

## STAYING SOBER

God expects believers to be good stewards of the bodies He has given them.

Proverbs 23:17-21, 29-35

### FIRST THOUGHTS

Alcoholism and drug abuse have become a prominent feature of our cultural landscape. Lives have been destroyed, marriages ruined, families wounded, and communities disrupted because of its destructive influence. Some of us worry that our children or grandchildren will be caught in its grip. Others of us worry that someone we love will never be set free from his or her addiction.

### UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Proverbs 22:17–24:22 has been called by some Bible teachers “**The Thirty Wise Sayings of Solomon.**” In staccato fashion, Solomon poured out precept after precept layered on top of the foundational truths he set forth in the previous chapters, especially chapters 1–9. Solomon’s inspired words are wise counsel upon which God’s people can build a sound and fruitful life.

There are four things we see in Solomon’s counsel in this passage:

- 1) The wisdom of God revealed in His Word covers a wide variety of issues. It is **comprehensive**.
- 2) The wisdom of God is **soul-searching**. Solomon’s counsel to God’s people was personal & spiritual.
- 3) Solomon’s counsel is intensely **practical**. He was interested in making God’s wisdom livable (obtainable).
- 4) Solomon’s counsel is **relational** in that he desired relationships with God to grow deeper.

**KEY DOCTRINE: God the Father**

*God the Father is fatherly in His attitude toward all men (Deut. 32:6).*

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

#### The Promise (Proverbs 23:17-18)

When we see people who have rejected the Lord living in a way that appears to be fulfilling, we might begin to wish we could exchange our lives for theirs, at least for a little while. In an effort to scratch the itch of our envy, we may choose to take some secret steps toward experiencing what they seem to enjoy. Such a temptation can wreak havoc on a young Christian, but its powerful influence can also erode a mature believer’s perspective too. For that reason, we’re wise when we call attention to the disastrous effect that the secret envy of sinful behavior can have on us.

Those who fear the Lord and trust in Him can count on a secure and hopeful future. To help God’s people know and understand this promise, Solomon gave two pieces of wise counsel. First, he returned to the principle first laid down in Proverbs 1:7. It is the fear and reverent awe of the Lord that is the basis of wisdom.

The promise of God’s presence assures a future hope. This was the second great truth of which Solomon reminded God’s people so they might continually embrace the wisdom of God. Solomon combined two great themes of life—hope and wisdom. Walking in God’s wisdom keeps alive the promise of a future with purpose and hope; to neglect the wisdom of God will cut short or stunt a future with purpose and hope. **Hope is much more than wishful thinking; it is extreme CONFIDENCE in God. Hope in Him will never be dashed!**

#### The Petition (Proverbs 23:19-21)

When Solomon referred to **the mind** in this verse he meant the thinking process of God’s people. How and what a person thinks when it comes to the critical junctures of life makes all the difference. A sound mind filled with the

wisdom of God will be better able to make the right choices and avoid the bad choices that can derail us. **Solomon’s wise counsel to God’s people was for them to stay the course set by the wisdom of God. His instruction was for God’s people to remain clear-headed.**

Alcohol and substance abuse can cut short a person’s potential and hope-filled future. Solomon petitioned God’s people to not associate with those who drink too much wine or with those who gorge themselves on meat. Both drunkenness and gluttony can lead to poverty of body and soul. ***Both alcohol and food sometimes function as medicines that numb us to the difficulties and pains of life.*** God’s people are to trust God in difficult times, not turning to vices such as alcohol or overeating for comfort in the process. The numbing effects of drunkenness and overeating are only short-term fixes for what may be a set of long-term problems. When the effects of self-medication and gluttony are gone, the problems will remain.

Solomon addressed the often-neglected issue of gluttony. A drunkard will keep on buying alcohol until all his money is gone. By the same token, Solomon warned that the glutton will become poor. Shoving food into our mouths generally leaves us groggy. The grogginess leaves us unable to be productive when we work. As a result of our lack of control, we’ll end up wearing rags. In our culture, we tend to abhor drunkenness, but we don’t usually have the same attitude about gluttony.

The consequences of alcohol abuse and gluttony are clear and stark. The consequences are physical, mental, financial, relational, and spiritual. How many lives have been wasted by alcohol and cut short by the effects of unhealthy habits? How many families have been ripped apart? **God’s people need to stay sharp, focused, and fully engaged in life—living within the guidelines of God’s wisdom.**

### **The Portrait (Proverbs 23:29-32)**

Solomon portrayed the abuse of alcohol in vivid terms. He described the appeal and enticements of alcohol—it gleams in the cup and goes down smoothly—but in the end it bites like a snake. On the front end things seem good and acceptable; on the back end the ramifications of alcohol abuse are horrible.

The consequences of alcohol abuse are many and varied: the loss of reason, abusive and belligerent behavior, and even the open demonstration of the physical signs of alcohol abuse. **Alcohol over-promises and under-delivers.**

What actions might a person need to take so they don’t find themselves in the picture painted by addiction?

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### **The Problem (Proverbs 23:33-35)**

In these verses the description of the consequences of alcohol’s use and abuse continue in vivid and stark terms. Solomon pictured the abuser of alcohol as someone who **sees strange things** (the loss of mental reasoning) and **will say all kinds of abusive or absurd things** to others. People who abuse alcohol lose their mental capacities and the ability to demonstrate self-control. In addition, Solomon pictured the drunkard as a person **asleep at the helm of a ship**. The drunkard is lethargic and mentally incapacitated. Only one thing matters for a person suffering from addiction. Not even being struck or beaten would be of greater concern. The pressing problem has to do with getting another drink.

Without question, the addictive behaviors and the consequences of alcohol and substance abuse can be devastating. Solomon’s description in these verses of alcohol’s effects challenge us to give the control of our bodies to the Lord alone.

How is Solomon’s portrait of addiction seen in real life? Which image in the description makes the greatest impact?

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### **Next Week’s Lesson – Accepting Discipline (Proverbs 29:1-3, 12-20)**