

PROVERBS:
RELATIONAL STRIFE

Thursday, April 16
Reading: Proverbs 18:19-24

Proverbs 18:24 *One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

Australian psychologist and social researcher Hugh Mackay once said, “Nothing is perfect. Life is messy. Relationships are complex. Outcomes are uncertain. People are irrational.”¹ While this statement is a bit pessimistic, it is often true. Relationships can cause a lot of strife. The last verses of Proverbs 18 focus on relationships.

FAMILY RELATIONS (18:19) – While all conflict is bad, strife within a family is devastating. It tears families apart. If the issue is not dealt with quickly, emotional walls are built that become difficult to overcome. Proverbs 17:14 is a good verse to apply here: “Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.” This principle applies to all relationships.

MARITAL RELATIONS (18:22) – A godly spouse is a blessing from the Lord. This verse parallels Proverbs 8:35 which speaks of finding ‘Lady Wisdom.’ By placing this general statement in a passage about conflict, Solomon is reminding us that a wise wife (or husband) is a gift from God when dealing with trouble. “...a wise wife can add a dimension of wisdom which a husband sorely needs. Her sensitivity, insight, and intuitive discernment enable her to balance a man’s analytic and less sensitive approach to conflict.”²

SOCIAL RELATIONS (18:23) – This verse highlights the social class distinctions that have always existed in our world. The cries of the poor for help are too often ignored by the rich and powerful. This should not be! God is on the side of those who cannot help themselves and so should we!

FRIEND RELATIONS (18:24) – Proverbs has already told us that our friends have a powerful influence on our lives (12:26; 13:20). The Hebrew word translated “friends” in the first part of this verse means ‘acquaintances.’ These casual relationships will often fall apart during times of trouble. The Hebrew word for “friend” in the second part of the verse means ‘one who loves’ (see 17:17). This verse tells us that it is better to have one true than many superficial relationships. Some friendships are closer than the brotherly bond of family. “Instead of wishing you could find a true friend, seek to become one. If you look around, you’ll find people who need your friendship. Ask God to reveal them to you, and then take on the challenge of being a true friend.”³ The believer’s ultimate Friend is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 15:12-17).

Sandwiched between these relational verses is another warning about the power of the tongue (18:20-21). What stirs up trouble in relationships? Often it is the words that we say. We will reap what we sow – whether they are words that bring life and healing or words that bring strife and death to a relationship.

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/hugh_mackay_231481?src=t_relationship

² A. J. Higgins. *What the Bible Teaches: Proverbs* (Ritchie Old Testament Commentary), p. 206

³ *Life Application Study Bible*, ‘Proverbs 18:24’, p 1034