 22)

How easy it is for us to take matters into our own hands. When we have been wronged we want to make things right. We want people to understand what they have done to us. We want them to pay for their wrong. Solomon challenged his readers not to do this. Instead, they were to wait on the Lord and let the Lord deal with the problem.

This is often a challenge for us. The Lord does care for us and our need. Solomon tells us that the Lord will deliver us. Solomon's challenge for us here is to wait and watch what the Lord does. All our striving to take matters into our own hands will only hinder the good work God wants to do.

Steps Directed by the Lord (verse 24)

While we often think that we are in control of our own destiny, it is really the Lord who directs our steps. It is the Lord who brings things onto our path. He orchestrates the situations in our lives and allows things to happen to us that change the course of our lives. We really have very little control over the path our life takes. "A man's steps are directed by the LORD."

This being the case "how then can anyone understand his own way," Solomon asked? If it is God who determines the path we take, how can we make any decisions apart from seeking Him? We must seek Him for everything, for only His plans will succeed.

Rash Vows (verse 25)

We need to be careful about the decisions we make in life. Sometimes we are too quick to make promises. Verse 24 reminds us that we are not in control of our steps. We cannot tell what will happen tomorrow. It is very easy to make vows we cannot keep. To make promises and vows without seeking the Lord or giving careful thought to what we are promising is a trap. Those who make vows quickly will find themselves trapped in a situation they do not like. They will want to get free from their promises and vows but will not be able to do so.

Winnowing out the Wicked (verse 26, 27)

A wise king, according to Solomon, will winnow out the wicked by driving a threshing wheel over them. When a farmer wanted to separate the wheat from the straw, he would drive a cart over it so that the grain would fall off the straw. The straw would be gathered and shaken so that the grain fell to the ground where it could be gathered while the straw was taken away.

The wise king would make a distinction between the good and the evil people of his land. He would seek out the wicked and judge them. These wicked people would only cause problems. By dealing with evil, the king guaranteed prosperity and blessing for his kingdom.

The same principle is true in our lives as well. We would do well to seek out any sin and evil that stands between us and our God. All sin should be rooted out and destroyed lest it cause our downfall.

In verse 27, Solomon reminds us that just as the wise king will search out the evil in his land, so the lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of man. The spirit of God searches deep into our very inmost being. Nothing can be hidden from Him. He sees all the evil thoughts and attitudes that are hidden deep within us. Just as the wise king will root these things out of his land, so God will do the same. It is His desire to defeat sin and evil in us. We would do well to open our hearts to Him.

Love and Faithfulness (verse 28)

Rulers often come to power through various means. Some take their power by force and seek to control those who are under them. Solomon tells his readers in verse 28 that it was love and faithfulness that would keep the king safe and make his throne secure. There is great wisdom in what Solomon is telling us here.

The ruler who dominated and controlled his subjects by force would find that he had many enemies. Those who tried to establish their throne by deceit and dishonesty would be found out and exposed. Those who faithfully served out of love for their subjects, however, would gain their respect and devotion. This principle applies to many other aspects of life as well. Parents, Christian leaders, teachers and bosses can all learn from this. Love and faithfulness will always win out in the end.

The Glory of Man (verse 29)

Age will take away our strength and vitality. When we are young, we take great delight in our strength and youthful energy. When we get older, however, and our strength and energy is not what it used to be, our gray hair becomes our delight. When Solomon speaks of gray hair he is speaking about the wisdom and experience that comes with age. With old age, our role may change but it is still a very important role. Youthful energy and strength does not come with experience. How important it is for us to learn to work together as young and old. Youthful energy and strength directed and guided by the wisdom of age and experience is a powerful tool for the kingdom of God.

Cleansing away Evil (verse 30)

We conclude chapter 20 with a challenge from Solomon about cleansing away evil. "Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being," he said. When it comes to evil in our lives and society we need to take a harsh stand. Evil will only hinder us and draw us away from the Lord and His purposes. We need to temper this harshness with what Solomon tells us in verse 28 about love and faithfulness. The wise king will establish his throne on love and faithfulness but he will also be careful to weed out evil and deal with it harshly.

For Consideration:

- What does Solomon have to tell us about avoiding strife and quarrels? Have you ever faced this struggle? What makes us want to quarrel?

- What control does God have over our destiny?
- In verse 7 Solomon tells us that the righteous person lived a blameless life. Does this mean that the righteous person is perfect? How can we live blameless lives?
- How important is it that we weed out sin and evil? Are there any areas of your life where sin still reigns? What are they? How can you weed this out?
- What does Solomon tell us in verse 22 about waiting on God rather than taking matters into our own hands? Why do we have such problems with waiting on God?
- Solomon tells us that the king's throne is established by love and faithfulness. What does he mean by this? What implication does this have for other types of relationships?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to avoid strife. Are there any particular issues in your life right now that cause strife? Ask God to give you victory in this area of your life.
- Thank the Lord that He is in control of your destiny. Thank Him that your life is in His hands.
- Ask God to help you to demonstrate your true character by your actions and not just with words.

22

SOVEREIGNTY, DILIGENCE AND VICTORY

Read Proverbs 21:1-31

The King's Heart (verse 1)

While a king may make many decisions in life, the Lord will use what he decides to accomplish His purpose. God is not threatened by the decisions that are made even by evil rulers. He is able to use all decisions to accomplish His greater will. Solomon puts it this way:

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases."

The Lord is able to direct or use each decision that is made by those in power and authority. He will not only use the decisions that are made to accomplish His overall purpose but can stop decisions from being made that do not serve His purpose and will. This is not to say that God is the author of sin and evil. Each ruler is accountable to God for the decisions they make. There have been many bad

decisions made by rulers of this earth. Some of those decisions have meant terrible suffering and pain. Solomon is telling us that God is able to overrule and use what was intended for evil to accomplish good for the sake of His kingdom.

The Lord Weighs the Heart (verse 2)

God's ways are very different from our ways. There are many things that seem right to us but we are not the ultimate judges of what is acceptable before God to whom we must one day give an account.

Maybe you have heard people say: "I don't know what's so bad about this particular sin, I'm not hurting anyone." In our modern age, we have been pushing aside the Bible as a guide to moral truth. This has resulted in a redefinition of morals. Our society is now accepting things as normal that our ancestors would never have accepted. Our conscience no longer bothers us nor are we shocked by those practices that were frowned on in former generations. What we need to understand is that the authority of Scripture still stands in our day. God will weigh our actions to see if we are lacking. Let me picture this as a scale with the Bible on one side and our lives on the other. God will weigh our actions to see if they meet the standard of His Word. What we think will not matter. Only what God says will count. We will be judged by God alone and in accordance with His standard.

Obedience Better than Sacrifice (verse 3)

Verse 2 tells us that we will be weighed according to God's standard and not our own. Another aspect to this can be found in verse 3. There are times when, in an attempt to serve God, we make great sacrifices. We may give

ourselves to do a certain ministry or offer our time and effort for a particular purpose.

Solomon told his listeners that the Lord was not particularly interested in our great sacrifices. If those sacrifices are not in obedience to the Lord then they serve no purpose for the kingdom. God wants a people who are obedient (see 1 Samuel 15:22-23). He is looking for men and women who will listen to Him and move as He leads. All too often we can run ahead of God, thinking that we are doing wonderful things when we are only getting in the way. What is important is that we do what is right and just. In other words, God is looking for us to live in obedience to His Word and the principles of that Word. He is looking for obedience more than great sacrifices. Just because we have given up much for the kingdom does not mean that we are pleasing God. Only those who live in obedience are pleasing to Him.

Pride (verses 4)

Sometimes all our sacrifices are merely a sign of pride. The Pharisees in the New Testament were a people who practiced very religiously the Law of Moses. Jesus told a story about two men who went up to the temple to pray in Luke 1:10-14. The Pharisee boasted that he fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all he owned. The publican had nothing to boast about in life. He simply humbled himself before God, recognizing his guilt. Jesus told His listeners that God heard the prayer of the publican and rejected the Pharisee with all his sacrifices. God hates pride. Here in verse 4 He makes it clear that haughty eyes and a proud heart are sin. That pride can be disguised in the cloak of religious activities

Diligence (verses 5-6)

Through the book of Proverbs, Solomon reminds his readers of the benefit of diligence and hard work. In verse 5 he tells us the plans of the diligence lead to profit but haste leads to poverty. Those who want to succeed, at all costs, will often ignore the small details that bring success. The diligent gives careful thought to his ways. He does not jump into things without considering them. He is patient and works consistently and faithfully. The plans of these individuals are more likely to succeed than those who are rushed and careless.

There is a second truth we need to see in verse 6. Not only are we to work faithfully and diligently but also Solomon challenges his readers to work honestly. "A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare," he told them. If we want to succeed in our plans, we must first be sure that those plans are from God. When we are assured of this, then we must work diligently and faithfully with integrity. Faithful, diligent and honest work is the pathway to success.

The Way of the Wicked (verses 7-8)

Violence will only lead to problems and defeat (verse 7). Those who try to achieve their goals and ambitions in life through violence will be dragged away. Imagine the police coming to take these individuals away by force to judge them for their violence. Of what good is their wealth in prison? God will judge those who seek to achieve their plans through violence.

In verse 8 Solomon told his readers that the way of the guilty is devious. That is to say, their way is filled with deceit and dishonesty. These individuals are guilty before

God for their actions. Those whose conduct is righteous, however, are innocent and will know the favour of the Lord.

A Quarrelsome Wife (verse 9, 19)

Solomon speaks at least five times in this book about quarrelsome wives (19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15). One wonders if Solomon, with all his wives, did not experience something of this personally. It is "better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife," he said in verse 9. He went even farther in verse 19 when he said that he would prefer to live in the desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife. The quarrelsome wife is one who seems only to find fault. This is not a problem unique to wives. There are many husbands who fall into this category as well. What Solomon is telling us here is that living with someone who finds fault and criticizes what we do is not a pleasant experience. Putting it another way, Solomon tells his readers that having a pleasant and godly wife or husband is worth more than all the wealth he had. What a privilege to live with a partner who is pleasant and agreeable. This is a gift from God.

The Wicked Man (verses 10, 12)

In verses 10-12 Solomon has some things to say about the wicked. In verse 10 he told his readers that the wicked craved evil. We all fall into sin from time to time. The wicked, however, have cultivated their hunger for sin. This becomes their longing. When their neighbour cries out to them for help and mercy, they are refused this assistance and compassion. The evil person's heart has been sold out to sin. They will willingly step on the needy to satisfy their lust.

Solomon warns the wicked that the "Righteous One" will take note of the house of the wicked and bring it to ruin. The "Righteous One" spoken of here is the Lord God. He will judge the wicked. While this may not happen immediately, we can be sure that their judgment is coming.

Punishing the Mockers (verse 11)

The theme of discipline is repeated constantly in the book of Proverbs. "When a mocker is punished, the simple gain wisdom," Solomon told his readers in verse 11. When sin is punished those who see it will learn a lesson from it. We punish wrong behaviour not only to correct the guilty but also to warn anyone else of the danger of falling into this behaviour. Correction is a way of instructing the simple.

Solomon went on to say that while the simple could be given wisdom by seeing sin and evil punished, those who were already wise could still learn from instruction. Not all learning needs to come from discipline. We can learn from the instruction of others. The wise person will listen to instruction and gain understanding so that he or she will not need to be disciplined.

Giving Gifts (verses 13-14)

God's desire for us is to be generous with what He has given. He has given us more than we need for a purpose. He wants us to use what He has given to bless others. There is a warning in verse 13 for those who shut their ears to the cry of the poor. When we refuse to listen to the poor in their need, what right do we have to cry out to God when we are in need? Can we expect God to do for us what we are not willing to do for others?

There are those who give gifts not to minister to the needs of the poor but to serve their own purposes. Solomon reminds us in verse 14 about the practice of bribery. These people give gifts in secret to pervert justice. They give a "concealed" gift to pacify the anger of a judge against them.

The person who refuses to give a gift to a poor does so because they are only thinking of themselves. This is the same for the person who gives a bribe. These people only give so that they will profit. Both people will have to answer to God for the misuse of His resources.

Justice Brings Joy (verse 15)

Bribes only hinder justice. When justice is done, however, there is great joy not only for the person who received justice but for the society as a whole. The only ones who do not rejoice in justice are those who have perverted it and are found guilty. For these individuals, justice is a terrifying thing. It exposes them for who they are and makes them pay for their sin and evil.

Straying from the Path (verses 16-18)

God has laid out a path for the righteous in His Word. As our creator, He knows what is best for us. Those who stray from the path He has set out will suffer the consequences of their actions. "A man who strays from the path of understanding comes to rest in the company of the dead," Solomon told his readers in verse 16. We often fail to understand the importance of this truth. We have treated the Word of God and its commandments lightly. We have not been careful to follow them. All too often we have replaced the clear instruction of God with our own ideas. Any

society that wanders from the path of God's Word will suffer the consequences.

In verse 17 Solomon warns us about another temptation. "He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich." Not only are we seeing societies turn from the clear teaching of the Word of God to their harm but we are also seeing an increase in the pursuit of pleasure. We don't have to look very far to see how this is true. God is not against pleasure. The problem, however, is that sometimes we can get caught up in the pursuit of pleasure. Pleasure can quickly become a god for us. We can seek it at all costs. This world is filled with people who are "pleasure-seekers." Solomon warns us that those caught up in the pursuit of pleasure will end up in the "company of the dead." Pleasure in itself will not satisfy the need of the soul. It will bring delight for a moment and leave us empty. Those who get caught up in the pursuit of pleasure find themselves spending all they have on something that never lasts.

"The wicked become a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright," Solomon reminded his readers (verse 18). If we want to prosper and know true joy, we will need to remain on the path of righteousness God has set out for us in His Word. Only in obedience and faithfulness can we know true blessing and joy. The wicked and the unfaithful will not prosper. Ultimately the righteous and the upright will rule over them.

The House of the Wise (verse 20-22)

The wise person is one who has learned the art of living in respect and reverence for the Lord God. Those who choose to live such a life will know the blessing of God. Those who choose to live in obedience to God and in

respect of His principles will wisely use what God has given them. Solomon told his readers in verse 20 that the wise person's house would be filled with stores of choice food and oil. This was not the case for the foolish. The foolish person devoured all he had (verse 20). The fool did not appreciate the good things the Lord had given. They were wasteful and careless with their possessions and so they wasted away.

The person who pursued righteousness and love would find prosperity and honour (verse 21). We need to understand that the prosperity Solomon speaks of may include physical wealth but should not be limited to this. If we limit prosperity to worldly wealth we miss the teaching of Scripture. God is concerned about our entire being and not just our physical comfort. Prosperity in the Bible has more to do with wholeness in every aspect of our lives and personality. Seeking God and His righteousness will bring that wholeness.

We have seen in these verses that the wise man is blessed by God and experiences wholeness. Verse 22 tells us also that the wise man will be victorious. He "attacks the city of the mighty and pulls down the stronghold in which they trust." God's blessing will be on the efforts of the wise. This is in great part because the wise are living for God and seeking His heart. Their efforts are in tune with God and His purpose.

Guarding the Mouth (verse 23)

We are reminded of the importance of our words in verse 23. "He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity." Who among us has not spoken words that we wish we could take back? Words can be powerful vehicles for blessing or for cursing. Words can destroy and

discourage. Those who are wise will carefully weigh their words before they speak. They refuse to speak words that do not bless and build up. They will not allow their words to damage and destroy what the Lord is doing.

Pride (verse 24)

Solomon says two things about the proud and arrogant man in verse 24. Notice first, that he called the proud man a "mocker." The proud person is one who mocks what others have to say. He finds fault with everyone else. He will not listen to instruction or correction.

Notice second, that the proud and arrogant man behaves with "overweening pride." The term overweening has to do with excess. What Solomon is telling us is that the proud man is excessive in his boasting and proud ways. The words used in the original language lead us to believe that this person could even be given to angry outbursts. This person will defend himself and his ideas even if it means getting angry with others. They are quite willing to hurt others to prove that they are right.

The Sluggard (verse 25-26)

"The sluggard's cravings will be the death of him" (verse 25). The lazy person is too lazy to work with his hands. Because he refuses to work, he will not have food for his table. He will literally die of starvation because he will not work. The lazy person craves all kinds of things but is too lazy to do what it required to satisfy those cravings.

On the other hand, the righteous person gives without sparing. Righteous people are those who have worked hard for what they get. They have resources to spare and

can share with those in need. This is what God is calling us all to do. He expects that we will work hard so that we can give to those who have legitimate needs.

The Sacrifice of the Wicked (verse 27)

God is concerned about the motive behind our actions. In verse 27 Solomon reminded his readers that the sacrifice of the wicked was detestable in the eyes of God. God is not interested in their sacrifice because their heart is not right before Him. This is the teaching of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:23-24:

""Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

If the Lord refuses to accept the legitimate offering of a person who is not in a right relationship with Him, how much more will He detest the offering brought with evil intent? If you bring your offering with the purpose of being seen by others, is this not an evil intent? If you serve the Lord in an attempt to be better than your brother or sister and have people think more highly of you, is this too not an evil intent? God is very concerned about our motives. The challenge for us is to carefully examine our motives when serving or giving to the Lord.

A False Witness (verse 28)

Judgment is pronounced on false witnesses in verse 28. The false witness will perish, Solomon tells us. God will judge all who are not truthful and honest. Notice in verse

28, however, that the person who listened to false witnesses would also be destroyed. God is so concerned about truth and integrity that He will also judge those who support or encourage dishonest people.

Giving Thought to One's Ways (verse 29)

"A wicked man puts up a bold front." What Solomon seems to be telling us here is that the wicked person comes across as very confident. This confidence is not based on careful planning but on their ability to manipulate and deceive. The righteous person will not resort to these tactics but will give careful thought to their ways to be sure that they are in tune with God's purpose and plan. The plans of the righteous will succeed because they are in line with God's purpose. The bold confidence of the proud and wicked may deceive many but they will have to answer to God for their ways.

Victory Rests with the Lord (verses 30-31)

The reason the plans of the righteous succeed is because they have been submitted to the Lord and His greater purpose. "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD," Solomon tells us in verse 30.

We can make all the right preparations but the victory will not be because of careful preparations but because of the Lord's mercy and grace. God expects us to prepare and work for Him but we should never think that it is our preparation that brings this victory. God's purposes alone will succeed.

For Consideration:

- What does Solomon teach us about the sovereignty of God over the plans and purposes of the nations? What comfort do you find in this truth?
- Why is obedience more important than sacrifice? It is possible to make sacrifices that are not in obedience to God? Give an example.
- Solomon speaks in this chapter about living with a quarrelsome wife. Are you a pleasant and kind partner for your spouse?
- What does Solomon teach us about the importance of our motives when giving to the Lord?
- While God calls us to give careful thought to our plans, why is it foolish to trust in those plans? What does Solomon have to say about this in verse 31?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to live in obedience to Him and not run ahead of Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is over all your plans and efforts. Thank Him that He is able to overrule even the most evil plans of the rulers of this world.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be a blessing to your marriage partner.
- Take the time to examine the motivation behind your service for the Lord today. Ask Him to examine you to be sure that there is no evil intent in your ways.

23

POVERTY, WICKEDNESS AND DISCIPLINE

Read Proverbs 22:1-21

A Good Name (verse 1)

As Solomon begins chapter 22 he reminds his readers of the value of a good name. A name is a reference to the character and reputation of an individual. A good reputation is to be desired more than great riches and esteemed more than silver. Those who have a good name are respected and honoured in society. People with good names can sleep at night knowing that they have been honest and compassionate in their dealings with others. If their good name comes from a right relationship with God, these individuals have a bright future. They not only enjoy a good relationship with their neighbours but also with the Lord their God. These things are worth more than anything money and riches can buy. Solomon, who had all the money he could ever have wanted, makes it clear that he would rather be known as a man of noble character.

The Rich and the Poor (verse 2)

Riches are not the measure of our true value. Solomon told his readers in verse 1 that a good name was worth more than riches. Riches do not buy a good reputation. You can be poor and still have a good name because of your character.

Solomon underlines this point in verse 2 when he reminded his readers that the Lord God made both the rich and the poor. They all have the same Creator who made all things good. The clothes we have or the homes we live in do not increase or decrease our value. Our value comes from the fact that we have been created by God.

A Prudent Man (verse 3)

A prudent person is one who is sensible and wise. When prudent people see danger they take refuge. This is not the case for the foolish. These people take no thought of danger. They walk right into danger without concern for the implications. They suffer for their foolishness. We are not to be foolhardy. The wise and prudent person will not take unnecessary risks. He will be careful in all his dealings. The fool ignores the obvious signs and suffers the consequences.

Humility and the Fear of the Lord (verse 4)

Wealth in God's eyes is not merely money and possessions. A person can have a lot of money and still be poor. Wealth has to do with who we are as people. It has to do with our standing before God and the experience of the fullness of His blessing in our lives. Solomon told his

readers that if they wanted to know the fullness of God's richness, two things were necessary.

The first of these two requirements was humility. Proverbs 3:34 makes this clear when it says: "He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble." Pride will strip us of the blessing of God. There are proud people in this world who have lots of money and possessions. Remember, however, that wealth in the world's eyes is not the same as heavenly wealth. While the humble of this earth may not see large amounts of money in their bank account, they know the presence of God and His blessing. God delights to give grace to those who live in humble obedience to His Word. The first quality we need if we want to know the fullness of God's rich blessings is humility.

The second quality necessary to experience wealth and honour is the fear of the Lord. To fear the Lord is to reverence and respect Him and His ways. Those who reverence and respect God live their lives in obedience to Him. They do all things to glorify Him. They avoid those things that would dishonour His name. God delights to bless those who honour Him. He delights to pour out His blessings on those who live in obedience to His Word.

The Paths of the Wicked (verse 5)

While the Lord delights to honour those who live for Him, those who wander from the path of His Word will find that their path is lined with thorns and snares. Thorns are designed to cause pain. Snares are designed to trap and imprison those who fall into them. This is the path of wickedness. This path is filled with thorns. It is lined with snares designed to entrap and bind them. This is a very dangerous path. It is the path that all who are wicked follow. It is a path of oppression, bondage and suffering.

Those who guard their soul will avoid the snares on the path. This does not mean that the righteous will never have problems. Even the path of the righteous is lined with obstacles. For the believer the obstacles on the path are means by which God develops and trains us. These obstacles are used by God to bring maturity and blessing into our lives.

Those who follow the path of wickedness will find that the thorns that line this path only bring sorrow and grief. By guarding our soul and keeping it on the path of righteousness we can assure that though the path be steep and difficult it is the path that leads to greater blessing and maturity.

Training up a Child (verse 6)

We have been speaking about two different paths in this chapter. We have seen the path that leads to blessing. This is the path followed by those who are humble and fear the Lord. There is also the path of wickedness that is lined with thorns and snares. This is that path of bondage and sorrow.

Solomon told his readers in verse 6 that if they would train a child in the way he should go, when he was old he would not depart from it. The word "train," in the original language, can mean "to start." The idea is that as parents we are to start our children on the path of righteousness. Ultimately, this is all we can do. Our children are with us for such a short period of time. By the time they reach their teen years we have done almost all we can do for them. In those early years of their life, we are to start our children on the path that leads to God. We are to teach them about God and His ways. All too quickly our children will reach an age where they will be making their own decisions. If

we have set their feet on the path of righteousness, the probability is that they will continue on that path they have learned from us.

I have heard this verse used to say that children of Christian parents will be saved because they were raised in a Christian home and taught Christian principles. We need to understand that Solomon is not speaking of salvation in this verse. Salvation does not depend on parents or how well they train their children. It is a gift of God that cannot be merited.

I remember speaking to a brother in Christ in a church I was serving as pastor. He was very concerned about his children and that they come to know the Lord. He began to wonder if he was doing enough as a father to bring his children to the Lord. As we spoke, I reminded him of how as a young boy his Hindu father would drag him out of church because he did not want him to be a Christian. Even though his parents were strongly opposed to him becoming a Christian this man accepted the Lord at an early age. While it is important that we point our children to the Saviour and set their feet on the path of righteousness, ultimately their salvation will not depend on us but on God who gives grace and mercy to the most unlikely people.

Solomon is speaking here about setting our children's feet on the path of righteousness. He is telling us that we are to train our children in the ways of the Lord. If we set their feet on this path they will be guided by the principles of God's Word throughout their lives. These principles will be instilled in their minds and influence the decisions they make and the direction they take in life. By God's grace they may even come to know the Saviour.

Lenders (verse 7)

In this world in which we live, very often the rich rule over the poor. The person who borrows is indebted to the one who has loaned. Solomon is not saying that this is God's plan for the world. He is merely stating what he sees in his society. As believers, we need to be careful that what is true in our society is not repeated in the church. Even those who have very little in life have been gifted wonderfully by God. Sometimes churches are run like the world with those of influence and wealth receiving positions of honour. While this is the way of the world, we need to set a different example in our churches.

Sowing Wickedness (verse 8)

Those who sow wickedness will reap trouble. While they may prosper for a time, the day of their judgment is coming. The rod of their fury will be destroyed, Solomon told his readers. The rod of their fury seems to relate to their oppression of others. They had their time of oppression and fury. They hurt others and stripped them of their possessions and hard earned money. They ruled over them oppressively. For a time, they enjoyed the profits of their oppression. All this would end. Their fury would be broken and they would be called to give an account of their actions.

A Generous Man (verse 9)

Verse 8 spoke about those who oppressed others. Solomon told his readers that they would be judged. In verse 9 Solomon reminded his readers that the generous person, on the other hand, would be blessed. The generous person shared his food with the poor. Unlike the wicked person of verse 8, this man chose to honour God by showing

compassion to the poor. He shared the wealth God had given him with others. God delights to bless the one who is generous and compassionate. He who blesses others will himself be blessed.

Drive out the Mockers (verse 10)

The mocker is a proud person who refuses to accept anything but his or her own way. Mockers look down on those who differ from them. They want to be right all the time. They will argue with those who disagree with them. They will insult others in an attempt to look better themselves. This type of person will only cause problems. Solomon tells us that if we drive out the mocker, all strife and quarrels and insults will cease.

A Pure Heart and Gracious Speech (verse 11)

In contrast with the mocker of verse 10, Solomon spoke of the one who loved a pure heart and whose speech was gracious in verse 11. While the mocker only caused quarrels and strife, the person whose speech is gracious will have even the king as his friend.

The person Solomon speaks of here has a pure heart. That is to say, he is humble and compassionate in his dealings. His speech is gracious. His words are not insulting or quarrelsome but healthy and uplifting. He uses his words and actions to build up and encourage friends and neighbours. He refreshes the hearts of those who come in contact with him. We are left to wonder if our words have this kind of impact on those who hear them.

The Lord Watches over Knowledge (verse 12)

It is God's delight to preserve His truth. We have seen this in the history of Christianity. Satan and the enemies of the gospel have often tried to destroy the truth. The Bible has come under tremendous attack but it has remained. Preachers and teachers of the truth have laid down their lives because of the fury of those who opposed the truth they taught, but the truth of God has been preserved. Solomon makes it very clear that the reason for this is that the eyes of the Lord keep watch over knowledge. God preserves His truth. We can be confident that the truth we have today is the truth of God. The Scripture has been miraculously kept so that we can know the truth.

While the Lord preserves knowledge and truth, He frustrates the words of the unfaithful. Over the history of this world we have seen countless philosophies and ideologies come and go. Human ideas and philosophies have come and gone but the truth of God has remained from the beginning. That truth continues to be powerful and effective in the lives of men and women around the world.

The Sluggard (verse 13)

Lazy people are masters of excuses. They are skilled at finding reasons why they cannot work. In verse 13 Solomon illustrates this by giving us the example of a lazy person who said: "There is a lion outside!" or, "I will be murdered in the streets!" What he is telling us is that we can justify almost anything we do. The person who wants to sin will find logical reasons why this is the only way to go. The person who doesn't want to do something will find reasons why they shouldn't do what they don't want to do. Sometimes we can fool ourselves into believing these lies

and exaggerations. As believers we need to cast off all lies, exaggerations and excuses and do what is right.

The Mouth of the Adulteress (verse 14)

We need to beware of lies and excuses that keep us from doing what we are supposed to do. There is another type of lie that will encourage us to do what we shouldn't. Solomon told his readers in verse 14 to beware of the mouth of the adulteress. He compared the mouth of the adulteress to a deep pit that those who are under the wrath of God will fall into.

Notice that the mouth of the adulteress is like a deep pit. A deep pit was used to trap animals. The pit was made deep so that the animal could not jump out. This is what Solomon is telling his readers. The words of the adulteress are designed to trap and ensnare those who listen to them. Those who follow the path of the adulteress will fall into a trap from which they will not easily escape.

Notice also that it is those who are under the wrath of God who fall into this trap. In other words, it is those who refuse the words of the Lord who listen to the adulteress. It is the sinner who turns his back on the Lord to walk in the path of the adulteress.

The Rod of Discipline (verse 15)

We are all born with a sinful nature that craves the things of this world. If left to ourselves we would quickly follow the path of sin. This is our natural tendency. You don't have to teach a child to hit his brother or sister. You don't have to teach a child how to lie to protect himself. We do have to teach them to tell the truth. We have to teach them how to

respect and love instead of doing what comes naturally. Solomon recognized this by his observation of little children.

"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him," he told his readers. In other words, if you want your children to be what God intended them to be, you will have to discipline them and point them in the right direction. The rod of discipline will drive foolishness from a child. Every child needs correction if they are to grow up to be mature and responsible adults. This does not change once we become adults. Even as adults, we need to be corrected if we are to follow the path of wisdom.

Justice and Wealth (verse 16)

There are those who will not hesitate to pervert justice in order to prosper their own goals. Solomon gives us two examples of this in verse 16.

The first example is that of a person who will oppress the poor to increase his wealth. This person will deny justice to the poor, or by dishonest means, strip them of all they have. He may impose heavy interest on their loans so that they suffer undue hardship in paying him back.

The second example is that of a person who will give gifts to the rich in order to gain their favour. This may come in the form of bribes or any other type of gift that has as its goal to influence the decision of the rich in their favor. This only encourages dishonesty and deceit. Decisions are made on the basis of personal profit and not on what is right and just.

Solomon warns his readers that God does not approve of such decisions. He will judge and bring those who practice such injustice to poverty. Though they may have money, they will be poor and miserable.

The Sayings of the Wise (verse 17-21)

Solomon challenged his readers in verse 17 to listen to the sayings of the wise and apply their heart to live in obedience to those sayings. It is one thing to listen and another thing to apply one's heart to live in obedience. To apply one's heart requires discipline and effort. God expects us not only to listen but to obey.

In verse 18 Solomon tells us that we will find it pleasant to keep wise sayings in our heart. What we need to understand here is that the wise sayings that Solomon speaks of here are not mere human ramblings about life. They are the words of God. Those who have God's word in their heart find great delight in that word. God's word is refreshing and invigorating. It brings comfort and direction when we need it. This is what Solomon is telling us. He is telling his readers that listening to and taking God's word to heart is a pleasant and wonderful thing.

Notice also that when we take God's words to heart, these words are not only pleasant but they equip us to minister to others who are in need. The words that we have taken into our hearts will be ready on our lips to bless and encourage our friends and fellow believers when they are in need. The apostle Paul expressed the same thoughts when he spoke to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that

we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

We can pass on the comfort we receive from God to others. The same is true of wisdom. What God teaches us and we take to heart can then be passed on to our brothers and sisters in need.

The book of Proverbs would not have been written if Solomon had not put what he said in verse 18 into practice. He shares the truths that God had taught him. In verses 19-21 Solomon gives two reasons for writing this book.

First, he shared his wisdom with his readers in this book so that they would put their trust in the Lord. This is his greatest desire. He wanted his readers to look to their Creator and honour Him in all they did. He wanted them to learn to trust Him and His purpose.

In verses 20-21 Solomon told his readers that he had given them these sayings to teaching them what was true and reliable so that they could give an answer to him who sent for them seeking advice and counsel. Again this reflects the heart of Solomon. He wanted to equip his readers with the tools necessary to give sound answers to those who needed it.

There is some confusion here in verse 20 regarding its translation. The New International Version of the Bible says: "Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge." The word "thirty" is translated in the King James Version by the word "excellent." It is not my purpose to enter a debate here over which word is correct. The King James Version is quite simple to understand. The words and sayings that Solomon gave were

excellent sayings that equipped his readers to minister to those to whom God would send them.

Those who believe that the word should be translated "thirty," point to section that follows verse 20 and note that there are literally thirty wise saying from Proverbs 22:22-24:22. We will examine these sayings in the next two meditations.

For Consideration:

- Solomon reminds us in verse 1 of the importance of a good name. Do you have a good name in your community?
- Why is it so easy to measure the value of an individual by their wealth? What does Solomon have to say to us here about this practice?
- Solomon challenges parents to set their children on the path of righteousness so that when they are old they will not depart from it. Is this path natural for a child? What kind of things can we do to set our children on the path of righteousness?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that God preserves knowledge? How does this give us assurance that the Scriptures are completely reliable?
- What is the difference between listening to the wisdom of God and applying that wisdom? What truths have you learned in the book of Proverbs? How have you applied them to your life personally?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to have a good name in your society so that you do not give any cause for people to turn from God.
- If you are a parent, ask the Lord to help you to set your children on the path of righteousness. Take a moment to pray for your children and their struggles. Ask God to keep them on the path of righteousness.
- Thank the Lord that He has preserved the truth of His word despite the efforts of many to distort it.
- Ask God to help you to take the truths you have been learning in the book of Solomon and apply them to your lives. Ask Him to give you opportunity to share those truths with others.

24

THE THIRTY SAYINGS: SAYINGS 1-15

Read Proverbs 22:22-23:21

There is a very clear division here in the book of Proverbs. This section begins in Proverbs 22:20 with the words: "I have written thirty sayings for you" (NIV). This section of thirty sayings ends in Proverbs 24:23 with the words: "Here are some further sayings of the wise." In the next two meditations we will examine these thirty sayings of Solomon.

Saying 1: Do Not Exploit the Poor (22:22-23)

Solomon began the first of thirty sayings by warning his readers not to exploit the poor because they were poor. To exploit is to rob, plunder or take advantage of someone. The person who exploits does not have a high regard for the poor but sees them as inferior to those who have money and possessions. These individuals see the value of a person on the basis of their worldly wealth and influence.

Solomon also challenged his readers not to crush these poor and needy in court. In other words, the poor deserved justice as much as the rich. While the rich could gain respect because of their position and influence in society, the poor did not have this opportunity. They still deserved justice. Solomon warns those with money not to oppress the poor or take advantage of them in court.

Notice that the basis of Solomon's warning here is the fact that the Lord God would take up the cause of the poor and needy. God would plunder those who plundered the needy. God does not see people as we do. He sees the heart and attitude. God's value system is not based on wealth or worldly possessions. Those who oppress the needy will have to answer to God for their evil.

Saying 2: A Hot-Tempered Friend (22:24-25)

The second wise saying of this section has to do with the friends we make. In particular, Solomon warns us not to make friends with hot-tempered people. The "hot-tempered" person is one who is not in control of his or her emotions. These people are quick to get angry and give full expression to that anger.

The reason Solomon told his readers not to associate with this kind of person was that the temptation would be to learn his or her ways. The hot-tempered person is one who quickly finds fault with everything. It is all too easy to find fault. It takes a person of true character to find something positive to say in a difficult situation.

There is no telling what a hot-tempered person will do. This person is not in control of his or her anger. This lack of control is not from God. Their hot-temper would only create problems and would not bring glory to the Lord. We are

encouraged to keep away from hot-tempered people lest their ways influence or ensnare us.

As believers we are to exercise control of our emotions. This is not to say that we never get angry. Even Jesus was angry about the right things. Anger, however, has a way of taking control. The believer is only to be controlled by the Spirit of God. It is not without reason that one of the fruits of the Spirit of God is self-control (see Galatians 5:23).

Saying 3: Pledges (22:26-27)

The third wise saying of Solomon relates to pledges. A pledge was a financial commitment. Solomon obviously saw many people in his day make financial commitments they could not handle, resulting in the loss of everything they had.

Here in verses 26-27 Solomon challenged his readers to be wise with the resources the Lord had given them. As believers, we are called to live within our means. That is to say, we are not to take on more financial commitments than we can handle. We should learn to be content with what God has given us and not seek more in life than we can afford. The same principle applies to our ministry. We should only take on what God has given us the resources to do.

Saying 4: Boundary Stones (22:28)

Saying four relates to removing boundary stones set up by the forefathers. We should see this in two senses.

First, we should see this verse as referring to absolute honesty in our dealings. To remove a boundary stone or

change its position was to steal land that belonged to one's neighbour. God expects us to be honest.

There is another aspect to the moving of a boundary stone. We are to respect those things that have been passed on to us from generations past. We are often too quick to change things that appear to be outdated. Solomon reminds us that the principles and practices of our past generations have reason and purpose. We are not to be quick to throw out the old in favour of the new. Instead, we should learn from past generations and respect the principles and practices they have handed down to us. This is not to say that we should never change. We need to be careful, however, to be sure that our changes are made carefully, taking into account the value of what has been passed down to us from generations past.

Saying 5: A Skilled Man (22:29)

The fifth wise saying of Solomon speaks to the value of hard work and faithful service. "Do you see any truly competent workers? They will serve kings rather than ordinary people." In other words, hard work and faithful service will be rewarded. The person who simply does what is expected will not be noticed like the person who goes beyond the call of duty. The king will notice those who are willing to do more than is required. These are the individuals who will be promoted. As believers we are to be willing to go beyond the call of duty. We should not fear hard work. God will notice this and reward us.

Saying 6: Moderation and Caution (23:1-3)

Solomon challenged his readers to moderation and caution in his sixth wise saying. He used the example of a person dining with a ruler. Solomon warned the person eating with a ruler to pay attention to what was put before him and to remember two things.

First, if they were given to eating too much, they were to put a knife to their throat. The idea is that they were not to permit themselves to eat too much in the presence of this ruler.

Second, when eating in the presence of a ruler, they were not to desire all his delicacies because deception might be involved in the meal. In other words, they were to realize that this particular individual offering them all these delicacies might be doing so to get something from them. This meal with all its excess food and delicacies might be the ruler's way of bribing them to get something for himself.

They were to be cautious in their dealings with rulers who were always looking for support. Not everything is as it appears. Behind the wonderful meal might be a bribe or a means of gaining favour or support. Human nature, being as it is, we often need to be careful and sometimes suspicious of evil motives behind what appears to be acts of kindness and compassion.

Saying 7: Don't Weary Yourself about Riches (23:4-5)

The seventh wise saying of Solomon challenges his readers in the area seeking to get rich. "Don't weary yourself trying to get rich," Solomon said. Riches disappear as though they had the wings of a bird. Riches can be lost in

an instant. We will not take our riches with us when we leave this earth. At best, the riches we have only last for our lifetime which is seventy or eighty years. To weary ourselves trying to get rich, according to Solomon in verse 4, was a waste of time. There are far better things to do with our lives. There are those whose life consists of working so hard to get money that they do not have time for anything else. They sometimes turn their back on all that is important in life to make their money. In the end, they have money but nothing else. Some will even spend an eternity separated from God. Others will give an account to Him for why they did not use their money to invest in eternity. Better to be content with what we have and spend it for eternity than to hoard it up and answer to God for its misuse.

Saying 8: Don't Eat with Stingy People (23:6-8)

Saying eight is closely related to saying seven. Solomon warned his readers about eating with stingy people. The stingy person is always thinking about how much everything costs. This person is very hesitant to offer what he or she has to others. They hold tightly to their possessions and do not give freely.

Solomon warns his readers that those who ate the food of a stingy person would quickly vomit up that food. There was no blessing in receiving from one who wants to keep for himself. While stingy people wanted to come across as being generous and compassionate, their motivation was not right. They gave grudgingly. This attitude stripped their actions of any value. God looks at the heart.

Again we are to be careful not to let this kind of person influence us. We are to give with a generous and compassionate heart. The apostle Paul, speaking to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9:7 said:

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The other thing to note here is that the person who is not in the habit of giving generously may have a motive behind his actions and why he wants to be generous. We need to be careful that we are not falling into a trap.

God is interested in the attitude of our heart. When we give, we are to do so with joy and a cheerful heart.

Saying 9: Don't Waste Your Breath on Fools (23:9)

"Don't waste your breath on fools, for they will despise the wisest advice," Solomon told his readers in verse 9. The fool will not listen to wisdom. The fool is not concerned about what a wise person has to say. In their pride, they only do what *they* want.

Maybe you have met individuals like this. These people refuse to listen to anything anyone says. I have met individuals who have gotten stuck on some questionable doctrine or practice. No matter what I said to them about this, they refused to listen. Nothing was going to change their mind. There are times when the only thing we can do is leave people in their ignorance. Our persistence in trying to change these people will only drive them to deeper resistance and bring us endless grief. We need wisdom from God about when to drop a matter.

Saying 10: Don't Steal from Orphans (23:10-11)

In his tenth wise saying, Solomon focuses on orphans. God has a heart for orphans. Solomon likely saw people

take advantage of an orphan who had no parents to defend them. Solomon warned his people not to move the boundary markers of an orphan. This property was all these orphans had. Those who took advantage of orphans in their need would suffer the wrath of God. God was a defender of the orphan. He took any offense toward an orphan seriously.

God's call is for the believer to be filled with compassion and kindness toward those who are oppressed. Instead of taking advantage of the orphan, God's people were to actively defend their cause.

Saying 11: Commit Yourself to Instruction (23:12)

In saying eleven, Solomon encouraged his people to commit themselves to instruction and knowledge. In particular, the instruction and knowledge he refers to is instruction in God's ways. Believers are to be people of the Word. The apostle Peter told his readers in 1 Peter 3:15 that they were to always be ready to give a reason for the hope that was in them.

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

The believer is to commit himself or herself to instruction with all humility, realizing that they have not yet arrived at perfection. I met a man once who told me that he knew all there was to know about the Bible and there was nothing his pastor could teach him. This man would not likely grow very much in his Christian life. The more I come to know, the more I realize how much I don't know. As believers, we are called to grow more and more in the Lord and our

understanding of His ways. To do this, we are to commit ourselves to instruction and knowledge. We are to open our hearts and minds more and more for God to fill them with understanding and knowledge of His person and His ways.

Saying 12: Don't Fail to Correct Your Children (23:13-14)

Another way we are to learn and grow is through correction. In saying twelve, Solomon called parents to correct their children. He was not against spanking a child if necessary in order to get their attention and keep them on the right path. Physical discipline may very well save our children from death, he told his readers. In other words, it is far better to correct a child with physical punishment than to let them follow a path that leads to their destruction. Physical punishment may hurt for a moment but the benefits will far outweigh any temporary pain they feel.

God will not hesitate to correct us when we need it. Someone once told me that God would never allow physical harm to come to one of His children. While God is concerned for our wellbeing, the reality is that He is far more concerned about our future and our walk with Him. Sometimes God must allow us to suffer physical pain in order to bring us back to Himself.

Saying 13: I Will Rejoice If You Become Wise (23:15-16)

In verses 15-16 Solomon reminds his people that he would be delighted if they became wise. This is the heart of any parent or teacher. My children are all grown up and on their own. It gives me great joy when they are walking with the Lord and making wise decisions.

I remember working with some leaders on the island of Reunion, in the Indian Ocean. My responsibility was to train these leaders in the work of the church. The last Sunday I was at the church, I watched these leaders take on a particular problem that had come up in the church that week. They took the matter in hand and challenged the members to follow the clear teaching of Scripture. I just watched as they dealt responsibly with the problem. What a blessing it was to me to see these leaders take this problem on themselves. They showed wisdom and discernment. Solomon felt this joy when his children took his advice and listened to wisdom.

Saying 14: Don't Envy Sinners (23:17-18)

We live in a world where dishonest people sometimes prosper. Sometimes we wonder if an honest person can really prosper in this sinful society. In saying fourteen, Solomon told his readers not to envy sinners. Instead, they were to fear the Lord and do what was right. He assured them that only by obeying the Lord and living in respect and reverence for Him could they have a future. The hope of the honest would not be disappointed. God promises blessing to those who fear Him but will demand an accounting from the sinner.

The sinner should never be envied for they will be judged by God and punished for their evil.

Saying 15: Do not Carouse with Drunkards (23:19-21)

In his fifteenth wise saying Solomon challenged his readers to keep their heart on the right course. In particular, this meant not associating with drunkards, gluttons and sluggards. Their lifestyle would only lead to poverty. As believers, we are to be careful to associate with those who

have similar values. We should not take any special delight in associating with those who do not live according to God's word.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the heart of God for the poor and the orphan?
- What is God's expectation of us in regards to living according to what He has given? Why is it important for us to be content with what we have?
- Why is it futile to make it our life goal to become rich in worldly possessions?
- Solomon challenges his readers to open their heart to instruction and correction. What has God been teaching you recently? Are you open to learning from Him?
- Have you ever found yourself envying the sinner? Why? Why is it not good to envy a sinner?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a greater compassion for those in need. Ask Him to open your eyes to the needs around you.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to learn more about Him and His purposes for you personally.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who has gotten caught up in sin.
- Thank the Lord that He loves you enough to discipline you when it is necessary.

25

THE THIRTY SAYINGS: SAYINGS 16-30

Read Proverbs 23:22-24:22

We continue with the thirty wise sayings of Solomon. In this chapter we will examine the last fifteen sayings.

Saying 16: Listen to your Father and Mother (23:22-25)

The challenge of saying sixteen is to children and their parents. We should not underestimate the importance of this relationship in the society. When children learn to respect and honour their parents they will likely also honour and respect others who are in authority in the society. Solomon called on children to listen to their father and mother. They were not to despise or reject the advice of their mother in her old age. Instead, they were to respect their experience in life and learn from them.

Parents were a source of great wisdom for the child. This is true not only when the children are home but also when they leave the home to set up their own families. The

advice of parents should never be despised. Solomon reminded his readers of the importance of wisdom, discipline and discernment (verse 23). This was what all parents were to pass on to their children. Solomon told his readers to buy wisdom and never sell it. In other words, they were to seek wisdom with all their heart and hold onto that wisdom.

Notice from verse 24 that not only would the child benefit from wisdom, discipline and discernment but so would the parents. When a father or mother saw wisdom, discipline and discernment in their children they had cause for great joy. One of the greatest things a child could do for their parents is to make them happy and joyful by being wise, disciplined and discerning.

Saying 17: Delight in the Way of Wisdom (23:26-28)

In saying seventeen, Solomon reminded his readers that wisdom had a very practical application in life. Wisdom would keep them from falling into the trap of the enemy. In particular, Solomon reminded his readers that wisdom would keep them from the way of the adulterous woman and the prostitute. The prostitute was a deep pit. The idea here is that if they fell into this pit they would not be able to get out again. The adulterous woman was like a narrow well. Those who fell into that well would get stuck and not be able to get out. Both of these women are compared to bandits lying in wait for those who pass by. They actively seek to trap unwise men. Wisdom was a protection from such sins.

Saying 18: Don't Let the Sparkle of Smooth Wine Deceive You (23:29-35)

Saying eighteen speaks to the abuse of alcohol. Solomon describes those who have lingered too long over wine. Notice the result of excessive drinking of alcohol. Excessive drinking will bring woe, sorrow, strife, complaints, needless bruises and bloodshot eyes (verses 29-30).

"Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly!" Solomon said. Wine is deceiving. While it is smooth and sparkling in the cup it will bite like a poisonous snake when it goes down.

Notice in verses 33-35 how Solomon describes the man who has had too much wine. His eyes see strange sights and his mind imagines confusing things (verse 33). Everything around them seems to sway back and forth as if they were on the top of the rigging of a ship (verse 34). The senses are dull and the mind unclear. "They hit me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it!"

Solomon attempts to show the foolishness of excessive drinking. He paints a picture here of a person who no longer has any sense of reality. He is no longer in control of his thinking or his actions. The wise person will not be fooled or controlled by alcohol.

Saying 19: Don't Envy Evil People (24:1-2)

There are people on this earth who seem to delight in and cultivate evil. These people plan violence and make trouble by the things they say. Solomon reminds his readers in his nineteenth saying that they were not to envy these wicked people or even desire their company.

What we need to understand is that often these wicked and evil people seem to be able to get what they want in life. They obtain riches by deceit and dishonesty. They are found in positions of authority and sometimes respected for their riches and power. While they may have what they want in life, they will have to answer to God for their evil.

To envy these wicked people is to fail to understand where their lifestyle is heading. Would you envy a person walking off the end of a cliff? Would you envy a drowning man? Neither should we envy those whose lifestyle is leading them to the judgement of God. We should not desire to join them or seek their company lest they take us down the same path.

Saying 20: A House is Built on Wisdom (24:3-4)

"By wisdom a house is built," said Solomon (verse 3). Solomon speaks symbolically here of an individual or a family. He reminds his readers that they need to build their lives by wisdom and understanding. Again we need to mention that the wisdom he speaks of is not earthly wisdom. For Solomon there was only one true wisdom and understanding. This was the wisdom that came from the Lord God. Our lives need to be built on the truth of God's Word. We need to fill our lives with His understanding and knowledge. Through the knowledge of God and His ways our lives are filled with beautiful treasures. Those who know the Lord and follow His ways are not like anyone else. These individuals experience God and His life in them.

Saying 21: Don't Go to War without Wise Guidance (24:5-6)

If we want to advance in life and succeed in our plans, we need to be humble enough to accept advice. It is the wise man who has power, Solomon told his readers in verse 5. It is through knowledge that strength is increased. We need to be willing to learn if we want to grow. We need to be a people who are willing to listen to what others have to say. "For waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers."

It is only the fool who believes he or she knows everything. Only a proud fool will refuse to listen to counsel. These people will never amount to anything in life because they refuse to learn. God expects us to recognize our need of others who can counsel and advise us. Seeking advice is not a sign of weakness. It is evidence of humility and true wisdom.

Saying 22: Wisdom is too High for a Fool (24:7-8)

While the fool often speaks out his mind, when it comes to a time when wisdom is required, the fool has nothing to say. In the assembly at the gate, where decisions were made, the fool had nothing of value to contribute. When wisdom and insight is required in important decisions, fools are of no help. They have nothing to contribute in the discussion of important matters.

It is important that those who are in positions of authority be men and women of wisdom. In particular, these individuals need to be men and women who have the wisdom of God.

Saying 23: A Reputation as a Schemer (24:8-9)

Saying twenty-three reminds us that we will be known for our actions. The person who plots evil will be known as a schemer. People will recognize that the ways of a schemer are foolish. They will detest a mocker. We don't always think about what we do. It is easy to lie and not consider yourself to be a liar. It is easy to be negative and not see ourselves as a critical person. We often justify our actions. People see us for who we really are. Our reputation is built not on how we see ourselves but on how others see us.

Saying 24: Failing Under Pressure (24:10)

The test of true strength is how we respond to times of trouble. Anyone can be strong when things are going well. We may commend ourselves for how we handle small problems in life but if we fall in times of trouble our strength is too small. If our faith is not big enough to carry us through the tough times in life it is not big enough. We should measure our strength not in times of ease but in times of struggle.

Saying 25: Don't Avoid Responsibility (24:11-12)

Wise saying twenty-five has to do with not being afraid to take on responsibility. Solomon challenged his readers not to sit idly by when they could do something to help. If they saw someone being led away to death they were to rescue them. If they saw people staggering toward slaughter, they were to hold them back. It is too easy to ignore the problems and pain around us. Sometimes we are too lazy to do anything about it. Sometimes we are not sure what others would think if we got involved.

The reality of the matter is that the Lord will put people on our path who have real need. He does this so that we can do something about that need. We will have to answer to the Lord for the opportunities missed. The believer needs to have open eyes and an open heart. We need to be willing to take a risk and reach out to those God puts on our path. There are no excuses for not reaching out when we have the ability to help. God will repay each of us according to what we have done (verse 12).

Saying 26: Find Wisdom and Find a Bright Future (24:13-14)

In verses 13-14 Solomon compares wisdom to honey. Here he told his readers to eat honey for it was both good for them and sweet to the taste. He told them that wisdom was like this. Wisdom was good for them and it too was sweet to their souls. Those who tasted wisdom would find it would assure them a bright future. Wisdom would keep them and give them bright hope.

Wisdom profits us in the present and in the future. By wisdom we are able to avoid many pitfalls in life. By wisdom we avoid many sorrows and hurts. Those who live in God's wisdom will assure their eternal reward and keep themselves in a right relationship with God.

Saying 27: Don't Lie in Wait against a Righteous Man (24:15-16)

God expects us to be respectful of those who belong to Him. God loves those who belong to Him. Solomon warns his readers about lying in wait for a righteous man. In other words, they were to be careful not to mistreat one of God's children. God takes this matter very seriously. Jesus told

his listeners in Matthew 25:40 that whatever they did to one of His children they did to Him:

"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'"

Jesus went on to say in Matthew 25:45:

"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'"

To speak against one of God's children is to speak against God. To harm one whom God loves is to hurt God.

Notice in verse 16 that God promises to bless the righteous and give them strength to rise up when they fall. God is with His people. Nothing the enemy does to us will stand. Those who love the Lord will overcome. They may be often cast down but they will not be defeated for God is their strength. Those who harm His children will answer to God for their actions.

Saying 28: Don't Gloat When Your Enemies Fall (24:17-18)

As believers we are not to delight in the fall of our enemy. The challenge of the Word of God is to love our enemies (see Matthew 5:43-44). We should not find any particular comfort when our enemy is being judged by God or suffers under His discipline. The love of God in our heart should stir up our compassion for the hurt our enemy feels. Solomon warns us that God disapproves of those who gloat over their enemies when they fall. He tells us that God may

turn His wrath from our enemy and put it on us to teach us the evil of our thoughts and attitudes.

Saying 29: Don't Fret Because of Evildoers (24:19-20)

While our hearts should be filled with love for our enemies we are told in saying twenty-nine that we are not to fret because of evil people or be envious of what they have obtained by evil means. We are not to concern ourselves overly with the prosperity of those who are wicked. Their wealth will not last. They have no future. Their lamp will be snuffed out and they will be judged. There is no cause to envy those who will be judged by God for wickedness. It is better to have nothing in life and know we will stand blameless before a holy God, than to have everything this world offers and be guilty for all eternity.

Saying 30: Fear the Lord (24:21-22)

Solomon's final wise saying in this section, challenges his readers to fear both the Lord and the king. They were to live lives of respect and reverence for God and refuse to join any who were living in rebellion against Him and His ways. Those who refused to live under the fear of the Lord would come to sudden destruction and ruin.

For Consideration:

- What lessons have you learned from your parents? How have they influenced you in your life?
- Why is it important that we keep ourselves from the influence of those who do not live a godly lifestyle?

- What is the true measure of our strength according to Solomon in verse 10?
- What does Solomon teach us about taking responsibility for the needs around us? Why does God bring needs to us? Have you been faithful to God in the needs He has brought your way?
- What challenge does Solomon bring to us about loving our enemies? Are there people you have problem loving today?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the influence your parents and leaders have had on your life.
- Do you have friends and loved ones who are wandering away from the Lord on the path of evil? Take a moment to pray that God would minister to them and bring them to Himself.
- Thank the Lord for His protection on your life. Thank Him for the strength He has given you to face your trials. Ask Him to increase your strength.
- Ask God to give you a greater heart of compassion. Ask Him to help you see the needs around you and give you the willingness to do something about them.
- If you have someone you have trouble loving, take a moment now and pray that God would give you grace to love them more.

MORE SAYINGS OF THE WISE

Read Proverbs 24:23-34

In the last section of Proverbs, Solomon shared thirty wise sayings. Proverbs 24:23-34 appears to be another section. It is sandwiched between Solomon's thirty sayings and a new section of sayings written down by Hezekiah's men from chapters 25-29.

Partiality in Judging (verses 23-25)

Notice how this new section is introduced in verse 23. The verses that follow are distinguished from the thirty sayings of chapters 23 and 24. "These also are sayings of the wise," the author tells us. We are not clearly told that these are Solomon's words. They are simply words of the wise.

The first of these further sayings of the wise has to do with judging without partiality. In other words, all judgement is to be on the basis of the crime committed and not on the basis of who committed the crime. All people were to be judged fairly without regard for their status or financial

situation in society. The poor were to receive the same treatment as the rich and influential.

God is not blind to partiality in judging. Those who show favouritism in judging by declaring the guilty innocent will be cursed by their people and whole nations would denounce them. God would judge those who showed partiality in judging. He would expose their actions. Their own people would turn against them. There was no blessing for those who perverted judgment.

On the other hand, the Lord would pour out His blessing on all who exercised true justice without partiality. Those who convicted the guilty would receive favor from the Lord.

The heart of the Lord God is for justice. He stands behind those who exercise His righteous judgement on the earth. God will punish sin and evil. He will not let the guilty go. They will stand before Him to give an account of their actions.

An Honest Answer (verse 26)

"An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips." That is to say, it is pleasant and refreshing. It should be mentioned here that not all honesty is easy to hear. Sometimes, honesty exposes hurts and injuries. Sometimes it reveals things that we need to deal with in our lives. What we need to understand, however, is that honesty, when spoken in love, has as its goal to build us up and move us onto the path of righteousness. Lies and deceit will only destroy us in the end. The Lord blesses honesty spoken in love. Growth in relationships can only take place when we are honest with each other. Honesty is the soil in which true relationships are built. It is the soil in which growth in

righteousness can take place. It is also the soil in which God plants His seeds of blessing.

Wise Priorities (verse 27)

Notice in verse 27 that readers are challenged to finish their outdoor work first and after that to build their house. The field, for the Jews, was a source of income. When the fields were cared for and producing crops, they had food for their family and money to spend on their homes. If the farmer ignored his fields and started to build his house, he would soon run out of money.

What the wise man is telling his readers is that they were to plan wisely. In life, it is important that we get our priorities correct. We are to weigh the cost of our projects before we undertake them. The wise man challenges his readers to be sure they have the money for the projects they undertake. We should not take on things we do not have the means to complete. God expects us to be wise stewards of His resources.

Neighbours (verses 28-29)

As believers we should maintain good relationships with our neighbors. The wise man has two things to tell his readers in verses 28-29 about their relationships with their neighbors.

First, we are to be honest in our dealings with our neighbours. "Do not testify against your neighbour without cause," the wise man told his readers in verse 28. The picture is of a man who testifies falsely about his neighbour in order to get ahead of him. We are encouraged to respect our neighbours and to speak honestly about them.

Not only are we to be honest in what we speak about our neighbor but the wise man tells us in verse 28 that we are not to use our lips to deceive our neighbours. We are to be honest in what we say about our neighbours to others and we are also to be honest in our dealings with our neighbours. Our neighbour should be able to trust us in all things.

Not all neighbours are good neighbors. Sometimes we have bad neighbours who cause us problems. The wise man, however, challenged his readers to refuse to render evil for evil. They were never to say: "I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did." As believers, we are to return good for evil. This is the clear teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Matthew 5:43-44:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Laziness (verses 30-34)

The final word of wisdom from the wise in this section is found in verses 30-34. Here the author speaks about laziness.

He begins his challenge by sharing an illustration. The wise man told his readers how on one occasion he went past the field of a lazy person and the vineyard of a person who lacked judgment. As he looked over the fields he saw that thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds and his stone wall was in ruins.

This picture remained on his mind and he began to think about what this illustration taught him. He came to the

conclusion that a little sleep and a little folding of the hands in rest will quickly bring poverty. Those who are lazy will find that poverty and scarcity will come on them like a bandit stripping them of everything they have.

We cannot sit back and expect God to provide all we need. God calls us to work hard and be responsible. God often provides for us through hard work.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about God's desire for justice? Do you see this justice in your society?
- God expects us to be honest in our words with our friends and neighbours. Does being honest mean that we need to tell our neighbours and friends everything? Is it possible to tell our friends and neighbours too much truth? When is it best not to say anything?
- What does the wise man tell us about being wise with our money and possessions? Have you been wise with your money and possessions?
- Are you a good neighbour? Is there anything more that you can do to encourage and bless your neighbours?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of justice.

- Take a moment to pray for your neighbours. Ask God to help you to be a blessing and encouragement to them.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be a hard and honest worker. Thank Him that He never ceases to minister to us.

**SAYINGS COPIED BY
HEZEKIAH'S MEN:
PART 1**

Read Proverbs 25:1-28

Under the reign of King Ahaz, the temple of God in Jerusalem was closed. Ahaz was an evil king. He offered sacrifices to the gods of the nations and even burned his own sons on the altar to these strange deities (2 Chronicles 28:2-4). His son Hezekiah brought great revival to the land. Under Hezekiah's reign, the temple was re-opened and purified. Hezekiah restored the worship of the Lord God of Israel. We read in 2 Chronicles 29:30:

"King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped."

What we have recorded for us in Proverbs 25-29 are saying that Hezekiah's men copied during this period of revival

in Jerusalem. They were designed to help the people of the day return to the Lord and His ways.

Concealing and Searching Out (verses 2-3)

One of the things we all understand about God is that His ways are so much higher than ours that we cannot possibly understand His purposes. He is much bigger than any of us. The glory of God is seen in how big He is and how His ways cannot be fathomed. God conceals His wisdom from us. Indeed, we could never grasp the depth of His wisdom and purposes. This is, in part, what makes God so glorious. His ways are beyond us and His purposes too great to understand.

It is the glory of a king to search out matters. In other words, a king who governs well will take the time to learn what is happening in his kingdom. A wise king will take the time to get to know his people and the issues they struggle with in their daily lives. He will seek to gain understanding of his kingdom so that he can rule it well.

The task of governing a nation is a complicated task requiring a person of tremendous skill and wisdom. These verses describe the heart of the king as being unsearchable for the common person. As wise and discerning as the king needs to be, his wisdom cannot be compared to that of God whose ways are beyond the wisest king.

Removing the Dross (verses 4-5)

If the king wants to rule his kingdom well, he needs to remove wickedness. The author compared this to removing the impurities from silver so that the result will be pure silver ready to be fashioned into jewelry (verse 4). As long

as there are impurities in the silver it cannot be used for anything of value. "Remove the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be established through righteousness," the wise man said. Evil and wickedness only hinder the progress of a nation. The wise king will search out evil and wickedness and remove it from his land. The blessing of God will only be hindered by evil. This same principle is true in our personal lives as well. As long as there is evil and wickedness in us, the blessing of God will only be hindered.

Humility (verses 6-7)

Verses 6-7 challenge the reader to humility. In verse 6 the author told them that they were not to exalt themselves in the king's presence or claim a place with great men. This is very easy for us to do. All too many people try to achieve greatness in the eyes of this world. They spend their time and energy trying to have people think well of them. Solomon told his readers in verse 6 that they were not to do this.

Instead of seeking greatness, the readers were to wait for the king to lift them up. If they elevated themselves, they risked being demoted and put in their place. This would be humiliating for them. If they were promoted by the king, they would be honoured before all and nothing could strip them of this honour.

As believers, it is not our role to lift up ourselves or to seek a place of honour in the eyes of those around us. Our responsibility is to be faithful. God will honour us in His time. Our focus should be on Him and His kingdom and not on ourselves.

Being Hasty in Court (verses 7-10)

Verses 7-10 challenge readers not to be hasty in drawing conclusions. "What you have seen with your eyes, do not bring hastily to court," he told them. There may be several reasons for this.

First, we might be wrong in our interpretation of what we have seen. Sometimes we don't have all the information we need. Some time ago I noticed a man spending a lot of time with a younger woman who was not his wife. I would see him in coffee shops with her. Sometimes, driving past her house I would see his car in the yard. I began to wonder why he was seeing another woman. One day, I saw them together in a coffee shop. As they were leaving, they walked past a mutual friend of theirs who said: "I see you are spending a lot of time with your daughter." When I heard this I realized how easy it would be to draw a wrong conclusion. This man was not being unfaithful to his wife. He was being a good father. Solomon is telling us not to be hasty to make judgments. We might be wrong.

Second, we should not be hasty in making judgements against our neighbour lest he put us to shame (verse 8). Can you say that you are without sin? Could it be that our neighbour knows things about us? What would happen if when we brought our accusation about our neighbour, he began to expose our sins? We need to realize that we also need correction.

Verses 9-10 tell the readers that if they argued their neighbour's case, they were not to betray his confidence. In other words, they should not use this opportunity to gossip and spread stories about their neighbour. Maybe you have been in a prayer meeting where prayer requests were being given. Sometimes we can use this as an opportunity to

share all kinds of things about our neighbour's personal life. Under the pretence of praying for our neighbour, we can in reality be gossiping. The call here is to respect our neighbours and their privacy. If we betray our neighbour's confidence we may never gain that confidence back.

Words Aptly Spoken (verses 11-15)

Words have a powerful impact. They can bless and encourage or they can break down and destroy. Words that are spoken at the correct time and in the correct way can be a real blessing. The author compared them to apples of gold in settings of silver. The picture is a beautiful basket or platter made of silver filled with delicious golden apples. Notice two things about this picture. First, notice the apples. They are beautiful apples, delicious to the taste and refreshing. Second, notice that the apples are served on a silver setting. There has been great care taken in presenting these apples to the visitor. These apples are carefully placed on a beautiful plate or basket before they were served. Our words need to be wise and wholesome but they also need to be presented in the right way. Good words spoken in the wrong way or with the wrong attitude will only bring a curse.

In verses 12-15 we are reminded of the kind of words we can speak and how they will impact those who hear them. Verse 12 speaks of words that correct. The rebuke of a wise man is compared to earrings of gold. As earrings are designed to enhance beauty, these words of correction will improve us and build our character. We can profit greatly from the corrective words of a wise man. These rebukes are valuable because they instruct and teach us the way we should go.

The trustworthy words of a messenger are compared to the coolness of snow at harvest time. That is to say, they brought refreshing. Imagine the worker labouring hard in the heat of the summer to bring in his harvest. He is being burnt by the hot sun as he works with all his might to bring in his harvest. The cooler weather is a real delight to him, especially when he has the assurance that his harvest is in. This is what the words of a trustworthy messenger are like. They bring refreshing to the weary.

There is another type of word in verse 14. Dishonest words were like clouds and wind without rain. The author paints a picture of a man who makes promises but never keeps those promises. These words are useless. They are like clouds without rain. They promise great things but their promises amount to nothing.

Gentle words, when spoken with patience, will persuade a ruler. A gentle tongue is a powerful tool. When words are spoken harshly, people tend to pull back or get defensive. When words are spoken with kindness and compassion, they break down many barriers.

Words are very powerful tools. They need to be spoken at the right time and in the right way. It is important that we learn how to speak so that our words will bless and encourage.

Moderation (verse 16-17)

Too much of a good thing can be bad. "If you find honey, eat just enough— too much of it, and you will vomit" (verse 16). We need to learn to be moderate in all we do. What is true of what we eat is also true in relationships. The author told his readers that they were not to spend too much time at their neighbour's home lest their neighbour begin to

dread their visits. Balance is important in our lives. Good things can become bad if we take them to extreme. We need discernment in knowing how to find this balance.

Falsehood, Unfaithfulness and Discernment (verses 18-20)

Verses 18-20 speak about relationships. In verse 18 we are told that the man who gave a false testimony against his neighbour was like a club, sword or sharp arrow. The idea is that this person caused his neighbour great pain and suffering. Speaking false words against one's neighbor was like hitting him or her with a club or striking them with a sword or sharp arrow.

In verse 19 the reader is told that relying on an unfaithful person was like a bad tooth or a lame foot. If you have a bad tooth, every time you eat that tooth sends terrible pain though your entire face. The same is true of a lame leg. When you want to walk on it, it gives out on you. You can't depend on a sore tooth or a lame leg. Neither can you depend on an unfaithful person. Just when you need them they will fail you.

There is a time for singing and there is a time for mourning. The author compares those who sing songs to a heavy heart to someone who takes away a person's garment on a cold day. Their song will not accomplish what they want it to accomplish. Their song shows disrespect to the mourner. If anything, it will leave the mourner angry and frustrated because the person singing does not understand their pain.

The person who sings songs to the heavy heart is also like one who pours vinegar on soda. When vinegar is poured on soda a chemical reaction takes place. The soda

explodes and boils over. A song sung to a person with a heavy heart is likely to cause the mourner to become angry or frustrated with the singer. The challenge is to be sensitive to others. There is a time to sing and rejoice and there is also a time for us to be sensitive and mourn.

Respect for Enemies (verses 21-22)

Verses 21-22 speak about the relationship a believer should have with his enemies. Even the Lord Jesus had enemies. We should not be surprised to find that we too have people in our lives who will not like us or what we stand for.

The author teaches us what Jesus taught His disciples in the gospels. If our enemy is in need, we are to do our best to provide what he needs. If he is hungry we are to feed him. If he is thirsty we are to give him something to drink. In doing this we heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward us.

In ancient times fires were kept going for cooking and heat. When the fire went out, it was not always easy to get it started again. In our day it is relatively easy to start a fire. We simply strike a match and get it started again. This was not the case in Bible times before matches were invented. Imagine that your fire went out at night as you were getting ready to go to bed. What do you do? You would have to go your neighbour to get some hot coals from him to get your fire started again. Imagine that you went to your neighbour for help. When your neighbour saw your need he filled a container with hot coals and helped you lift it onto your head so you can carry it home.

What this verse is telling us is that when our neighbour is in need we are to do all we can to reach out to them. We

are to fill his container with coals of blessing so that he will not be cold. We are to send him home with an abundant supply of coals so that he will not be in need. We are to do this, even if our neighbour is an enemy. God will see our efforts and bless us.

More about Words (verse 23-25)

Verses 23-25 have more to say about words. In verse 23 we begin by comparing the sly tongue to a bitter north wind that brings rain. This north wind was a cold wind. When that cold wind came with rain it was very miserable. Those who were trapped in it were both cold and wet.

The word "sly" is translated by "backbiting" in the King James Version of the Bible. The idea is that this tongue is deceptive and deceitful. This kind of tongue is as unpleasant as being caught in a downpour spurred on by a bitter and cold north wind. Those who speak with such a tongue will not receive a warm welcome. They will be greeted with angry looks as bitter as this north wind.

Verse 24 speaks about a quarrelsome wife. What is true about a quarrelsome wife applies equally to a quarrelsome husband or any other person for that matter. The author tells us that it is better for us to live in the corner of a roof than in a house with a quarrelsome wife. The quarrelsome person is one who cannot seem to see anything positive. This type of person always seems to be angry and critical about something and does not hesitate to let their views be known. It is very difficult to live with this type of person. We are called to be encouragers. Instead of being negative and critical we need to cultivate the art of seeing things from a positive perspective. We are to accept differences between brothers and sisters and respect each other for those differences.

Those who have lived any time away from home understand the blessing of receiving good news from a distant land. Good news is like cold refreshing water to a weary soul (verse 25). It is a delight to be bearers of good news.

Taking a Stand (verse 26)

In verse 26 the author challenged his readers to take a stand for righteousness. He compared the person who let the wicked person have his way to the one who muddied a spring or polluted a well. Everyone suffers when the wicked have their way. Wickedness pollutes our land and strips it of its blessing from God. When we allow wicked people to have their own way, we allow the pollution of their wickedness to fill our lands. We are to fight for righteousness and stand up for its principles lest wickedness defile our land.

Seeking One's Own Honour (verse 27)

Verse 27 is really a repeat of verses 6-7. Here the wise man told his readers that they were not to be obsessed with seeking their own glory. It is nice to have people think well of us. If we are working for a living, we want to please our boss. This is as it should be. Children ought to seek to please their parents. Believers ought to seek to please their God. What we need to understand, however, is that when we become obsessed with having people think well of us, we wander from the path of righteousness. Too much honey is not good, the wise man says. Neither is the excessive desire to seek one's own honour. We ought to be known to be an honourable people. We should maintain a good reputation in our community. It is possible, however, to become so caught up in seeking our own honour that our focus is no longer on God and serving Him from a pure heart. The focus shifts from God to ourselves. Our

focus should be on living for our Lord and serving Him. He will honour us. We do not need to seek this honour for ourselves.

Self-Control (verse 28)

We conclude this chapter with a word about a person with no self-control. This person is like a city whose walls are broken down. A city whose walls are broken down is unprotected. Without the protection of the walls, this city is open to the attack of the enemy. When a person does not have self-control they can quickly fall into all kinds of evil. They speak words they will one day regret.

For Consideration:

- Why is it important that we take a stand for righteousness? What happens when we give way to the wicked?
- Have you ever found yourself trying to get people to think highly of you? How does this distract us from our true calling in life?
- Why is it good not to make quick judgments? Have you ever judged someone only to find out later that you had misunderstood the situation?
- Why is how we use words important? Is it possible that we use the right words but present them in a way that is wrong? What is the result of right words presented in the wrong way?
- What is the place of moderation in the Christian life? Can we have too much of a good thing? Explain.

- How does self-control protect us?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to search your heart to remove any impurities that keep you from experiencing the fullness of His blessings.
- Ask God to set you free from a desire to make a name for yourself. Ask Him instead to set your desire on Him.
- Ask the Lord to teach you how to use your words so that you are able to present them like apples on a silver platter to those around you.
- Do you have trouble loving someone? Ask the Lord to help you to love them and to reach out to them in ways that would honour them as people.
- Ask God to give you more self-control in your words and actions so that you do not fall into sin.

28

SAYINGS COPIED BY HEZEKIAH'S MEN: PART 2

Read Proverbs 26:1-28

Proverbs 26 speaks about different types of people; the fool, the sluggard, and the gossip. We will look at each of these individuals separately in this meditation.

Chapter 26 begins with two statements. The first relates to the fool. Here the author reminds his readers that honour was not fitting for a fool. He compares a fool receiving honour to snow in summer or rain at harvest time. There is nothing honourable about being a fool or having foolish ways. No one wants it to rain when they are trying to bring in the harvest. Neither do people want to see a fool honoured.

We need to understand how the word "fool" is used in this passage. Wisdom, according to Solomon, has its roots in the fear of the Lord. The wise person is one who has

learned the art of living a life that respects and reverences God and His purposes. The fool is just the opposite. The fool has no desire for God nor does he care about his eternity. The fool lives for the moment. The fool does not submit to God. There can be no honour in disobedience to God and His ways.

The second statement made in the opening section of this chapter has to do with an undeserved curse. The author speaks in this chapter about fools, gossips and deceivers. These individuals have one thing in common. They are not in control of their words. They speak without thinking. Solomon told his readers that they did not need to fear these undeserved curses from the lips of careless people. Like a bird fluttering about, these curses would not find a place to rest. They would cause confusion for a time but would move on and be forgotten.

Having made these introductory statements the author moves on now to speak of the fool, the lazy person and the gossip.

THE FOOL (verses 3-12)

The first person described in chapter 26 is the fool. The author has several things to say about the fool.

A Rod for the Back of the Fool (verse 3)

The author does not have too much respect for the fool. As we have said, the fool is one who has decided to turn his or her back on God. He has rejected God and His ways.

It is important to note that we are not speaking here about punishing someone for lack of understanding. The author

is calling for the punishment of those who refuse the wisdom of God. He is calling for the judgement of those who refuse to listen to God or follow His ways. Just like the whip is used to correct the horse or the halter is put on the donkey to show them the direction they need to go, so the rod of correction should be used on the back of a rebellious fool to bring him back to the way he should go.

Don't Answer a Fool in His Folly (verse 4-5)

Have you ever tried to reason with a person who refused to listen to reason? It is impossible to reason with this type of person. Trying to reason with such a person will only cause conflict and anger. The only way to deal with such a person is to treat them as fools. There is no use debating with them because they will not listen to reason. They need to be corrected and admonished for their foolishness. If we don't admonish them and challenge their foolishness, they will think they are wise. They will not see the error of their ways.

Don't Send a Message Through a Fool (verse 6)

In verse 6 the wise man warns his readers about sending a message through a fool. He compares it to cutting off one's feet or drinking violence. The fool will likely misrepresent the person who sends him and this will reflect badly on the person who sent him. The person receiving the message will get a wrong impression. The receiver may even be insulted by the comments of the fool and this will become a problem for the sender of the message.

A Proverb in the Mouth of a Fool (verses 7, 9)

A proverb or wise saying in the mouth of a fool was like a man's leg that hung limp. What use is a lame leg? A person cannot walk with it. It serves no purpose. This is what a wise saying is like to a fool. It is useless to them. They don't know how to use it and it is of no benefit to them practically because they don't accept it.

A wise saying is like a thorn bush in the hands of a drunkard. What will happen to the drunkard with a thorn bush? Very likely he will only hurt himself. This thorn bush will scratch him and everyone he comes in contact with. This is what a wise saying is like for the fool. He will not benefit from it. He will misinterpret it and this will result in his hurting himself and those around him.

Honouring a Fool (verse 8)

Honouring a fool is like tying a stone in a sling. This is actually quite humorous. Imagine taking a stone and tying it with cord to a slingshot. What is the result? You can swing that slingshot all you want but the stone will never leave its pouch because it is tied firmly to it. A stone must be free to leave the sling if it is to be of any use to the person using it. Honouring a fool is like tying a stone to a sling shot. It is foolish. It will accomplish nothing. In fact it may be very dangerous. Imagine facing the enemy with slingshot that would not work.

Hiring a Fool (verse 10)

The reader is challenged not to hire a foolish person. He compares this to an archer who wounds people at random. There is not discernment here. The fool has no purpose or

guidelines. He does what he feels and doesn't think about what he does.

When we hire someone we want to be sure that the person is wise and discerning. We want to know that the one we hire will advance the cause for which we serve. The fool will not do this because he is not guided by principles and is unwilling to learn.

This principle has implications in our service for the Lord. We want to be sure that those who serve and work with us are men and women who live according to the principles of God's word. We want them to be people of purpose.

Fool and His Folly (verse 11)

The fool by his or her very nature is attracted to foolishness. Unless they are radically changed in nature they will continue to act in foolish ways. Unbelievers do not understand the ways of righteousness. These principles do not make sense to them. It is the nature of humankind to sin and wander from God and His ways. Until the Lord God changes our heart this is where we will remain. Solomon compares this to a dog returning to eat its own vomit. Until we are changed by the Spirit of God we will continue to return to our foolish ways.

One Who is Wise in His Own Eyes (verse 12)

In verse 12 the wise man told his readers that there was more hope for a fool than for the person who was wise in his own eyes. Pride is worse than foolishness. A humble fool can change if he or she is willing to learn and change. The proud person, however, refuses to change. These people are wise in their own eyes and will not listen to

anyone because they believe they alone are right. A fool may repent of his or her ways and come to the knowledge of the truth. It is much more difficult for a proud person to repent and be restored.

THE SLUGGARD (verse 13-16)

We now move on in verses 13-16 to speak about the sluggard or lazy person. These verses have several things to say about the sluggard.

The Sluggard's Excuses (verse 13)

The lazy person is a master of excuses. Lazy people will invent all kinds of excuses so they do not have to work. We have some examples of this in verse 13. "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!'" As a parent I have often seen my children make up excuses to get out of something they did not want to do. Sometimes the lazy ones actually believe the excuses they make up. They are even able to deceive themselves into thinking these excuses are valid.

The Sluggard Turns on his Bed (verse 14)

The sluggard is compared to a door turning on its hinges. The picture here is of the lazy person turning from side to side in his bed. They do not get anything accomplished in life; they simply sleep and turn from side to side on their bed.

Too Lazy to Eat (verse 15)

Sometimes the lazy person is too lazy to take care of themselves. In verse 15, Solomon told his readers that the

sluggard buried his hand in his dish but was too lazy to bring it to his mouth. The lazy person does not care for his fields. He does not care for his or her personal appearance or his family. He doesn't even care for himself.

Wise in his Own Eyes (verse 16)

The sluggard is a master of excuses. Sometimes these people deceive themselves. They are not worried about the future. "Everything will work out," they say. The sluggard may have wise and discerning people challenging him to work but he will not listen. He does not see the need to listen. He doesn't believe their concerns are justified. He figures he has everything under control. He sees himself as wiser than those who try to counsel him. Laziness is dangerous not only because of what it does to us and our families but also because it closes our mind to the counsel and advice of other people.

THE GOSSIP, THE QUARRELSOME PERSON AND THE DECEIVER (verses 17-28)

Verses 17-28 speaks about a variety of people who misuse their words. All of these people use words as weapons to hurt their fellow citizen.

Quarrels (verse 17)

Verse 17 compares a person who gets involved in someone else's quarrel to a person who grabs a dog by the ears. Who in their right mind would grab an angry dog by the ears? Such a person risks getting bit. This is what will happen to those who get involved in a quarrel that is not theirs. They will surely get hurt.

Joking (verse 18-19)

The way we use words is very important. In the culture in which I live, people are always joking with each other. One common way of joking with people is to insult or belittle them. Verses 18-19 speak to this practice. He compares it to a madman shooting fiery arrows. The words we use are like fiery arrows. They hurt those they hit. It really doesn't matter that you may have been joking when you said what you did. The fact is that those words hurt and you will be held accountable to God for what you have said.

Gossip (verses 20-22)

Verses 20-22 compare gossip to a fire that is fuelled by words. Without wood a fire will go out. So it is with gossip and a quarrel. If we simply stop fueling the gossip with our words it will soon stop. This is not always an easy thing to do. The author reminded his readers in verse 22 that the words of the gossip were like choice morsels. They are delicious and difficult to resist. We all know how tempting it is to listen to the latest gossip. It is also difficult to keep from sharing that gossip. The wise person will exercise discipline. He will resist the delicious morsels of gossip that come his way and stop the gossiping in its tracks.

The Deceiver (verses 23-28)

In verse 23 the author compared the deceiver to a clay vessel coated with glaze. It looks beautiful on the outside but it really is a cheap vessel that will not last. This is what the words of the deceiver are like. They are coated with wonderful and delightful promises but they are not what they appear to be on the outside. There is malicious intent behind the words of the deceiver. He harbours deceit in his heart (verse 24). His speech is charming but it cannot be

trusted for his heart is filled with seven abominations (verse 25). Some see the seven abominations mentioned here refer to Proverbs 6:16-19 where Solomon told his readers that there were seven things the Lord hated:

- 1) Haughty eyes
- 2) Lies
- 3) Shedding of innocent blood
- 4) Scheming
- 5) Feet rushing to evil
- 6) False witnesses
- 7) Dissension between brothers

This is what is behind the charming words of the deceiver. He conceals his true intent by deception.

The author promised that the day was coming when the deceiver would be exposed to the assembly (verse 26). "If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him," he told his readers in verse 27. Deceivers will fall into their own pit. They will be judged for their actions. God would reveal their actions and they will answer to Him for their deceit.

Deceivers hate those they hurt (verse 28). They deliberately set out to hurt their fellow citizens by deceiving them. They flattered people with the purpose of ruining them. There are no noble intentions here. Deceivers do not care about the hurt they cause. Deception is never innocent. Deceivers will have to answer for their actions. As believers we must remove all forms of deception from our lives and relationships.

For Consideration:

- What is Solomon's definition of a fool? Why is foolishness such a serious matter in his eyes?
- Why is it dangerous to work with a fool? Why is it important that we keep our distance from a fool?
- Solomon tells us that a fool always returns to his foolishness. This is true unless his foolish nature is changed. How did the Lord God change your foolish nature?
- Why is there more hope for a fool than for a proud person?
- Have you ever found yourself making excuses not to do what you should do? Explain.
- How does laziness keep us from listening to the counsel of others?
- How is gossip like a fire? How do you put out that fire?
- How can it be said that a deceiver hates those he deceives?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has changed your foolish nature and given you a heart that seeks Him.
- Ask the Lord to strip any pride from you.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have fuelled the fires of gossip and quarrelling.
- Ask the Lord to help you to use your words carefully to be a blessing to all who hear them.

**SAYINGS COPIED BY
HEZEKIAH'S MEN:
PART 3**

Read Proverbs 27:1-27

Boasting (verses 1-2)

Chapter 27 begins with a word about boasting. Notice first, in verse 1, that the author of the proverb warns his readers not to boast about tomorrow because they did not know what tomorrow would bring. How many times have we made plans for the future? We all have plans. It is good to have a plan. In fact, Scripture encourages us to make plans for the future (see Proverbs 6:6-8). We are challenged to be like the ant that works hard to gather in her harvest for the winter. The issue being addressed in Proverbs 27:1-2 is not planning for the future but boasting about our plans for the future. Planning for the future is one thing, boasting of all the great things we are going to do is another. We do not know if we will be alive or well tomorrow. We cannot assume that we have control of our

destiny. The Lord God alone is in control of our future. All our plans must be held in submission to Him and His purposes. Only if God wills are we able to accomplish our plans. We must recognize God in all our plans. We must take His purposes and will into account when we look ahead into the future. To boast about tomorrow and all the things we are going to do is to take God's place. It is to assume that we are in control of our future.

The second thing these verses tell us is that we are not to praise ourselves. We are to leave this to others. There are two principles we need to keep in mind here. First, it is proper and acceptable to receive praise from other people. Some of us have a hard time accepting praise. In reality these people are trying to encourage and bless us by their words. They want us to know that we have blessed them. To refuse their praise is to strip them of the ability to bless, encourage and thank us for the way God has used us in their lives. I have personally been guilty of downplaying the praise and compliments of others. Sometimes I have actually believed that by receiving these compliments I was being proud. The opposite is actually true. By refusing the compliments and praise of others I am showing my pride. In reality, I am saying that I don't need their affirmation and blessing. It takes greater humility to graciously accept a compliment than it does to push it away.

The second principle we need to see in verse 2 is that we are not to live our lives seeking to please others. While we are often blessed by the praise and thankfulness of others, we do not serve or live our lives seeking that praise. Some people spend their time trying to lift themselves up in the eyes of those around them. They do everything so that people will think well of them. Sometimes they are so insecure that they have to draw attention to themselves so people will notice them. Our security does not come from

people. We serve, not to be noticed by others, but because it is right and godly. We serve to honour the Lord for what He has done and for who He is. The person who is always looking for praise takes the glory from the Lord. We should learn to accept with thanksgiving the praise of our brothers and sisters but we should not live our lives seeking that praise.

Anger and Jealousy (verses 3-4)

Imagine a person carrying a great load of stones or sand in his arms. This burden is heavy and very difficult to bear for any length of time. As he walks with this load his steps are slow and awkward. His muscles are tight and his heart beats under the strain. He can only walk a certain distance before he has to put this load down and rest. Imagine having to do this all day. This would be a difficult job and one most people would not look forward to doing.

While this load of stones or sand is difficult to bear, there is something worse than this. Provoking a fool to anger was more difficult to bear than this armful of heavy stones. Who can stand in the presence of an angry fool? Who can tell what the fool will do in his anger? It is far better to be weighted down with stones than to bear the anger of a fool in uncontrollable anger.

While the anger of a fool can be cruel and his fury overwhelming, there is something even greater than anger. Jealousy, according to verse 4, is worse than anger and fury. Jealousy is the fuel for all kinds of evil. Jealousy will provoke anger. Jealousy has been the source of terrible crimes in our day. Murder, theft, deceit and slander have all sprung from the soil of jealousy. Uncontrolled jealousy is very dangerous. Unchecked, there is no telling where it will lead.

The Wounds of a Friend (verses 5-6)

There are times when friends have to be harsh with each other. Sometimes even those who love each other clash. This may be because one person is going in the wrong direction and needs to be corrected.

A true friend will not hesitate to correct when it is needed. This is because a true friend cares. There are all kinds of people who say they love us but wouldn't cross the street to minister to us in our time of need. Love by its nature is practical. You can't say you love someone if you are not willing to do something about it. I would much rather have a friend who corrected me when I needed it, than a friend who just let me wander into error.

The reader is reminded that the wounds of a true friend could be trusted more than an enemy's kisses. The true friend has our best interest at heart. This is not the case for our enemy. The true friend will do all he can to care for us in our need. Though they may have to hurt us, they will do so because it is for our benefit. While we may not always enjoy the rebukes of a true friend, we will benefit from them if we listen.

Hunger (verse 7)

Those who have all they need do not always appreciate what they have. Those who have nothing will appreciate anything they have. "He who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet" (verse 7). This shows us the importance of moderation in our lives. If we hoard things for ourselves we will find that we really do not enjoy them in the end. It is better to live a simple life and enjoy what we have than to have so much we get bored

with it all. Better to give the excess we have to others so that both we and they can enjoy what God has given.

Responsibility (verse 8)

Verse 8 speaks of a man who strayed from his home. In the Old Testament context, the man was the provider for his family. When a man wandered from his home, he left his family behind without provision. Not only was his family without provision but his own life was in danger because he did not have the security of a home. Maybe the man needed a change. Maybe he was not comfortable at home and wanted to do bigger and better things. Leaving his home and ignoring his responsibilities was dangerous and irresponsible. The writer of the proverb challenged the men of his day to take their responsibilities seriously. He compared this man to a bird that strayed from its nest, leaving its eggs or young ones vulnerable to the attack of an enemy. God expects us as providers for our home to be responsible and faithful. We are to do all we can to assure the safety and security of the family God has given us.

Friends (verses 9-10)

One of the best things about good friends is the fact that we can sit down and talk to them knowing they will listen to us and give us good advice when we need it. This, according to verse 9, was like perfume and incense that brought great joy to the heart. Who among us has not been wonderfully blessed by such friends? The pleasantness of a friend sprung from his or her wise counsel.

Verse 10 challenges us to respect such friends. They were rare jewels to be treasured. They can be trusted even above family members. A friend cares sometimes more

than our blood relatives. When disaster strikes sometimes even a brother will refuse to stand with us. This is not the case for a friend. A true friend will always be there.

Answering Those Who Treat us with Contempt (verse 11)

While our children may choose to be disobedient and rebellious, generally when we raise our children in the way of the Lord they will be governed by the principles we taught them. Verse 11 tells us that when a son was wise he would not only bring joy to the heart of the father but give the father something to answer to those who treated him with contempt. In other words, when the father's enemies saw his wise children they would back off in their harsh and critical comments. The way he raised his children would speak loudly to his enemies about the character of the father. True character is seen first at home.

The Prudent (verse 12-13)

Some people seem to fall into danger or find themselves in difficult situations. They don't seem to have wisdom or discernment. The wise person will see danger and avoid it. God calls us to be wise in our decisions. When we are not careful in our decisions we risk losing what God has given. God calls us to take the necessary precautions in life. This may mean seeking to provide for our future or not making unwise decisions in business. It is true that God will sometimes lead us into situations that do not make sense to us from our human perspective. In those cases, we need to be obedient to the Lord and willing to risk everything. Unless the Lord leads us otherwise, as good stewards of God's resources, it is good to avoid dangerous or risky situations.

We have an example of this principle in verse 13. Here we are challenged to take the garment of the person who put up security for a stranger or a wayward woman. The stranger or the wayward women could not be trusted. The person who trusted them was taking a big chance. Very likely these individuals would not pay back their debt. The wayward woman was a dishonest woman. She was unfaithful to her husband. The stranger was someone who had not proven his character. If you deal with these people you will need to demand a security from them in the event they were not faithful to their promises. It would be foolish to risk everything by putting confidence in people who have not proven they are worthy of trust. Asking for a garment as a guarantee of payment assured that there would be some kind of return on a loan or a promise.

The author challenges us to be wise in our dealings with others. We should certainly be willing to give to those in need. We are challenged in the Scripture to do all we can to minister to those in need. If we are not wise, however, it would be all too easy to lose everything we have. When this happens we will ourselves be in need and unable to minister to the needs of even our own family.

Loud Blessings (verse 14)

Too much of a good thing is not good. This is true with regards to our possessions and our relationships. Solomon referred to this in Proverbs 25:16-17 when he said:

If you find honey, eat just enough— too much of it, and you will vomit. Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house— too much of you, and he will hate you.

The principle of moderation also applies in verse 14 where the author said: "If a man loudly blesses his neighbour early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse." Imagine that you are resting in bed in the early morning and your neighbour, in his eager excitement, comes to your door expressing loudly how wonderful a day it is. How are you likely to respond to your neighbour at that time? Will you not tell him to leave you alone? While excitement and happiness are good, if not controlled, they can become an annoyance to those around us. We need to learn the art of knowing how and when to express our emotions.

A Quarrelsome Wife (verse 15-16)

The quarrelsome person is one who seems to always find fault. Verses 15-16 compare living with a quarrelsome wife to a constant dripping on a rainy day. This constant dripping can become annoying. We just want it to stop. This is what it is like living with a quarrelsome person who seems bent on proving their point. You just want them to leave you alone and give you some peace and quiet.

Getting a quarrelsome person to stop their quarrelling is like trying to restrain the wind or picking up oil with one's hands. It is impossible. Who can stop the wind or trap it in a box? Oil cannot be picked up with the hands. Neither can a quarrelsome person be restrained. They are not happy people. They are unreasonable and find fault with everything we say.

Iron Sharpening Iron (verse 17)

We need each other if we are going to grow in maturity and wisdom. Those who live in isolation from other people will not reach their full potential. God has designed us in such a way that we need each other. He has not given all His

gifts to one person. He has not imparted all His wisdom to one person. We all have had different experiences in life. We need to draw from each other's gifts, experiences and wisdom if we are going to mature in our walk with the Lord and become everything we need to become.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another," verse 17 says. My interaction with other people will sharpen me. I will benefit from others and learn from them. The wise person will recognize his or her need of other people. Wise people will surround themselves with the gifts, resources and wisdom of many people because they know that if they are to succeed, they will need to learn how to work with others and learn from them. As believers, we are to be humble enough to recognize our need of other people in our lives. We would do well to have people we can talk to and seek advice from in our time of need.

Looking after one's Master (verse 18)

If you tend a fig tree you will usually be able to eat its fruit. The person who plants a garden expects to enjoy the harvest at the end of the season. Verse 18 tells us that this same principle applies to relationships with those in authority over us. The servant who looks after his or her master will be honoured. If we serve well and respect those in authority over us they will see our efforts and be pleased.

The servant can look after his or her master in many different ways. First, they can serve them well. This will advance the cause of the master. Second, they can respect their master by being honest and diligent in all their dealings with him. Third, they can look after their master and his cause by watching how they speak about him. In doing so, they honour his reputation and do nothing to slander

his name. The servant looks after his or her master by being a good ambassador for his cause and his name.

As believers we are to be good servants of our God. We are to honour Him and His character in all we do. If we honour our Master we will be honoured ourselves. God is not blind to our efforts for the kingdom.

The Heart (verse 19)

In 1 Samuel 16:7 we read:

"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.""

God is not fooled by outward appearance. He looks at the attitude of our heart. The measure of a person is not in what they have on the outside but what they have in their heart. While the outward actions and appearance is not how we ought to judge a person, that person's heart will be reflected in their actions and attitudes. Just as water or a mirror reflects a face, so a person's heart will be reflected in their actions and attitudes.

We can see the true character of a person by what they do and how they live. A person with a generous and compassionate heart will reach out in selfless acts of compassion and kindness. A person with a greedy heart will turn his back on those in need.

Greed and Lust (verse 20)

"Death and Destruction are never satisfied" (verse 20). Death claims its victims every minute. There has hardly ever been a time on this earth, since the fall in the Garden of Eden, when destruction has not been taking place somewhere on the earth. Death and destruction have an appetite that never seems to be quenched.

In verse 20 we read that our eyes are like this. Humankind never seems to stop lusting and craving for more. We see something and we lust after it. Wars start by greed and lust for what the eyes have seen. Marriages have been broken because the heart lusted for what the eyes saw. There is a natural tendency in us to want what our eyes see. Our lust and greed seem to be as hungry as death and destruction and equally as dangerous.

Man Tested by Praise (verse 21)

Silver is melted in a crucible or melting pot to be refined. Gold is put in a furnace to be melted and purified. The test of the purity of our heart is in the praise we receive. Let's consider this for a moment.

What happens when we are praised? Sometimes that praise can go to our head and make us proud. Sometimes we can desire that praise so much that we become motivated only by the praise we receive from others and not by true and pure motives. Sometimes we push off the praise of others in a false humility and refuse to let them minister to us or bless us. Sometimes we are influenced by the flattering remarks of those who want to manipulate us into doing what they want us to do. How we handle praise can reveal much about us. If we are controlled and manipulated by the praises of others we likely have insecurities

within us that need to be dealt with. If we push off praise and refuse to accept it we likely have to deal with issues of pride.

While the praises people offer us are not bad, what we do with it is very important. The praises people give can control our actions or dominate us. Like strong alcohol the praise we receive can quickly overcome us and control our every action. It is important that we learn how to handle praise. We must be able to receive the praise that others give. God often blesses us through the encouragement and praise of others. It is important however, that we not let the praises of others control us and our thoughts.

The Fool (verse 22)

The author shows his frustration with foolishness in verse 22 by showing his readers how it affects every part of an individual. Remember that foolishness, in this context, has to do with a rejection of the truth of God. It has to do with sin and rebellion against God and His wise ways.

If they were to grind the fools in a mortar with a pestle it would not remove folly from them. The mortar and pestle are used for grinding spices or other such foods. They do so by crushing the spices. Even if the fools were ground up like spices, the foolishness would not leave them. Foolishness was ingrained into every cell of their body and mind. It could not be separated from them and who they were. This is how sin has affected us. Sin has affected every cell of our bodies and cannot be separated from us and who we are. How thankful we need to be that the Lord Jesus comes to give us new life.

Give Careful Attention to your Herd (verse 23-27)

Responsibility is a characteristic that we all need. In verse 23-27 we are challenged to be wise stewards of the resources God has given.

"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds," the reader is told in verse 24. The herd needed to be tended. If the shepherd did not care for his flock and provide for it, he would likely lose his source of income. They were his guarantee of meat and milk. In verse 24, we are reminded that riches do not last forever. For this reason it was important for God's people to take care of what He had given them.

In verse 25 we have a picture of a farmer who cut his hay and brought it into the barns to feed his lambs. Those lambs, when well fed and cared for, would provide wool for clothing to keep the farmer warm. His goats would provide milk to feed the farmer's family and servants and money to pay for his fields. By being responsible for his herds, the farmer was caring for his own family. His family depended on the health of the herds for their well-being. The challenge here is to care for what we have. In doing so, we will be blessed.

For Consideration:

- Why is boasting wrong? How does the one who boasts try to take the place of God?
- Why is jealousy dangerous? What sins flourish in the soil of jealousy? Is it ever acceptable to be jealous?

- Why are the wounds of a friend to be received with thanksgiving? How are the wounds of a friend the test of true friendship?
- Moderation enables us to enjoy what we have. Too much of a good thing strips away our desire for it. Do you agree with these statements? Explain and give some examples.
- What does this chapter teach you about your need for other people? How have other people helped you to grow in your spiritual walk?
- How do you handle praise? How does praise test your character?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for how He has used other people to sharpen and correct you.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be responsible with what He has given you. Thank Him for the way He has provided for you. Ask Him to help you to be content with His provision and not to be constantly lusting for something else.
- Ask God to give you a pure heart. Ask Him to let the purity of that heart be seen in your actions and attitudes. Ask Him to show you any area of your heart that might need to be changed.
- This chapter shows us how foolishness is ingrained into every part of our lives. Take a moment to thank the Lord that He has given us a solution to this foolishness in the person of the Lord Jesus and His Word.

30

SAYINGS COPIED BY HEZEKIAH'S MEN: PART 4

Read Proverbs 28:1-28

Boldness of the Righteous (verse 1)

There are many things that disturb the conscience of the wicked person. Often those who have secretly hurt others live in fear that one day these people will discover what they have done. The evil person has many fears. The wicked man flees even though no one pursues him. His fears get the best of him. Because he has many enemies, he is always fearful. This is not the case for the righteous. They have a clear conscience. They can walk with their head held high. They have nothing to be ashamed about. They have been a blessing to many. They know that they are in a right relationship with their God and their enemies. Solomon describes them as being as bold as a lion. This boldness comes not only because their conscience is clear, but because they have a good relationship with their

God. They know His strength and enabling. They walk with Him and have nothing to fear. Even death does not cause them fear for they are assured of their place at God's side.

Maintaining Order (verse 2)

When a nation is governed by wisdom and understanding, order is maintained and there is stability. The wisdom that is spoken of here refers to the wisdom of God. When a nation is run on the basis of Biblical principles it will prosper. This is not the case when the nation turns from God and His ways. When a nation and its leaders live in rebellion against God, it will be filled with discord and discontent. Because of this discontent in the nation, rulers will be quickly replaced by other rulers. When a nation turns its back on God and gives way to greed and immorality, its leaders will suffer. Because the leaders are not leading the nation in righteousness they will not be respected or honoured. Rulers will be overthrown and replaced. There will be no stability or order in the nation that is not governed by principles of wisdom and righteousness.

An Oppressive Ruler (verse 3)

There is some confusion in verse 3 about the person being addressed. The King James Version as well as the New Living Translation speaks of a poor person oppressing others who were poor. The New International Version speaks of a ruler who oppresses the poor but includes a footnote indicating that the proper translation may be "a poor man."

If the reference is to a ruler who oppressed the poor, the interpretation is quite clear. A ruler who oppressed the poor destroys his nation. Like a hard rain uproots the crops so a ruler who oppressed his own people cannot prosper. God would stand in defense of the poor against this ruler.

If the reference here is to a poor person oppressing one like him, the sin seems to be even worse. The ruler, though without excuse, really does not understand the condition of the poor. A poor person who oppresses one like him does so understanding what he or she is doing. God often spoke to His children about oppressing the foreigners in the land. He reminded them in Deuteronomy 24:17-18 that they were to respect and offer justice to the foreigner in their midst because they were themselves strangers and slaves in Egypt:

Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

It is one thing to do something out of ignorance and quite another to do so with full understanding. God would certainly remove His blessing from those who showed no compassion to the poor in their midst. By oppressing the poor, God's people were placing their whole nation under the curse of God.

Forsaking the Law (verse 4)

By forsaking the law of God, we praise the wicked. In other words, we encourage wickedness and the evildoer. By turning from the law of God the believer was saying that he or she would prefer the ways of the wicked to the ways of God. They were commending the wicked and rejecting God's way. By keeping the law of God the believer resisted the wicked. They chose God's way rather than the way of wickedness and evil. Someone once said that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." In other words, when we choose to do imitate someone's ways, we are showing

them how much we want to be like them. Imagine your child saying to you one day: "Dad, when I grow up I want to be just like you." How would that make you feel as a father? Would this not be a great compliment? In a similar way, when we imitate evil people we praise them and their lifestyle.

Justice and the Evil (verse 5)

"Evil men do not understand justice" (verse 5). Part of the reason for this is that evil people have rejected the law of God. They have set up their own standards which are very different from God and His ways. Maybe you have spoken to individuals who have rejected the Word of God. These individuals have no moral standard on which to base their lives. They don't understand sin. Some of them don't understand what is wrong with pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex or homosexuality. They don't see what is wrong with a certain amount of dishonesty in business. They have no authoritative guide for what is right or wrong. They don't see that they have even sinned and offended a holy God. They don't understand why they should be punished.

This is not the case for those who seek the Lord. These individuals follow the Lord and His law. They look to God as their standard of morality and right behavior. They understand the seriousness of grieving God.

Blamelessness (verse 6)

Verse 6 tells us that it is better to live a blameless life than to have all this world has to offer and live in disobedience to God. In saying this, the writer shows us that he understood the seriousness of sin. He is telling his readers that he would rather give up all his wealth and prosperity than live in sin against a holy God.

This is a powerful testimony for us today. There is nothing that can be compared to walking in fellowship with God. You can have all this world has to offer but if you do not have fellowship with God, your life will be empty. You may be the poorest person on the earth but if you have fellowship with God you can know satisfaction and fulfillment.

Gluttony (verse 7)

The word used for glutton here can refer to someone who lives a careless and wasteful life. The glutton uses far more than is needed and wastes more than he should. The reader is challenged not to be companions with these careless and wasteful individuals. These individuals have no regard for the Law of God or respect for what He had given.

The son who kept the Law of God and walked in His ways was wise and brought honour to his parents. The wasteful and careless son, on the other hand, brought shame not only to himself but to his whole family.

Exorbitant Interest (verse 8)

God expects us to be compassionate and kind to those in need. He is also concerned by how we run our businesses. Verse 8 warns us about seeking to get rich off others by charging interest that was too high. While a modest profit from our services is acceptable, the writer warns about charging too much. As believers we are to be fair in our dealings with others. To seek to get rich off the backs of others by unfairly charging them for services is not only ungodly but those who do so will have to answer to God for their actions.

Those who increased wealth by excessive interest would amass it for someone who would be compassionate to the poor. In other words, God would strip away the wealth of such a person and give it to someone who would use it as He intended. Those who oppress others for their own purposes should not expect the blessing of God.

Turning a Deaf Ear to the Law (verse 9)

In verse 8 we saw how God would take away the blessing of those who oppressed others to get rich. Here in verse 9, we read that those who turned their back on God's law should not expect to have their prayers answered. If we want to experience God's blessing, we need to live in a right relationship with Him. We cannot live in rebellion against God and His ways and expect His blessing.

Leading God's Children Astray (verse 10)

In Matthew 18:6 the Lord Jesus told His disciples:

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

The Lord Jesus is a good shepherd who cares deeply for His sheep. His love for them is very real. In Matthew 18 He condemns anyone who would mislead any of His children. Their judgement would be severe if they turned even one of His children from the path of righteousness.

Verse 10 says: "He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own trap." The Lord God would judge the person who tried to tempt one of His children to follow

the path of evil. The false prophets of the day were doing just that. Even in our day there are pastors and Christian leaders who are doing the same. These individuals will have to answer to God for their ways. It is not only leaders who are guilty of misleading God's people. It is possible to mislead weaker brothers or sisters by our bad example or counsel. How careful we need to be that we live lives that are examples of godliness for all who see us. To mislead one of God's children is a serious matter. God's judgement will fall on those who are guilty of such sin. Those who live a blameless life, however, will know the blessing and approval of God. Blameless, here, does not mean perfect. The person who lives a blameless life is one who has come for forgiveness and cleansing.

Discernment (verse 11)

Discernment and wisdom are not something money can buy. The poor man can have wisdom as well as the rich. The rich may be able to afford a great education but still not be wise. The wisdom spoken of here is a wisdom that comes from God. A rich man may think he is wise but even a poor man who is wise and discerning can see his foolishness. God's gifts do not belong to the rich alone. God extends His blessing to all people regardless of their position in society.

The Triumph of the Righteous (verse 12)

A nation governed by righteous principles is a nation that will be blessed. God knows what is best and when we follow His ways we experience His blessing on our society and personal lives. It is a happy day when righteousness triumphs. On the other hand, when wicked people come to power, there can only be darkness and corruption ahead

for the nation. It is a sad day when wicked people who care nothing for God, rise to power.

Concealing a Sin (verse 13)

Sin in any form will weigh us down and keep us from experiencing the blessing of God. If we want to prosper in our lives, we need to deal with the one thing that keeps us from God and His blessing. We must see sin as the number one enemy to blessing and spiritual wholeness in our lives. As long as we are unwilling to deal with our sin and rebellion against God, we will not experience God's blessing in our lives. Only by confessing and renouncing sin can that blessing and fellowship be restored.

Notice here that both confession and renouncing is necessary. There are people who are willing to admit that they have sinned but these same people are not always willing to renounce their sin. Not only do we have to confess what we have done but we also have to turn from that sin. Confession is not enough. Confession must be accompanied by renouncing and turning away from our sin. Those who are willing to both confess and renounce their sin will find that God is a God of mercy who will forgive their sin and restore them to fellowship.

The Fear of the Lord (verse 14)

In verse 14, we are told that there was a blessing for all who feared the Lord. To fear the Lord is to live a life that respects and honours His name. This means that the person who feared the Lord turned from sin and rebellion and sought to live in obedience and respect for God. This person will know the wonderful blessing of God. The person, who hardened his heart to God and His ways, however, would fall into trouble. They may not see this immediately

but they would not prosper. Their day of judgement was coming.

A Wicked Ruler (verses 15-16)

Leaders should have compassion on their people. They should do all they can to help those in need. This is not the case for evil leaders. These leaders think only of themselves and their own interests. They are not concerned about those under them. In fact, they will take advantage of the defenseless. Verse 15 compares them to a roaring lion or a charging bear. They devour those who cannot defend themselves and profit from their fall.

These evil leaders lack judgment (verse 16). That is to say, they do not take into account that the Lord God will call them to give an account of their actions. They obtain their wealth by evil means. They oppressed and hurt the helpless. The Lord will bring them to judgement. They will not profit for long from ill-gotten gain. God will strip them in His time and they will suffer His wrath. Those who understand that they will be judged will live their lives accordingly.

Notice the promise of God in verse 16. The person who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life. This is because the blessing of the Lord will be on his or her life. God will bless and honour those who live in obedience to Him.

A Tormented Man (verses 17-18)

Those who live in sin can never have peace. We have here the example of a man who commits murder. This man would be tormented by the guilt of what he did. He would be a fugitive until he died. This is especially true if he was never discovered or accused of the crime. Our own hearts

condemn us when we sin. This shows us that we were created in the image of God. We feel the guilt of sinful actions. In verse 17 the reader is told that they were not to stand behind this kind of man. They were to have no part of his deed. These individuals would suddenly fall (verse 17). They would be judged even if they were never discovered and accused by a human court of law. God knew their actions and would punish them.

Those whose walk was blameless would be kept safe. They could live in peace and security knowing that they were in a right relationship with both their brothers and sisters and their God. True peace and contentment can only be found in obedience to the Lord God.

Hard Work (verses 19-20)

We read here that the person who worked hard would have an abundance of food but the person who chased after fantasies could only look forward to poverty. The one who works hard with what they have will produce greater benefits than he who chased after big ideas. There are many people who have big ideas of what they want to accomplish in life. Sometimes they waste their lives chasing those big ideas. The author calls his readers here to be content with what they had. They were to work hard with what God had given them and they would know His blessing.

These verses speak particularly to the person who is eager to get rich. The author warned his readers in verse 20 that the person who was eager to get rich would not go unpunished. Those who are eager to get rich are not content with what they have. They want more and more. In their haste to obtain more, they are willing to cheat, steal or resort to

violence. God sees what they are doing and will punish them for their evil.

What has God given you? He expects that we will be faithful with what He has given. He can do great things through what He gives us. It may not seem like we have much but if we work hard with what God has given, we will be surprised to see what He can do. We don't need bigger or greater gifts; we just need to learn how to wisely use what we already have.

Partiality (verse 21)

God does not judge our value based on our personal income or the type of house we live in. He does not look at our status in society. God treats us all fairly. The rich and the poor are the same in His eyes. He expects us to look at people in the same way. All are created equal in His eyes and should be treated in this way. It is not good to judge people based on their status, colour, background or riches.

Prejudice and partiality is a seedbed for all kinds of evil. Those who show prejudice and partiality do wrong "for a piece of bread" (verse 21). In other words, the person who does not value people of a certain race, culture or status is easily influenced to sin against them. For "a piece of bread" this person will speak evil of a certain race or person of low status in society. In the history of the human race, all kinds of terrible deeds have been done by those who have harboured prejudice in their hearts. For this reason, it is important that we see partiality and prejudice as a sin against God. We must deal with this sin immediately before it leads to further sin.

A Stingy Man (verse 22)

Stingy people do not want to share what they have. They want to keep everything for themselves. Verse 22 tells us that they are eager to get rich. He warned the stingy person that poverty awaited them. Jesus told His disciples in Luke 17:33: "Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." Later in John 12:24-25 He would say:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

The principle is quite simple. If you want a seed to grow in your garden you have to surrender it to the ground. If you want to have riches in heaven you will have to sacrifice them to the Lord here on this earth. Only by planting can we experience a harvest. The stingy person is like the person who never plants his seed. He keeps it on the shelf, afraid of losing it. He thinks that because he has all these unplanted seeds he is rich. The problem is that you can't eat the unplanted seeds. Only what we sacrifice here on this earth will produce fruit both here and in heaven. The stingy man will perish but the generous man will see a great harvest from what he has planted in the lives of those around him.

The Flattering Tongue (verse 23)

The flattering tongue is a tongue that carelessly spills out compliments and praise. It does so, often with a hidden motive. It delights in being well-received and respected. These people lavish praise on everyone around them not

because they really mean what they say but because they want people to think highly of them. They also manipulate people by their flattery. Their praise and complements are insincere.

Verse 23 tells us that it is better to receive a rebuke than insincere praise. Even the rebuke of an enemy can bring correction and make us a better person. The insincere praise of a flatterer may make us feel good for a moment but accomplishes nothing of value in our lives.

Respect for Parents (verse 24)

Verse 24 speaks about a person who robbed his father or mother. The context of the verse is unclear. What is clear, however, is at times it is quite possible for us to disrespect those who are closest to us. We say things to people who are closest to us that we would never say to strangers. It is easier to show disrespect to those closest to us. The author challenged his readers to show respect to their parents. Maybe he is thinking of a child taking advantage of his or her parent's generosity. Maybe he is thinking of a child who does not honour his parents by caring for them in their time of need. While the context is not clear, the principle is clear. If a child is willing to take advantage of his or her parents and shows no compassion, that child is like a person who destroys. That is to say, they are like those who destroy the property of another without any signs of regret. If they cannot be trusted to deal respectfully with their parents, they cannot be trusted in other areas of life. If they take advantage of their parents, they will do this in life in general. Their attitude is dishonest and ungodly. These people break down the moral fabric of society. They are cheaters, swindlers and liars who have no compassion or respect.

A Greedy Man (verse 25)

A greedy man is one who wants all he can get for himself. He will do anything he can to accumulate what he does not need. His lust for possessions is such that he will step on people to get what he wants. In his pursuit of more, he leaves behind a trail of dissension, bitterness and hurt.

On the other hand, there is a person who accepts the purposes of the Lord and trusts in Him. This person will prosper because the Lord will bless what He gives them. Greedy people do not trust the Lord's provision. They take matters into their own hands. They take what God does not want them to have. They cannot expect blessing in this. Instead of pursuing more, we need to learn to appreciate what the Lord has already given. What God has chosen to give will be blessed if we learn to use and appreciate it.

Trusting in Oneself (verse 26)

The person who trusts in himself is a fool. We have already seen an example of this in verse 25 where the author spoke about greedy people. These people do not trust in God and His provision but choose to take matters into their own hands. God would not bless what He did not give. They who took what was not theirs were fools.

There are other ways we can trust in ourselves. We can do this by not walking in the wisdom of God. Those who do not walk in God's wisdom believe they know better than God. They do not wait for His leading or walk in obedience to His Word. Instead, they take matters into their own hands. Solomon calls these people fools. They do not see what God sees. They turn their backs on the infinite

wisdom of God and chose to trust in the limited understanding of human beings.

Those who rejected human wisdom and strength would be kept safe. There is no security in human wisdom and understanding. People have all kinds of ideas but God alone knows the truth. I have spoken to people who felt they knew what life was all about. They rejected the teaching of the Word of God for their own personal ideas. They felt that because they lived a good life they would go to heaven. Some didn't even believe in God. They trusted their future into the hands of some human philosophy or religion. How foolish this is. God alone knows the truth. He is the source of truth. It is not what we think that counts but what God determines.

Giving to the Poor (verse 27)

There is a blessing promised for those who open their hearts to the poor and needy. We cannot expect a harvest unless we plant our seed. God is telling us that if we will give to the needy we will reap a harvest. God will care for those who use what He gives as He intended. Someone once said that "God will get His resources *to* us if he can get them *through* us to others." In other words, if you are willing to be a channel of God's blessings to others, God will channel His blessing through you to them. This is the heart of God. He wants to minister to those in need. He has chosen to use you and me for this purpose. If we are faithful, He will use us. Those, on the other hand, who keep what God has given for themselves will find that their blessings will quickly become a curse.

The Wicked (verse 28)

We conclude this section with a repetition of verse 12. Wickedness will only be a curse to a nation. A nation cannot prosper when wicked people, who reject God's wisdom, are in power. That nation will be under the curse of God for disobedience. Its citizens will suffer when wicked people are in power. They will go into hiding because they fear the terror of their wicked leaders who are not concerned for them and their needs. These wicked leaders will strip those under them of everything they have to profit themselves. They hate the righteous because they remind them of their sin and evil. When the wicked perish, however, the righteous thrive. While God's blessing is removed from a nation filled with wicked people, it falls powerfully on those who honour Him and live in His wisdom.

For Consideration:

- Can the wicked truly have peace? How is righteousness a guarantee of true peace and contentment in life?
- How does God's wisdom create order in a society? What happens when we reject this wisdom? What is the result in our communities?
- How does following the way of wicked men praise them and their evil (see verse 4)?
- What is the effect of righteousness on a nation?
- What happens when we conceal a sin? What is the difference between confessing a sin and renouncing a sin?
- We don't really need bigger and better gifts; we need to learn to use the gifts we already have. Do

you agree with this statement? What gifts do you have already? How can you better use them for God's glory?

- What is the connection between sacrifice and an abundant harvest? What lesson is there in this for us?
- What does Solomon teach us about partiality and prejudice? Why is this a seed bed for sin? Do you have any particular prejudices?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has given us His Word to be our guide into truth and practice in life. Ask God to help you to live more faithfully.
- Ask God to search your heart for any hidden sin. Take a moment to confess and renounce that sin.
- Ask God to help you to be a positive example for those around you so that no one is led astray by your example.
- Ask God to help you to learn to be content with what He has given you. Ask Him to help you to use what He has given you to the maximum.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart for any prejudice or partiality.
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can sacrifice more to Him. Ask Him to use what you have sacrificed to Him to produce abundant fruit in the lives of those around you.

31

SAYINGS COPIED BY

HEZEKIAH'S MEN:

PART 5

Read Proverbs 29:1-27

The Stiff-Necked Man (verse 1)

Repeatedly in the book of Proverbs we see an emphasis on the importance of listening to correction and rebuke. Here in verse 1 the man who would not listen to rebuke is compared to a person with a stiff neck. A person with a stiff neck cannot look to the left or the right. Their face points in one direction and it will not move. In other words, their mind is made up. They will not change direction or listen to what anyone says to them.

Verse 1 tells us that those who refuse to listen to rebuke will be suddenly destroyed without remedy. Rebukes are never easy to take. Sometimes these rebukes come from our enemies. The believer will learn to listen to n the

rebuke of his enemy so that through those rebukes he or she can grow.

When the Righteous Thrive (verse 2)

Righteousness is the soil in which a nation will prosper. The God who created us knows best how we are to live. The teachings of the Bible are proven methods by which any nation can prosper. The blessing of God is on the nation that honours Him. When God's Word and the principles of righteousness are ignored in a nation the people groan. Ignore righteousness and everyone around you will suffer. Wickedness will destroy a nation.

The Companion of Prostitutes (verse 3)

Wisdom follows the way of righteousness. The wise person is one who fears the Lord and walks in His ways. This person will bring joy to his or her father. There is no greater delight for a father or mother than to see their children walk in the way of truth.

Those who walk in the way of true wisdom bring joy to those around them. Solomon contrasts the son who walks in wisdom with the son who delights in the companionship of prostitutes. This person ignores the path of righteousness. He demonstrates that he has turned from the path of godly wisdom. He wastes his wealth on worldly pleasures. This person will have nothing in the end. Though for a moment he satisfies his fleshly desires, all this will come to an end and he will see how he has wasted his life.

Justice (verse 4)

Imagine a country where there is no justice. Imagine that all the judges could be bribed. What would be the result? Would this not create terrible instability in the nation? The guilty would be free to roam the streets. People would be afraid to go out of their house. The poor would be falsely accused and the rich could buy the favour of judges. Discontent and frustration would fill the land. How different it would be, however, if on the other hand, each citizen was assured of justice. The guilty would be punished for their crimes and the innocent could live in peace and security. Solomon told his readers that justice created stability for a nation.

Flattery (verse 5)

In verse 5 the person who flattered his neighbour is compared to a hunter who spread out a net. The flatterer is quick to compliment and praise. He does not do this because he means what he says but to gain a following or to get something from the person he flatters. It is for this reason that he is compared to a hunter looking for prey. Like the hunter, the flatterer seeks to attract his prey by telling them what they want to hear. When he has gained their confidence, he pulls his net over them.

Flattery is not from God. Flattery is insincere praise offered with deceptive intent. As believers, we need to encourage and build up each other. We should not be afraid to praise or complement each other but we must be sure that what we say comes from the heart without selfish intent.

The Righteous Man (verses 6-7)

In verses 6-7 the righteous person is compared with evil people. In verse 6, the righteous person could sing and be glad. Righteous people have a clear conscience. They live each day knowing that they are right with God and their brothers and sisters. This is not the case for the evil person. This person is snared by their own sin. Their sin is a heavy burden about their neck. It weighs them down. They are not free like the righteous person. The fruit of righteous living is freedom and joy.

The righteous person is driven by compassion and justice. This is the heart of God and the righteous person shares God's heart of compassion and justice. The righteousness of the righteous causes them to reach out to the poor and needy. They willingly sacrifice themselves for those in need. This is not the heart of the wicked. The wicked do not think of others. Their concern is for their own interests. They do not have concern for the poor and needy.

Mockers (Verse 8)

A mocker stirs up a city, we are told in verse 8. The mocker is one who resists or disrespects authority. In this case, he may resist or disrespect the authority of the leaders of his community. Mockers do not feel they need to be submissive to the wisdom of God. They are rebels by nature. They speak evil of those in authority and do not feel compelled to follow the laws of the land. These individuals stir up a city. Their voice of protest can be heard. They seek to gain a following of people who will stand with them against the authorities of the land. These are angry and discontented people.

The wise person will not fall into the trap of the mocker. Wise people turn from the anger of the mocker. Instead, they respect the authority that God has placed over them. In doing so, they honour God and bring greater harmony to their community.

Going to Court with a Fool (verse 9)

In verse 9 the author tells us that it is a waste of time to go to court with a fool. The fool would only rage and scoff, there would not be any peaceful settlement of their dispute. The fool, because he resists the wisdom of God, is not governed by God's values. Fools justify their actions whether they are right or wrong. They mock those who are guided by righteousness. They will not easily recognize the error of their ways. Instead, they get angry and scoff at any decision that does not please them. Going to court to settle a dispute with a fool almost never produces a peaceful settlement, for the fool will not be happy unless he got what he wanted.

Bloodthirsty Men (verse 10)

Bloodthirsty men are those who will not hesitate to take the life of anyone who stands in the way of their plans. These people have no respect for the life of their brother or sister. Bloodthirsty men hate people of integrity and righteousness. This is because the righteous stand against them and their ways. Motivated by Satan, these individuals lash out against those who stand for righteousness and integrity.

Self- Control (verse 11)

Self-control is a fruit of God's Spirit. There are two elements to self-control. The first is discernment. The person who has self-control is one who has the ability to discern when and where to use his or her gifts. The discerning person knows when to speak and when to be silent. Self-control requires discernment. Discernment in itself is not enough. Self-control also requires discipline. We can be discerning enough to know whether or not we should speak or act, but if we do not have discipline, our discernment is of no use. Discipline is the ability to control our words or actions. The disciplined person is able to hold his or her tongue when discernment tells them it is required. The self-controlled person is both discerning and disciplined. This person acts or speaks only when it is right.

This is not the case for a fool. The fool is not in control of his words and actions. The fool gives full vent to his anger (verse 11). Fools lack the discernment to know when to speak or not to speak. They express what they feel with no restraint or concern for the result.

The Ruler who Listens to the Wicked (verse 12)

Leaders have a very powerful influence on those who are under them. We are told in verse 12 that "if a ruler listens to lies, all his officials become wicked." Leaders have a tremendous responsibility on their shoulders. I have seen churches rise and fall because of leaders. Leaders can influence their followers for good or for evil. Sometimes all that stands between evil and God's people is a strong leader. A leader is like a shepherd protecting his sheep from the wolves. Leaders need to be men and women of integrity. They need to stand firm against the sinful ways of the world. If the leader is weak, his or her people will

also be weak. If God has called you to be a leader, you need to be a godly example of integrity and righteousness.

The Poor Man and the Oppressor (verse 13)

Both the poor and those who oppress them have one thing in common. God has given them both the sight of their eyes. In other words, God created both the poor and those who oppress them. They are made, as it were, from the same cloth. The One, who gives sight to all, sees everything that happens. He is aware of the oppression of the poor. The day is coming when God will judge the oppressor for his actions.

Fair Judgment (verse 14)

We saw in verse 4 that justice gives a nation stability. Justice also assures the reign of a king. The king whose reign is based on injustice cannot expect to stay on his throne. Those who have been unfairly treated will rise up against him and overthrow him. The blessing of God will also be stripped from him. God will not bless the throne that is built on injustice. In the history of Israel, God overthrew kings who refused to rule justly in the nation.

The Rod of Correction (verse 15)

The Bible teaches that we are sinners by nature. If left to ourselves, we will lean toward sin. Personally, I ask myself from time to time, where I would be if I allowed my sinful flesh free reign? If I did not exercise self-control and discipline, what would I find myself doing? Children naturally know how to lie, steal and hit. We need to teach them how to do good. If we are to steer a child toward the right path we will need to correct them. We do this to help the child.

We do this so that they will not continue on the path that comes naturally to their sinful flesh. We know that if the child is to become all that God intends him or her to become, they will need to learn how to die to the flesh and its desires. Children left to themselves will quickly fall into sin and evil. These children will bring dishonour to their parents.

If we are to become everything God wants us to become, we need His discipline and correction in our lives. God will discipline those He loves. Consider what the writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:5-6:

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son."

Believers must learn to appreciate the discipline of the Lord because they know that God is working in them to produce maturity and righteousness. The pull of sin and evil in our fleshly nature is so strong that sometimes only strong discipline will keep us from falling prey to its temptations.

The Downfall of the Wicked (verse 16)

If we do not discipline our children when they are young, they will fall prey to sin and wickedness. This in turn will have a great impact our society. We read in verse 16 that when wicked people thrive so does sin. Wicked people feed on sin. Sin is their motivation and pleasure. The thing about sin, however, is that it will also destroy those who love it. Satan offered Eve great possessions and pleasure

if she would eat from the forbidden tree in the Garden. The fruit of that tree, however, brought death. The fruit of sin is death. No society can prosper when the wicked thrive.

Discipline (verse 17)

Because sin is so deadly and destructive, we need to do all we can to steer our children away from it. This will require discipline and strong consequences for sinful actions. Discipline, however, will bring rich blessing. The child who learns wisdom through discipline will be a blessing to his or her parents.

Godliness does not come naturally. We need to be corrected. The Spirit of God will correct and convict. He will discipline when it is necessary to steer us onto the right path. The wise person will allow God to refine him through discipline.

Revelation (verse 18)

One of the most important tools for correction is the Word of God. The Word of God is our guide and authority in truth and behavior. We read in verse 18 that where there was no revelation people "cast off restraint." In other words, when there is no guideline or authority, people do what they want. This is the reason for the laws of our land. Imagine what things would be like in your society if there was no law against stealing or murder. Would there not be chaos in that society?

The revelation that the writer speaks about here is the revelation that the prophets received from God. It was the revelation that Moses received on Mount Sinai that gave Israel God's laws. This is clear from the context of the

verse when the writer told his people that those who kept the law (revelation of God) were blessed.

The law of God was not meant to limit or restrict. It was meant to be a guideline for living the best possible life. Without this law, sin and evil reigned. Without the law of God, there was no concept of what was right or wrong. God knew what was best for His people. His law was intended to guide them into truth, righteousness and blessing. Where the law of God is cast aside, there is chaos, confusion and wickedness.

Correcting a Servant (verse 19)

There are times when mere words are not enough. Our tendency to sin is so strong at times that unless we have a compelling reason not to sin, we will quickly fall prey to its temptation. A servant who is merely corrected by words will not likely change his behaviour. If the punishment for disobedience is not greater than the pleasure disobedience brings, the servant will choose to disobey every time. This is the nature of the sinful flesh.

When it comes to sin, there are times when we need to be very harsh. Satan knows the temptation of sin for the flesh. He will dress up sin and make it look very attractive. He will offer us pleasures and riches if we will surrender to its temptations. Without the Word of God to guide us we would quickly fall prey to these temptations. We would all do well to consider the serious consequences of sin when we are tempted by the flesh and the devil. Sin will strip us of fellowship and blessing. An understanding of the consequences of sin ought to help us to turn from it.

Speaking in Haste (verse 20)

How many of us have been guilty of speaking whatever comes to our mind without first thinking about the consequences of those words? Verse 20 reminds us that we are to be slow to speak. The person who speaks without thinking will cause many problems. Words have tremendous power for good and evil. Careless words cause great harm. A discouraging word spoken to a young child can go with him throughout his or her life. Maybe you have counseled an adult who never got over the insults spoken when they were a child. There are people who have never reached their potential because they were discouraged by someone who was not careful with words.

Careless words cause arguments. Careless words start wars. Careless words destroy potential. Only a fool will speak words without thinking. When we understand the power of words, we will be careful to use them wisely.

Pampering a Servant (verse 21)

Is it possible to be too nice to someone? Even our acts of compassion and kindness need to be tempered and balanced. Verse 21 gives us an example of this: "If a man pampers his servant from youth, he will bring grief in the end." Imagine a master who never disciplined his servant. Instead of requiring that he worked, he let him live a life of ease. What would be the result? The result would be a lazy servant who lived an undisciplined and unproductive life. The master's work would suffer in the end. We need wisdom in showing compassion and kindness. Too much of a good thing can be bad.

An Angry Man (verse 22)

An angry or hot-tempered person is one who stirs up dis-sension. In other words, a person who gets angry easily will cause many problems. My anger fuels anger and bitterness in other people.

There is something else about anger. Anger seeks release. Angry people, who act on their anger, commit many sins. Their anger will cause them to say hurtful things. Their anger will cause them to lash out physically in violent acts. Anger, when it is conceived, will give birth to sin. For this reason, it is important that we deal with anger immediately.

Pride (verse 23)

In Proverbs 16:18 the writer tells his readers that "pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." In other words, people who think too highly of themselves are setting themselves up for a fall. God will humble them or expose them for who they really are. The proud do not see their need of God. They turn their back on God and on others. This will only lead to defeat. On the other hand, the humble person seeks God and His strength. These people are not afraid to listen to others and take advice. They will prosper. God honours those who seek Him and His face. While God resists those who are proud and arrogant, He will bless those who humbly come to Him and surrender to His purpose.

The Accomplice of a Thief (verse 24)

Partnering with someone in their crime is a serious matter. Those who partner with someone in crime are also guilty

of that crime. By agreeing to protect a guilty person or by refusing to testify against them we become a partner in crime. Sometimes a person fears the consequences of speaking out against the criminal. Maybe they fear for their lives if they were to testify against the criminal. By partnering with a criminal or by protecting that criminal we become his accomplice and make ourselves guilty before God.

Fear of Man (verse 25)

The fear of man will prove to be a snare. What a burden it is to live one's life always afraid of what others think. Every action and deed is weighed by what others will think. We can never please people. What pleases one person will not please another. Those who live their lives always trying to please others will find that this becomes a burden too heavy for them to bear. They will be greatly hindered in life.

Instead of living life to please people, we need to learn how to live in the fear of God. Only when we live our lives in accordance with God's principles can we find true freedom. God will keep those who trust Him. He will honour those who cast off their fear of people to live in obedience to His word. The Pharisees of the New Testament were governed by what others thought about them. Often they were hindered in their decisions because they were afraid of people (Matthew 21:26, 46; Luke 20:19). The apostles, on the other hand, were freed from this fear. They served the Lord unconcerned about the reactions of those around them.

Justice is from the Lord (verse 26)

Human leaders will not always give us the justice we need. We have seen countless instances of injustice in our land.

The innocent are condemned. The guilty are set free. Judges can be bribed and deceived. What a comfort it is to know that the Lord God is not deceived or bribed. He is a God of absolute justice and integrity.

The Righteous and the Wicked (verse 27)

Righteous people hate dishonesty. They love the truth and live in truth. Their words can be trusted and they will not stoop to deceit. Verse 27 reminds readers that if they were righteous and honest, they would not always be appreciated. The wicked person depends on dishonesty and deceit to cover his evil ways. Satan is a liar. He holds his followers by his lies. He deceives and tricks them. God, on the other hand, is a God of absolute truth. His truth can set Satan's followers free. Satan will do his utmost to keep his followers from accepting or hearing the truth. He hates the truth. It should not surprise us that those who preach the truth will sometimes be despised in this world.

For Consideration:

- How deeply rooted are the desires of the flesh? Why is strong correction sometimes the only way to keep us on the path of truth?
- How is righteousness good for a nation? What would change in your society if it were governed by principles of righteousness?
- How does justice create stability for a society?
- How do discernment and discipline work together to produce self-control in our lives?

- Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? What is the result of too much kindness or compassion? Why is it important to find a balance?
- What is the fruit of anger? What is the result if it is released in an unhindered way?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to accept His correction and the correction of your fellow human being.
- Are there any areas of your life when you need more self-control? Ask God to give you this self-control in that area of your life.
- Thank the Lord that He has given us a guide in His Word to what is right.
- Ask God to set you free from the fear of what people think. Ask Him to give you a heart to follow His Word no matter what people think.

THE SAYINGS OF AGUR

Read Proverbs 30:1-33

We have here in this section of the book of Proverbs the sayings of a man by the name of Agur. This is the only reference to this particular man in Scripture. He is the son of Jakeh of whom we know nothing. Verse 1 tells us that Agur spoke these wise sayings to two men in particular, Ithiel and Ucal. Again, we know nothing about these men and, apart from this verse, they are never mentioned again in the Bible. Though this man is unknown, it is important that we notice that his sayings are described as being an oracle (verse 1). This is significant. An oracle was a revelation from God. What the author is saying is that the words we have here from Agur are revelations from God. They were as important as the sayings of Solomon because they were God-inspired.

Notice what Agur felt about himself. In verse 2 he describes himself as an ignorant man. He did not consider himself to be a man of great understanding. Notice also in verse 3 that he did not claim to have great wisdom or have the knowledge of the Holy One. When Agur said that he was an ignorant man and he had not learned wisdom nor

have knowledge of the Holy One, he is telling his readers that he was never educated in the ways of the Lord God. He was a very simple man. He had not gone to school to learn wisdom or prophecy. He was not always clear in his understanding of God. What he shares, however, was a clear revelation from God. What he spoke carried all the weight and authority of those who had learned wisdom and theology. God will use whomever He desires. He can use the simple as well as the educated. What is important is that we be open and ready to be used.

While Agur described himself as an ignorant and simple man, he also realized that even the best educated were unable to understand the ways of the Lord God. "Who has gone up to heaven and come down?" he asked in verse 4. In other words, who among human beings has firsthand knowledge of God and His purpose? Who among us has sat down with God and discussed His plans and purposes for the universe?

The God Agur served was a God who was beyond human understanding. He was a God who gathered the wind in the hollow of His hands. He wrapped the waters of the earth in His cloak. He established the limits of the earth. This was an awesome God whose ways could not be grasped.

Notice in verse 4 that Agur challenges his people to tell him the name of God and His son. Israel had various names for God. Agur is not asking for a name because he wanted to know what Israel called their God. If we really know a person we will know something about their family and the names of their children. What Agur is saying is something like this: Who knows God on a first name basis? Who among us is familiar enough with God to know about His son? For Agur, no one on earth really knew God in this

way. God was an awesome God whose ways and purposes were far greater than anything we could ever grasp with our frail human minds.

One thing Agur did understand about God was that He was perfect and that every word He spoke was flawless. He was a God who could not lie. As human beings we can place our full confidence in God and His plans. What He says will come to pass. Those who rely on Him and His words will never be disappointed. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. His purposes will stand against every attack of the enemy. In His word and promise we can be secure and confident.

In verse 6 Agur challenged his readers not to add to God's words lest they be rebuked and proven to be liars. There are several ways we can add to the word of God. We can add to the word of God by misinterpreting it. Some people use Scripture to prove a particular theology or practice. Sometimes they twist the Scriptures to prove their point. Cults and sects of our day are guilty of this. By misinterpreting the Scripture they are saying that God said something He never said.

We can also add to the word of God by adding requirements that God did not add. The Pharisees were guilty of this in the New Testament. In order not to break the Law of God they added laws of their own. They would, for example stipulate how far a person could travel on a Sabbath so that they would not be guilty of breaking the law of the Sabbath. In Colossians 2:20-23 the apostle Paul spoke to this issue when he said:

"Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not

taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because *they are based on human commands and teachings*. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (emphasis mine).

The Colossians added their human commands and teachings to the requirements of God. Paul told them that while these rules had an appearance of wisdom they lacked any value. The word of God is perfect. We cannot add anything to it. Agur warns those who add to the word of God that they would be exposed as being liars.

Two Things I Ask (verses 7-9)

In verses 7-9 Agur has two things to ask of God before he died. The first was that God would keep falsehood and lies from him. Obviously, this follows along with his teaching in verses 5 and 6 regarding those who added to the Word of God. Agur is asking God that for the ability to live and teach the truth of the Word of God. He wants both his life and his teaching to reflect this truth in every way.

The second thing Agur asked was that God would neither give him poverty or riches but only what he needed each day. He explained his reason for this in verse 9. Here he told his readers that if he had too much he would be tempted to disown God. In other words, his confidence and trust would no longer be in God but in his wealth and possessions. Wealth can take our attention from God. Those who have money and possessions can easily be tempted to forget their need. Agur did not want this to happen.

On the other hand, Agur did not want to be poor. The reason for this was because, in his poverty, he might be tempted to steal to provide for his needs. If he did this, he would dishonour the name of the Lord God.

Agur prayed that God would give him his daily bread. He did not want so much that he would be tempted to trust in his wealth. He didn't want too little lest he be tempted to dishonour God by stealing. Instead, he wanted just enough to provide for his needs. He wanted to live a life of trust and confidence in God each day. This is an important balance for each of us to find.

Slander (verse 10)

In verse 10 Agur warned against slandering a servant to his master. While servants did not have a high position in society, they were still to be respected. Slander, by nature, is accusing and critical. The slanderer's desire is to make someone look bad. Sometimes slanderers bend the truth to get their point across. The Lord God, however, loves His children. He sees injustice. He hates dishonesty. The Lord watched out for the servant who was being slandered. The slanderer would answer to God for his words.

Evil People (verses 11-14)

As Agur looked around him, he saw those who cursed their fathers and did not bless their mothers (verse 11). This was a serious offense in the eyes of God. There were also proud and arrogant people who were pure and innocent in their own eyes but were a filthy people filled with sin (verse 12). They refused to accept their guilt. These proud individuals looked down on others and their practices but did not see their own evil (verse 13). They oppressed the poor and needy. Their teeth are compared to swords and their

jaws like sets of knives. Like a wild animal they devoured the lowly.

Four Things that are Never Satisfied (verses 15-16)

As a child I remember swimming in a river one summer. When I came out of the river I noticed a leech on my leg. The leech had attached itself to my leg and began to fill itself with blood. These little creatures are very hard to remove once they attach themselves.

Sometimes people can be like this. They can become so selfish and greedy that nothing will distract them from getting what they want. The leech, according to Agur had two daughters. They cried out: "Give! Give!" and yet never seem to be satisfied.

Agur told his readers that there were four things that never said "enough." The first was the grave. From the time sin entered the world until now the grave continues to swallow up victims. The second was the barren womb of a woman that longed to have a child. The third was land that soaked up all the water it could get. The fourth was fire that ate everything in its sight without ever getting full. Greed and discontentment are like these four things that are never satisfied. They will ultimately devour all who are consumed by them.

Mocking Parents (verse 17)

Agur has some strong things to say in verse 17 about those who mock their father or who disobey their mother by acting deceitfully. These individuals were under a curse. Their eyes would be pecked out by the ravens of the valley and they would be eaten by vultures. What he is

saying is that those who mock their parents will be held accountable to God. They will be judged severely and know the full force of His wrath. It is quite clear from this how important it is to honour one's parents.

Four Things Too Amazing (verses 18-19)

There were four things too amazing for Agur to understand in life. The first was the way of the eagle in the sky. How did this eagle glide so gracefully in the sky and how did it see its prey from such lofty heights? The second was the way of a snake on a rock. The snake suddenly appeared and vanished just as quickly. There was a certain mystery about the snake and its ways as it slithered silently from one place to another seeking its prey. The third thing too amazing to understand was the way of the ship on the high seas. This ship was battered and tossed by the winds and the waves but continued its course. The sailors of Agur's day took great risks to seek out their treasure. They endured great hardships to bring back their ship loaded with goods. They risked their lives for the treasures they sought. The fourth thing too difficult for Agur to understand was the way of a man with a maiden. What would a man not do for the love of a woman?

Agur reflects on some of life's basic mysteries. He began this chapter by asking his readers if they knew God and His ways. He develops this theme in these verses. Do we understand what makes the eagle soar in the air, defying gravity? Do we understand the mind of the serpent slithering across the rock? Can we understand what motivates men and women to endure great hardships and put their lives at risk to obtain a treasure they can only enjoy for a time? Can we understand the natural attraction of a man and woman for each other? If these things are too big for

us to understand, how can we possibly understand the mind of God?

The Way of the Adulteress (verse 20)

Agur reminded his readers in verse 20 of the way of an adulteress. "She eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.'" She refuses to admit her guilt. All sense of guilt over sin is destroyed. She is no longer guided by the principles of the Word of God. She lifts herself above God and sets up her own standards. She is rebellious and proud. Agur warns his readers about the adulteress so that they will avoid her and her evil ways.

Four Things the Earth Cannot Bear (verses 21-23)

Agur describes four things in verse 21-23 that the earth cannot bear. The first is a servant who becomes a king. This is not so say that there are not servants who become good kings. Agur speaks here about a servant who does not have experience. He speaks about the servant who has not proven to have the character of a king. What happens when a person is put into a position they are not ready to handle? They will only cause confusion and chaos for all who are under their authority.

The second thing the earth cannot endure is a fool who is full of food. The fool who is full of food is one who has become rich. It takes great wisdom to handle wealth. The fool does not have this wisdom. As a result, he wastes his resources and does not put them to the use for which they were intended. When fools are governing the resources of this world there will be great chaos and waste. People will suffer because the resources are being misused.

The third thing that this earth cannot support is an unloved woman who is married. This is a tremendous burden to bear. A married woman is one whose desire is to be faithful to her husband. She has bound herself to this husband for life. Her desire is to please and honour him but if he does not love her, her pain is very great. She lives side by side with someone who does not love her. She shares her daily experience with someone who makes her life miserable. This according to Agur is something the earth cannot support.

The fourth thing this earth cannot support is a maidservant who displaces her mistress. This may be for various reasons. There may be a connection here between what Agur says about an unloved wife. Could it be that the husband, in this case, has shifted his love and attention to the maidservant, rejecting his wife? In this case the maidservant displaces her mistress and takes her place in her husband's heart. The wife, no longer loved, is now cast aside. This according to Agur made the earth tremble.

Four Things That are Small but Wise (verses 24-28)

In verse 24-28 Agur describes four things that are small but very wise. The first is the ant who works hard to store up food for the winter. The ant is an example, of how, through hard work and perseverance, a person can accomplish great things.

The second small thing with wisdom was the coney or badger that made its home in the rocky crags. These animals were able to make their homes in places where other creatures could not live. They are an example of how we need to learn to be content with what God has given us.

The third small creature that demonstrated wisdom was the locust that had no king to lead but was able to work with others like a well-organized army. These small creatures did what human armies had to train for years to do. They are an example of unity and harmony of purpose.

The fourth creature demonstrating wisdom was the lizard. The lizard was a common creature that one could pick up in the hand but this common creature could be found in the richest palaces on the earth. They lived where no human could live. They were not governed by riches or affected by wealth. They lived contentedly wherever they could find a place to live.

Four Things Stately in Stride (verses 29-31)

There were according to Agur four things stately in stride. The first was a lion who moved majestically like a king among the wild beasts and stood up to any enemy that came against him. The second creature with a stately stride was a strutting rooster proudly lifting his head. The third was a he-goat confident in his strength and position. The fourth creature that had a stately stride was a king with his army around him. He had no fear of his enemy for he was well protected. He walked proudly as one whose word could instantly send all these soldiers to defend his cause to the death.

Plotting Evil (verses 32-33)

The sayings of Agur are concluded in verse 32-33 with a word to those who foolishly plot evil. Agur told these individuals to clap their hand over their mouth. In other words, they were to immediately stop themselves from planning this evil. They were to cease their plotting. He gives them a clear reason for this in verse 33. Just as churning milk

produces butter and violently twisting someone's nose causes it to bleed, so those who plotted evil and stirred people to anger would cause strife. Their evil would not produce good.

For Consideration:

- Agur described himself as an uneducated man yet what he said still carried the authority of God. Can God use simple people? How easy it is for us to refuse to listen to simple people?
- Is it possible to fully understand God and His ways? What are some things you don't understand about God and His ways?
- How can we be guilty of adding to the Word of God? Why is this dangerous?
- What is the danger of wealth? What is the danger of poverty?
- Why is it important that we learn to be content with what we have?
- How important is one relationship with one's parents? What is Agur's warning to his readers in this chapter?
- What lessons can we learn from the creatures around us (see verses 24-28)?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is bigger than our minds could ever understand.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to use even the simplest of people for His glory.

- Ask the Lord to help you to learn to be content with what He has given.
- Thank the Lord for His perfect and flawless word. Thank Him that we can trust this word completely.
- Agur tells us that the earth cannot bear to see an unloved wife. This applies equally to a husband. Ask the Lord to increase your love for your husband or wife. Ask Him to teach you how to demonstrate that love in a greater way.

33

THE SAYINGS OF KING LEMUEL

Read Proverbs 31:1-31

Chapter 31 contains the sayings of King Lemuel. His name literally means "for God." He is mentioned only two times in the Bible. Both of the references to his name are here in this chapter of Proverbs. He is described as a king but we know nothing about the man or his kingdom.

It is significant to notice the source of King Lemuel's wisdom. The wisdom he shared with his readers came from his mother. We could entitle this chapter, "The Sayings of King Lemuel's Mother." It is also important to mention here that these sayings are described as an oracle (verse 1). An oracle was a divine revelation. What we have here is a revelation from God passed on from Lemuel's mother to her son. These sayings of Lemuel relate to women, alcohol and justice.

Women (verses 2-3)

Lemuel's mother speaks in verses 2-3 to her son. Notice that Lemuel was the son of her womb and the son of her vows. Being the son of her womb, Lemuel was her naturally born child. Notice also, however, that Lemuel was also the son of her vows. This may be a reference to the vows she had made to Lemuel's father when she was married. In other words, Lemuel was her legitimate son, the fruit of her faithful love to her husband.

In verse 3 Lemuel's mother warns him about spending his strength on women. She speaks in this context about women of questionable character who "ruin kings" (verses 3). Solomon understood what Lemuel's mother spoke about here. 1 Kings 11:4 shows us how Solomon fell prey to the influences of his pagan wives:

"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

Lemuel's mother understood the influence a woman could have on a king. She wanted her son to be aware of this influence so that he would not fall morally or spiritually and be ruined as a king. Her challenge to Lemuel was that he not waste his strength on this type of woman. His character and rule as king could be destroyed by a woman of questionable morals.

Alcohol (verses 4-7)

Another great temptation for the king was to drink wine and beer. Lemuel's mother told him in verse 4 that it was not

for kings and rulers to drink wine and crave beer. The intoxicating effect of these drinks was such that the king might do things he would regret. Under the influence of alcohol the king might forget the law of God (verse 5). Wine and beer might also blur the judgement of the king so that he issued orders that led to the poor being oppressed and their rights trampled. As a king, Lemuel needed to be wise and discerning. He needed to seek justice for all his citizens. He needed to be an example of righteous behavior to his subjects. By the excessive use of alcohol Lemuel risked falling short of his responsibilities as king.

For Lemuel's mother those in leadership should never compromise their judgment or risk sacrificing their testimony because of the unwise and excessive use of alcohol. "Give beer to those who are perishing and wine to those who are in anguish; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more," she told him. Lemuel's mother is not encouraging drunkenness among the poor. She is telling her son that while wine or beer would at least help a poor person to forget their misery, it served no purpose for a king or ruler who needed to be constantly alert and ready to make godly decisions.

Speaking Out (verses 8-9)

The third concern of King Lemuel's mother was that her son seek justice for the poor and needy. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute," she told him. As a king and ruler, Lemuel was to serve the poor. He was to do all he could to ease their suffering. Many kings in the history of this world have oppressed the poor. Lemuel's mother told him that he was to use his position to defend the rights of the poor. He was to use his influence to speak on their behalf. He was to be a defender of the poor. He was to judge fairly

and not discriminate against the needy because of their position. Lemuel's mother wanted her son to know that it was not only in his power to act on behalf of the poor and needy, but it was also his obligation before God.

A WIFE OF NOBLE CHARACTER (verses 10-33)

Verses 10-31 are written in the Hebrew language as an acrostic poem. That is to say, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For our purposes we will break the poem down into four main headings and examine the wife of noble character in regards to her value (verse 10), her relationships (verses 11-12), her work (verses 13-27) and her reward (verses 28-31).

Her Value (verse 10)

Earlier in this chapter, Lemuel's mother warned her son about wasting his strength on women of questionable moral character (see verse 3). Here in verse 10 she speaks to him about a woman of noble character. It is important that we take a moment to examine the word "noble" here. The word in the Hebrew can be translated by the words: "valour, strength, riches, power, ability or efficiency." These words are significant. They speak about a woman of strength and ability. There are those who feel that the Old Testament seems to depreciate the value of women. This is not the case here. The woman of noble character is one who is strong, skilled and energetic. This woman is enterprising and busy.

Lemuel's mother told her son that a noble wife was of great value. Her value was worth far more than rubies. She was to be treasured and respected more than all his wealth.

Her Relationship with Her Husband (verses 11-12)

Notice, however, how Lemuel's mother describes the relationship this strong, skilled and energetic woman had with her husband. Verse 11 tells us that her husband had full confidence in her. He lacked nothing of value in his life. She brought him good all her days. Her hard work and strength was a blessing to him. Her husband delighted in her strength and efficiency.

Her Work (verses 13-27)

Verses 13-27 tell us about the hard work of this woman of noble character. Notice that she is a very skilled worker, provider, caregiver and administrator.

In verse 13 Lemuel's mother described this woman's attitude. She "works with eager hands," Lemuel's mother told him. The word "eager" indicates that she serves with a willing heart. It was her delight to serve. She took pleasure in her work. She had a good attitude. She did not serve grudgingly but with a cheerful and willing heart.

The woman of noble character is compared to a merchant ship bringing her food from afar in verse 14. She is a provider for her family. She got up while it was still dark and prepared food for her family. Notice in verse 15 that she prepared food even for her servant girls. She had a servant heart.

Her work was not limited to the home. In verse 16 she considers buying a field. Out of her own earnings she plants a vineyard. This woman is a capable administrator making wise and profitable business decisions for her household (verse 18).

Her work is described in verse 17 as being vigorous. The word vigorous could be translated by the words, bold, strong or powerful. This is not a weak woman. Her arms are "strong for her tasks." Those strong arms and hands are used to spin thread (verse 19). She was not afraid of hard work.

Notice also in verse 20 that her arms were not only strong arms but they were also compassionate. She opened up her arms to the poor and needy. She gave out of her abundance to those who were in need. Her hard work and skill not only provided for her family, but it also for those outside the family who were needy.

Her hard work spinning yarn and thread provided the clothes her family needed. When it snowed and the cold weather set in, she had no need to fear for her family. Her family would be warm and comfortable in the clothes she had made them. Notice that her family was clothed in scarlet (verse 21). This would indicate that they were clothed in the highest quality of clothes. Their beds were covered with linen and purple, again an indication of the rich blessing she had provided for them.

Because of her hard work, her husband was respected in the city gate. His family was well provided for by his noble wife. She dressed them in scarlet and purple cloth. Her fields and vineyards produced an abundance of crops. The poor and needy were blessed at her hands. Because of her, her family was well respected. Her husband sat proudly as a leader of the community. He was respected and honoured because of his wife.

This noble woman made linen garments and sold them in the community. She supplied the merchants in her city with

sashes she had made (verse 24). She was a capable and gifted business woman.

She was clothed with strength and dignity. Verse 25 tells us that she laughed at the days to come because she knew that by her hard work her family would have no worries.

This wife of noble character spoke with wisdom and gave faithful instruction (verse 26). She was a capable teacher and instructor. Others could learn from her. This was a woman of exceptional testimony. She was a hard worker who watched over the needs of her family (verse 27).

Her Reward (verses 28-31)

Her exceptional character would not go unnoticed. In verse 28 her children rose up to call her blessed. They honoured her and respected her for her character and hard work. Her husband praised her and recognized her valuable contribution. The reward of this faithful and noble wife was that her children honoured her and her husband praised her. As husbands we need to take this as a challenge. We need to notice the work our wives do and then offer sincere praise for their efforts on behalf of the entire family.

Lemuel's mother reminded her son in verses 29-30 that charm could be deceptive and beauty would quickly fade away but that woman of noble character who feared the Lord was to be praised. Notice that this is not an option. This is a command. Women who fear the Lord and serve like the woman described here are to be praised. Lemuel's mother told her readers to give this kind of woman the reward she earned. That reward was the honour of her children and the praise of her husband and those who had benefitted from her efforts and hard work.

For Consideration:

- What influence can a woman of questionable character and morals have?
- Why is it good for leaders not to drink? How does alcohol compromise judgement and personal testimony?
- How does Proverbs 31 recognize women and their contribution to society?
- What do we learn about the importance of praise in our relationships? Why is praising people seen sometimes in a negative light?
- Take a moment to consider the strengths and qualities of your wife or husband. Make a mental list of those good qualities. Find some time this week to praise your partner for their strengths and contribution.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord for strength to resist immorality and the abuse of alcohol.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for your marriage partner. Thank the Lord for specific qualities you see in him or her.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to offer praise when it is due.

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens of thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books are now being translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path visit our website at www.lighttomypath.ca