

Proverbs

Devotional Part 2



Wisdom for the All Ages

By Chris Losey

Thanks for your interest in

Wisdom of the Ages – Part 2

*It is my hope that this information
will give you a greater hunger for
God's amazing wisdom*

*Dedicated to those
who hunger for God's
life-changing truth*

About the Author

Chris Losey grew up in Calistoga, California. He received his Bachelor of Science degree from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, in 1973. After



serving for five years as an infantry officer in the Army, he resigned his commission and returned to school receiving his Master of Divinity degree from Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland, Oregon in 1982. After graduation Chris returned to the military where he served as a chaplain in the Air Force retiring in 1994. Since then he and his wife Sharon have ministered at Valley Baptist Church in San Rafael, California, where Chris serves as senior pastor. Chris and Sharon have been married for 33 years and have two children, Christine (husband-Jathan) and Rob, and two grandchildren, Soren and Belen.

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Introduction

Dear Friend,

Several years ago I learned that a person could read through the whole book of Proverbs by reading a chapter a day – 31 days in the month, 31 chapters in Proverbs. This wasn't rocket science. The plan was simple enough so I tried it. And it worked. I now call it "The Proverbial Habit."

As I read and re-read Proverbs each month, the truth contained in its pages jumps out at me and sinks into my heart. It is just what I need.

Also, I've noticed that the book addresses a myriad of subjects like:

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| - adultery | - fear | - moderation | - training |
| - anger | - fools | - obedience | - understanding |
| - counsel | - generosity | - parenting | - unity |
| - children | - honor | - patience | - unrighteousness |
| - contentment | - humility | - pride | - vengeance |
| - discernment | - integrity | - purity | - violence |
| - discretion | - justice | - righteousness | - vision |
| - discipline | - judgment | - reproof | - wickedness |
| - drinking | - kindness | - sin | - wisdom |
| - endurance | - laziness | - sluggards | - wives |
| - friendship | - loyalty | - testing | - work |
| - finances | - marriage | - the tongue | - youth |

For my own edification, I've been creating an ever-increasing coded index of topics at the start of the book. In the column of my Bible I write these codes next to the verses that contain the topics. I put "**An**" next to verses on **anger**, "**D**" next to verses on **discipline**, and "**Pa**" next to verses on **parenting**. I even find myself identifying key verses and memorizing them. I am having fun, and God is making His truth part of my life.

If you haven't tried the "Proverbial Habit," it is a great way to discover what I call "Wisdom of the Ages." This thirty-one day devotional is my attempt to give a brief summary of some of the wisdom found in each chapter. Before reading the devotion for the day, I encourage you to read the Proverb for the day. The devotional will then help pull the material together.

Every Christian needs God's "Wisdom of the Ages" because it is "Wisdom for ALL Ages." It applies to young and old alike.

Happy Reading,

Chris

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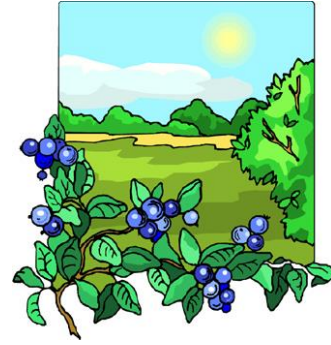
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Proverbs 17

“A Panoply of Wisdom”



The word panoply means “splendid display.” Proverbs seventeen is certainly a panoply of wisdom. It includes truth about peace, wisdom, testing, the tongue, poverty, grandchildren, bribes, fools, evil, wickedness, quarrels, friendship, finances, joy, and righteousness.

Peace – *“Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it, than a house full of feasting with strife”* (v1). Having peace and tranquility in ones home is of great value.

Wisdom – *“A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, and will share in the inheritance among brothers”* (v2). Those who act wisely may receive unusually good benefits.

Testing – *“The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests hearts”* (v3). God is concerned about the spiritual condition of our hearts and will test them from time to time. For example, He may allow us to go through a difficult circumstance to see how we respond.

The Tongue – Speech is one of the main topics in Proverbs. *“An evildoer listens to wicked lips, a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue”* (v4). You can tell a lot about people by who they listen to. *“Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool, much less are lying lips to a prince”* (v7). Fools don't speak with excellence, and princes shouldn't lie! *“He who conceals a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends”* (v9). Learning when to keep quiet can save a friendship. Verse nineteen confirms, *“He who loves transgression loves strife; he who raises his door* (opens his mouth and says the wrong thing) *seeks destruction.”* Verse twenty reveals the connection between a crooked mind, perverted language, and evil, *“He who has a crooked*

mind finds no good, and he who is perverted in his language falls into evil." Verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight reveal the connection between restrained speech and wisdom, "He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent."

Poverty – *"He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; he who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished" (v5).* God cares about the poor.

Grandchildren, Sons, and Fathers – *"Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of sons is their fathers" (v6).* Grandpas revel in their grandkids, and children often see their fathers as people to emulate.

Bribes – *"A bribe is a charm in the sight of it's owner; wherever he turns, he prospers" (v8).* Bribes can bring prosperity. On the other hand, verse twenty-three reveals that bribes are sin, *"A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice."* Just because a person can benefit from bribes, he should not take part in them.

Fools – Fools and foolishness are a major topic of Proverbs. *"A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool" (v10).* A fool often doesn't respond to correction. *"Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly" (v12).* Fools can be dangerous. *"Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, when he has no sense?" (v16).* Fools lack sense! *"He who sires a fool does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy" (v21).* *"A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him" (v24).* Fools bring grief to their families.

Evil and Wickedness – *"He who returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house" (v13).* It is hard to believe that some people repay good with evil, but they do. There also are those who justify wickedness and condemn righteousness. Such people are an abomination to God. Verse fifteen confirms, *"He who justifies the wicked and he who*

condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord." We see a lot of twisted morality in modern society as some people condemn biblical truth and applaud perversion. This behavior is appalling and abominable in God's sight!

Quarrels – *"The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out"* (v14). When a quarrel starts it can become a raging torrent like water breaking through a dam. It is better to abandon a quarrel than to be washed away in a flood of anger.

Friendship – *"A Friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (v17). How great it is to have a friend during hard times!

Joy – *"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones"* (v22). Joy is medicine for the soul!

Reflection

1. What truths from this chapter stand out in your mind? Why?
2. What do verses 4, 9, 20, 27, and 28 teach about the tongue?
3. In what ways have you seen the truth of verse fifteen in modern society?
4. Have you experienced the truth of verse seventeen in your own life? If so, how?

Proverbs 18

“Wisdom’s Treasure Chest”



As a boy I remember watching the movie “Treasure Island.” The storyline and characters fascinated me – especially the pirate, Long John Silver, and the young boy, Jim Hawkins. From that time on, I dreamed of finding my own treasure map and buried treasure. As an adult I found it! It is the Book of Proverbs! Tucked in the chapters of Proverbs is enough buried treasure to satisfy the most avid treasure hunter. Like the rest of the book, chapter eighteen is awash with God’s priceless jewels of wisdom.

The Tongue – The power and use of the tongue come up again and again in Proverbs. Why? Because God knows that words can make or break a person. Verse four states, *“The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.”* A person’s words can cut deep into the life of another. Verse eight gives great insight into gossip, *“The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body.”* If we choose to gossip, our words will sink deep into the heart of the hearer, and possibly cause great damage to others. This is not God’s will! Verse thirteen reveals the dangers of answering before listening, *“He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”* We must listen carefully before responding to others. Verse seventeen shows the importance of hearing extensive evidence before drawing a final conclusion on a matter, *“The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.”* How often we jump to conclusions before hearing all the evidence. Verse twenty shows that satisfaction in life is closely connect with a person’s speech, *“With the fruit of a man’s mouth his stomach will be satisfied; he will be satisfied with the product of his lips.”* Great satisfaction comes after a person has said the right thing at the right time. Verse twenty one shows the power of the tongue, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”* Learning when and how to speak can be the difference between life and

death. It is essential that those who follow God use their speech to glorify Him. How does a person learn this skill? By studying the “speech principles” sprinkled throughout Proverbs and diligently applying them to life.

Fools – Another area addressed in Proverbs eighteen is “fools”. What makes a person a fool? Actions and words are often a good indicator. For example, verse two states, *“A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind.”* When you meet a person who is not interested in listening or talking things out, he is undoubtedly a fool. Fools delight in spewing their own thoughts rather than engaging in intelligent conversation. Regarding the words of a fool, verses six and seven reveal, *“A fool’s lips bring strife, and his mouth calls for blows. A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are the snare of his soul.”* Fools stir up trouble for themselves when they speak.

Besides speech and foolishness, Proverbs eighteen addresses other areas of priceless wisdom.

Partiality (Favoritism) – *“To show partiality to the wicked is not good, nor to thrust aside the righteous in judgment”* (v5). It is not right to help the wicked and hurt the righteous.

Work – *“He also who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys”* (v9). Slovenly work is akin to destruction.

Protection – *“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe”* (v10). Those who want ultimate protection, find it in the Lord as they stay close to Him.

Finances – *“A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination”* (v11). Rich people often feel a great sense of security when they consider their wealth. Verse twenty-three states, *“The poor man utters supplications, but the rich man answers roughly.”* Unfortunately, wealthy people sometimes lack sensitivity. If the Lord

blesses you with wealth, be sure to treat those of lesser financial status with kindness.

Pride or Humility – *“Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, but humility goes before honor”* (v12). Pride often precedes destruction. Humility brings honor.

Endurance – *“The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, but as for a broken spirit who can bear it”* (v14). It is often easier to endure physical sickness than emotional anguish.

Unity – *“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a citadel”* (v19). If you offend a close relative or friend, it may be difficult to make amends and restore unity.

The chapter contains other nuggets of wisdom as well. The treasure is there for the taking.

Reflection

1. Summarize the wisdom in verses 4, 8, 13, 17, 20, and 21? What topic is addressed, and how can you apply the truth to your life?
2. What do verses 2, 6, and 7 teach about fools? Have you ever met a fool? Explain.
3. Quickly review the other teachings in Proverbs eighteen. What wisdom stands out to you? Why?

Proverbs 19

“Raining Wisdom”

As much as I love the sunshine, I also appreciate rain. Growing up in California we experienced months without rain during the summer. When rain came in the fall, amazing things happened to the landscape. Brown, grassy hills turned green. Dry creek beds filled and flowed. When spring arrived, wildflowers sprang up everywhere in all their glory. Rain brought life to the land!



The sayings of Proverbs are rain from heaven. Each verse contains a drop of wisdom, but together become a stream of life-giving truth. Like the chapters before it, chapter nineteen is a steady downpour of cool, refreshing wisdom for the soul, covering a wide array of topics.

Poverty - *"Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool"* (v1). Poverty may be difficult, but a poor person with integrity has a distinct advantage over a fool. Unfortunately, poverty sometimes causes people to lose friends. Verses four and seven state, *"Wealth adds many friends, but a poor man is separated from his friend. All the brothers of a poor man hate him; how much more do his friends abandon him."* People have a tendency to separate themselves from poor people. Sometimes it is because they don't want to be hit-up for money. Sometimes it is for social reasons. This type of discrimination should not be true of God's people. Verse seventeen states, *"One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed."* By giving to the poor, we give to God, and He will repay us in His own way.

Discipline - *"Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death"* (v18). This verse insinuates that those who fail to discipline

their children contribute to their children's demise. By disciplining children, parents give them correction and guidance needed for survival. Verse twenty records the benefits to those who receive counsel and discipline, "*Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days.*" Receiving discipline adds wisdom to life. Verse twenty-seven describes the dangers of rejecting wisdom, "*Cease listening, my son, to discipline, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.*" Verse twenty-five describes some of the benefits of discipline, "*Strike a scoffer and the naïve may become shrewd, but reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge.*" Naïve people learn lessons when they see scoffers disciplined. When a man of understanding (a wise man) receives discipline, he gains more knowledge.

Anger - "*A man's discretion makes him slow to anger; and it is his glory to overlook a transgression*" (v11). If people exercise discretion (wise caution) they will not be so quick to get angry. Sometimes it is better to overlook someone's sin than to get angry and stir up more trouble. People who lack discretion often have great anger and suffer for it. "*A man of great anger will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again*" (v19). James 1:19,20 in the New Testament gives the quintessential wisdom regarding anger, "*But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*"

Fools and Foolishness - "*The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the Lord*" (v3). Fools ruin their lives by their own choices, and then blame God for it. Each person must learn to take responsibility for his own actions. Verse ten states, "*Luxury is not fitting for a fool, much less for a slave to rule over princes.*" Fools and slaves often lack wisdom and tend to become tyrants if placed in positions of authority. Verse thirteen addresses the destructive nature of fools, "*A foolish son is destruction to his father...*" Verse twenty-nine adds, "*Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and blows for the back of fools.*"

Because fools do foolish things, they sometimes receive harsh punishment.

Laziness - *“Laziness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle man will suffer hunger”* (v15). *“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, but will not even bring it back to his mouth”* (v24). The dangers and pathetic nature of laziness are obvious.

Kindness - *“What is desirable in a man is his kindness”* (v22). If you are a man, be kind. It’s what is desirable in you.

As well as the subjects mentioned above, Proverbs chapter nineteen addresses many other important topics.

Reflection

1. How have you seen poverty affect people? What do verses 1, 4, 7, 17, and 22 teach about poverty?
2. Explain Proverbs 19:18 in your own words. What is the insinuation? How do verses 20, 25, and 27 relate?
3. What can be learned about anger from verses 11 and 19? Can you think of an example when you saw these truths at work?
4. What does verse 23 teach about the benefits of fearing of the Lord?

Proverbs 20

“A Colorful Spectrum”



Visible light is a small part of the electromagnetic spectrum and begins with the color red (longer wavelengths ~700 nanometers) and goes to the color violet (shorter wavelengths ~400 nanometers). From longer to shorter, the colors of the visible spectrum are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. When seen together in a rainbow, the colors are spectacular. The book of Proverbs is much like a rainbow, but instead of containing colors, it contains a wide array of wisdom covering numerous topics. When this wisdom is taken together and applied to life, it becomes a glorious spectacle for all to see.

Intoxication and Behavior - The chapter begins, “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise*” (v1). How foolish it is to get intoxicated. Drunkenness turns people into mockers and brawlers. Statistics regarding alcohol show it’s incredibly destructive nature. How much better it is to remain sober and in control of ones faculties!

Don’t Mess with Authority! - Verse two shares the dangers of provoking those in authority, “*The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.*” In today’s world there seems to be little respect for authority, but God warns that if a person provokes those in authority (ones boss, a teacher, the police, the government...), there may be a high price to pay.

Keeping Away from Strife - Some people like to argue and fight, but little good comes from it. Verse three confirms, “*Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.*” If you find a person who enjoys quarreling, you have likely encountered a fool.

Dangers of Laziness - *“The sluggard does not plow after the autumn, so he begs during the harvest and has nothing.”* Many people want something for nothing. The reality is, to get life’s necessities (food, clothing, and shelter) a person needs to work. Laziness leads only to poverty and want. Verse thirteen confirms, *“Do not love sleep, or you will become poor; open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with food.”*

Integrity and Blessing - *“A righteous man who walks in his integrity – how blessed are his sons after him”* (v7). When a person has integrity (moral wholeness), he becomes a huge blessing to his family. Not only does he set a powerful example, he helps keep his family out of trouble.

Honesty’s Importance - *“Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the Lord”* (v10). God loathes dishonesty. The illegal practice of merchants tampering with their scales was detestable. Dishonest gain may seem sweet at first, but it is bitter in the end. *“Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel”* (v17).

Distinguished Youth - *“It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself, if his conduct is pure and right”* (v11). The good deeds of a person are what make him stand out. His conduct should be pure and right. If a person wants to be a “stand out,” he needs to do what’s right!

Financial Wisdom - *“There is gold, and an abundance of jewels; but the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing”* (v15). Gold and jewels are valuable, but wise talk (lips of knowledge) is more precious. *“Take his garment when he becomes surety of a stranger; and for foreigners, hold him in pledge”* (v16). How foolish it is to “guarantee debt” (become surety) for a stranger. Anyone who does it may lose the shirt off his back. *“An inheritance gained hurriedly at the beginning, will not be blessed in the end”* (v21). Some children (like the prodigal son) want an early inheritance. If a child lacks maturity, he will likely squander an early inheritance, and thus not be blessed.

Counsel and Guidance - *“Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance”* (v18). Before making important decisions it is crucial to get wise counsel.

Avoiding Gossip - *“He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip”* (v19). It is important to avoid people who slander and gossip about others. If you hang out with them, chances are you will become just like them.

Honor and Parents - *“He who curses his father or his mother, his lamp will go out in time of darkness”* (v20). If people dishonor their parents, they will only hurt themselves in the end.

Revenge - *“Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the Lord, and He will save you”* (v22). Don’t take your own revenge, let God handle it.

Strength and Gray Hair - *“The glory of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is their gray hair”* (v29). Young men are honored for their strength. Old men are honored for having gray hair.

Reflection

1. Describe the financial wisdom found in verses 14, 15, 16, and 21.
2. What does verse 11 teach about distinguishing oneself? Have you ever observed this in real life?
3. What truths are taught in verse 19? Have you applied them to your life? How? What happened?
4. Review the teachings contained in this chapter. Which ones stand out most to you? Why?

Proverbs 21

“A Floral Display”

Many churches have beautiful bouquets in the front of the sanctuary each Sunday. These flowers add beauty to the worship experience. What is particularly pleasing to me is a bouquet that has coordinated colors. Such beauty makes me ponder the richness of God’s creation. Chapter twenty-one of Proverbs is similar to a beautiful floral display. Instead of flowers, it contains an amazing array of God’s incredible wisdom. Look and enjoy!



Heart Check - *“Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts”* (v2). People can justify their actions, but God is concerned about motives. Why do you do what you do? Is your heart right?

Doing Right - *“To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord more than sacrifice”* (v3). In the Old Testament, sins were paid for through the sacrificial system. If a person sinned he had to bring a sacrifice to the temple. Rather than receiving more sacrifices, God wanted people to avoid sin. He would rather have them do what is right in the first place, than come with a sacrifice and say, "Sorry." Obedience is important to God!

Honesty in Finances - *“The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death”* (v6). In today’s world the mantra seems to be “get rich any way you can.” God is not opposed to riches; He just wants people to acquire wealth honestly.

Contention in Marriage - Contentiousness means being prone to argue and fight. No one wants to be around contentious people! Verse nine states, *“It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.”* Verse nineteen adds *“It is better to live in a*

desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.” Is there contention in your home? Stop it! Figure out what's bothering each person, and work to restore peace. Contentiousness destroys marriages!

Gifts and Anger - Is someone angry at you? Why not consider giving them a gift? Your thoughtfulness may end the feud and restore the relationship. Verse fourteen says, *“A gift in secret subdues anger, and a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.”* I can tell you from experience that gifts given in love can melt angry, cold hearts.

Rewards of Righteous Living - *“He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor”* (v21). Some people feel that living a righteous life is a sure way to miss all the fun. Quite the contrary! God says that the person who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor. Do you want life and honor? Then make it your aim to live a righteous, loyal life.

Guarding the Tongue - Verse twenty-three states, *“He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.”* How often a word poorly chosen has returned to haunt the speaker! If a person wants to save himself a lot of grief, he can do it by learning to control what comes out of his mouth.

Planning or Haste - Verse five states, *“The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.”* If you have some grand idea, don't launch out in haste. Be sure to plan diligently, otherwise your good intentions may lead to poverty.

Pleasure, Wine, and Wealth - Verse seventeen states, *“He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.”* Pleasure is not a bad thing, but when a person is consumed with satisfying his own pleasures, he may put himself on the road to poverty. His love for "the finer things in life" may cause him to overspend and overindulge. Second Timothy 3:1-4 warns that in the last times perilous times will come. Many people will be lovers of pleasure

rather than lovers of God. As Christians we need to be sure that our primary focus is on God, not pleasure.

The Nature of Wickedness - *"The violence of the wicked will drag them away, because they refuse to act with justice" (v7).* The lives of wicked people are marked by violence and injustice. Such behavior will drag them away (be their undoing). *"The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no favor in his eyes" (v10).* Violent people often desire evil, and have little respect for others. *"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent!" (v27).* When wicked people bring a sacrifice to God with wicked intent, God views their offering with contempt. He sees their heart and knows there is no real sorrow for sin. Christians must avoid wickedness and seek righteousness. Only then will God be pleased.

Reflection

1. According to verses 7, 10 and 27, what are some of the things that mark the lives of wicked people? What can be learned from this?
2. What is pleasure? Is pleasure always wrong? Explain verse seventeen in your own words.
3. Explain verse three in your own words. Why is obedience so important?
4. Explain verse two in your own words. How can you apply it to your life?

Proverbs 22

“The Fountain of Truth”

Many cities have beautiful fountains. These fountains captivate people's attention through endless streams of spouting water that splash into rippling pools. People often stand mesmerized, and sometimes toss coins into the shimmering waters.



Proverbs, like a fountain, provides a seemingly endless stream of God's eternal wisdom. Rather than stopping to toss coins into God's living waters, people can drink and have their lives refreshed, re-directed, and renewed.

A Good Name - People want many things, but near the top of their list should be the desire for "a good name." Proverbs chapter twenty-two begins, *"A good name is to be more desired than great wealth..."* Often, in order to gain wealth, people compromise their values and ruin their reputation. But God says, having a good name is more valuable than great wealth. He's right! If we lose our good name through sin, it may be quite difficult to get it back. A good name has immense worth!

Rich and Poor - Some rich people think they have nothing in common with poor folks. Proverbs 22:2 states differently, *"The rich and the poor have a common bond, the Lord is maker of them all."* The chapter warns rich people not to take advantage of the poor, *"He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty"* (v16). Except for the grace of God, any of us could become poor. If we oppress the poor, God may turn His hand of blessing away from us. Verses twenty-two and twenty-three caution, *"Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their case and take the life of those who rob them."* Verse nine states that those who share with poor folks will be blessed, *"He who*

is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor." In the New Testament, Jesus said we would always have the poor with us (Mt 26:11). It is the responsibility of "the haves" to help those in need.

Various Kinds of People - *"The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the naïve go on, and are punished for it" (v3).* **Wise** (prudent) people avoid evil. The **Naïve** (simple folks) entangle themselves in evil and get into trouble. **Scoffers** cause contention, strife and dishonor. *"Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, even strife and dishonor will cease" (v10).* *"Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards himself will be far from them" (v5).* **Perverse** people encounter all sorts of thorns and snares. We should want wisdom to mark our lives rather than naivety, scoffing, or perversity.

Special Rewards - *"The rewards of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life" (v4).* Those who live humbly and fear the Lord, can expect riches (something as opposed to nothing), honor and life. These two rewards are certainly worth having!

People to Avoid - *"Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, or you will learn his ways and find a snare for yourself" (v24).* Hanging around angry people can cause a person to adopt the same destructive lifestyle. Don't do it! In addition, avoid those who give pledges and guarantee debts. *"Do not be among those who give pledges, among those who become guarantors for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take your bed from under you?" (vv26,27).* Guaranteeing another person's debt is risky business. If he defaults, you lose.

Raising Children - *"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it" (v6).* God instructs parents to train their children. This training will go a long way to help those children walk with the Lord. Parents also need to discipline their children. At times this may necessitate a spanking. Verse fifteen declares, *"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of*

discipline will remove it far from him." Spanking is not the end-all in discipline, but there are times it is appropriate.

The Value of Skill - *"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men"* (v29). People exceptionally skilled in their profession often find themselves elevated to a place of distinction.

A Pleasant Life - *"Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, that they may be ready on your lips"* (vv17,18). If you want a pleasant life, learn and apply God's truth!

Reflection

1. Read Proverbs 22:1. Why is having a "good name" (good reputation) important? How can this either help or hurt a person's witness? Who do you know who has a good name? Why?
2. What do verses 2, 16, 22-23, and 9 teach about how we are to treat the poor? Have you ever helped the poor? Explain?
3. What four kinds of people are mentioned in verses 3, 5, and 10? What do the verses teach about each one?
4. What kinds of people do verses 24, 26-27 tell us to avoid? Why?
5. Explain verse 29 in your own words. How does it relate to you?

Proverbs 23

“Don't do this!”

What Christians *do* is important. Among other things they need to walk with God, live by faith, and love others. These and many other “do’s” are sprinkled throughout the Bible. In addition, there are many "don'ts". These directives are equally important and are on the flip side of ones “to do” list. Proverbs twenty-three has a number of important additions to the “do not do” list. Let’s explore a few of them.



Do Not Desire Another's Delicacies - Proverbs twenty-three begins, *“When you sit down to dine with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are a man of great appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for it is deceptive food”* (vv1-3). Why shouldn't we desire another's delicacies, especially a ruler's? It is deceptive food. The ruler may be "wining and dining" us in order to make us feel obligated to him. He may desire our support for some deceptive scheme. Also, his budget is likely greater than ours. We probably can't afford what he can afford. If we begin desiring and coveting his lifestyle, we may set ourselves up for financial ruin.

Do Not Chase After Wealth - Desiring the delicacies of another can cause a person to chase after wealth. Proverbs 23:4,5 cautions, *“Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.”* Chasing wealth can be an illusive dream. If you work hard and God blesses you with wealth, great! But don't make getting rich your primary goal. If you do, you may be sorely disappointed.

Do Not Speak Around Fools - Fools often scoff; they ridicule wisdom. That's why verse nine directs, *"Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words."*

Do Not Take Advantage of People - In Old Testament times, people sometimes took advantage of unsuspecting neighbors by moving property markers, letting their flocks graze in a neighbor's field, or stealing produce not belonging to them. These crimes were often committed against those who were fatherless or going through tough times. God warns against such evil behavior, *"Do not move the ancient boundary or go into the fields of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you"* (vv10,11). Honesty is important to God. If you are tempted to take advantage of someone, consider this warning - "Don't do it, or God will hold you accountable."

Do Not Withhold Deserved Discipline - Even though spanking has been demonized in today's society, God says it is a viable option for child discipline, *"Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol"* (vv13,14). There are necessary precautions to ensure spanking does not become abusive, but sometimes a good spanking is just what a child needs to change his attitude and get him back on track. "The rod of correction" administered on "the seat of learning" is a good teacher.

Do Not Let Your Heart Envy Sinners - Not only are we not to desire someone else's delicacies, we are not to envy sinners who prosper by illicit means. Verses seventeen and eighteen state, *"Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the Lord always. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."* Some people delve into sin because they think it is the only way to get ahead. Sin has its pleasure for a season (Heb 11:25) but in the end it often brings heartache and ruin. Christians are to live in the fear of the Lord – respecting His values, and living in obedience. Our future hope must be in God, not things.

Do Not be with Drunks or Gluttons - *"Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe one with rags"* (vv20,21). These instructions are simple and clear. In addition, verses twenty-nine through thirty-five give a detailed description of the dismal state of alcoholics. You don't want to experience the negative impact of that destructive lifestyle!

Do Not Despise an Elderly Mother - *"Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old"* (v22). To despise means to view as trivial or worthless, and to treat with scorn or contempt. As parents grow older and are less able to care for themselves, it would be easy to view them as having diminishing value. All humans are valuable, no matter what their station in life. Children should always treat parents with honor and respect.

Reflection

1. Explain the following statement in your own words, "A Christian's maturity is not only measured by the things he "does" but by the things he "doesn't do." What are some of these "do's" and "don'ts"?"
2. According to verses twenty-four and twenty-five, if a child is wise, how will this affect his parents?
3. What are the specific "don'ts" covered in Proverbs chapter twenty-three? How are you doing on "not doing" these things?
4. Are there other "don'ts" that you have difficulty conquering?

Proverbs 24

“The Banquet!”



Each year our church hosts a Thanksgiving banquet.

Everyone is asked to bring a side dish and salad, or a side dish and dessert to share. The deaconess board cooks several turkeys and prepares a boatload of mashed potatoes and gravy to throw into the mix. Our gymnasium is transformed into the finest restaurant in town with a seemingly endless supply and variety of mouthwatering food!

Proverbs chapter twenty-four provides its own banquet – a banquet of varied and profound wisdom to satisfy the most voracious spiritual appetite. Dig in!

Envy Not - *“Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their minds devise violence and their lips talk of trouble”* (vv1,2). It is easy to envy evil people. Evil has allure and excitement, but don’t be fooled, it eventually leads to heartache and regret. *“Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked; for there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out”* (vv19,20).

Build that House - *“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches”* (vv3,4). Today beautiful, new homes are popping up in every city across the nation. But sadly, almost as fast as families move in, there are other families moving out; families where marriages fell apart. If you want a home that stands the test of time, it takes more than a physical house; it requires God’s wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

Wisdom, Power, Honey and Hope - *“A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power. For by wise guidance you will wage war,*

and in abundance of counselors there is victory” (vv5,6). Do you want strength and power? Then get wisdom and knowledge! “My son, eat honey, for it is good, yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste; know that wisdom is thus for your soul; if you find it, then there will be a future and your hope will not be cut off” (vv13,14). Wisdom, like honey, is sweet. When applied to life, wisdom brings hope for the future!

The Resilience of the Righteous - *“Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; do not destroy his resting place; for a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity” (vv15,16). Although wicked people make plans against the righteous, righteous people have special strength from God that helps them bounce back. Righteousness adds resilience to life!*

Don’t Cheer an Enemy’s Fall - *“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; or the Lord will see it and be displeased, and turn His anger away from him” (vv17,18). Many people feel like cheering when an enemy falls, but God warns against such behavior. Even if an enemy deserves destruction, we shouldn’t cheer his demise.*

No Partiality in Judgment - *“To show partiality in judgment is not good. He who says to the wicked, ‘You are righteous,’ peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him; but to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight, and a good blessing will come upon them” (vv23-25). We must not show partiality in judgment by calling evil “good.” Those who have done evil deeds should be punished.*

Keep Your Priorities Straight - *“Prepare your work outside and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterwards, then, build your house” (v27). If a person had to choose between building a new house and working in the field to plant and tend crops, he might choose to build. By doing so, he would make a mistake. It is his fields that provide food and income. Before rushing off to build his house, he should tend to his*

fields. If he puts the cart before the horse, he may find himself with no resources with which to build!

Sluggards; Look and Learn! - *“I passed by the field of the sluggard and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; its surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding the hands to rest, then your poverty will come as a robber and your want like an armed man”* (vv30-34). Lazy people suffer hardship at their own hands. Their laziness is their own undoing. Don’t buy into the saying, “Hard work pays off later, but laziness pays off now.”

Important Don’ts - *“Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, ‘Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work’”* (vv28,29). Not only must we guard our mouths against speaking lies, we must be sure we don’t take our own revenge.

Reflection

1. According to verses one and two, why are we not to envy sinners? Explain. How do verses nineteen and twenty apply?
2. Verses three and four state that there are three major elements in building, establishing, and filling a house. Describe each one.
3. Explain verse twenty-seven in your own words. How does it apply to you?
4. What truths in this chapter stand out most to you? Why?

Proverbs 25

“Timeless Wisdom”

It is amazing how wisdom spans the ages. In other words, truth about human character and relationships is as valid today as it was thousands of years ago. Proverbs chapter twenty-five is loaded with such wisdom!



Remove the Dross! - *“Take away the dross from the silver, and there comes out a vessel for the smith; take away the wicked before the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness”* (vv4,5). Dross is the refuse (the impurities) that rises to the top of molten metal during the refining process. As dross is removed, the molten metal becomes pure and ready for pouring into molds. Just like dross must be removed in the refining process of metals, so too, wicked people need to be removed from a kingdom for that kingdom to be pure and righteous.

Pride and Humility - *“Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of great men; for it is better that it be said to you, ‘Come up here,’ than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince...”* (vv6,7). Those who try to elevate themselves may be humbled by others. *“Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely”* (v14). People who falsely boast about their abilities are foolish indeed. Regarding pride, verse twenty-seven warns, *“It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glory to search out one’s own glory.”* Too much honey makes a person sick. Promoting oneself does the same thing. If you become great, others will tell you. Don’t beat your own drum. If you do, others will stop.

Word Power - *“Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear. Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he*

refreshes the soul of his masters” (vv11-13). “By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone” (v15). “Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land” (v25). A word spoken at the right time, wise words of correction, words from a faithful messenger, and soft words can have great impact on those who hear them. Never underestimate the power of positive words!

The Need for Moderation - *“Have you found honey? Eat only what you need, that you not have it in excess and vomit it” (v16). Too much of a good thing can be a bad thing!*

A Good Neighbor - *“Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor’s house, or he will become weary of you and hate you” (v17). One aspect of being a good neighbor is keeping visits to the house next door to a minimum. In addition, verse eighteen warns against being a false witness against a neighbor, “Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.”*

Misplaced Confidence - *“Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble” (v19). We must avoid placing confidence in the wrong people at the wrong time!*

How to Treat an Enemy - *“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you” (vv21,22). Rather than grinding enemies into the dirt, God says to help them. By doing so we will heap coals of fire upon their heads and God will reward us. In Old Testament times, people who travelled carried hot coals and ashes in clay jars on their heads. These coals were essential for starting a fire at the next location. Having fire was crucial for warmth and cooking. Thus heaping coals on someone’s head was a good thing. When we help our enemies in their time of need they may become our friends. It must be stated that this way of treating enemies relates to ones personal life. Dealing with enemies on the battlefield in time of war is a different story.*

The Contentious Woman - *“The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue an angry countenance. It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman”* (vv23,24). Contentious people are prone to argue and fight. If you are that kind of woman, stop it, or you’ll drive your husband away.

Don’t Give in to Wickedness - *“Like a trampled spring and a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked”* (v26). Giving in to wicked people opens a floodgate of evil. The onslaught of wickedness and its accompanying moral filth, has never been greater. Today, God’s people must stand against all forms of evil, and reinstate righteousness in their own lives and into the fabric of society.

Lack of Self-Control Equals Broken Walls - *“Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit”* (v28). In ancient times the walls of a city were vital to its protection. If the walls were broken down, the city was vulnerable to attack and destruction. People who lack self-control undermine their own lives and set themselves up for personal destruction. If you want to protect your life, learn to control yourself.

Reflection

1. Explain verses four and five?
2. What do the following verses teach about humility? vv6-8, 27
3. Describe the power of words revealed in verses 11-13 and 15?
4. How does verse twenty-eight apply to your life?

Proverbs 26

“Fools, Sluggards and Contention”

Fools - A fool is a person deficient in good sense or judgment. Fools are easily duped. Proverbs chapter twenty-six has much to say about them.



“Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool... A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools. Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes. He cuts off his own feet and drinks violence who sends a message by the hand of a fool. Like the legs which are useless to the lame, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools. Like one who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honor to a fool. Like a thorn which falls into the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools. Like an archer who wounds everyone, so is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by. Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? there is more hope for a fool than for him” (vv1-12).

Here’s a summary of truth regarding fools:

- don’t honor fools – vv1,8
- fools bring severe discipline upon themselves – v3
- when communicating with a fool, don’t stoop to his level or he will see himself as wise – vv4,5
- don’t hire a fool or you will regret it – vv6,10
- fools & wisdom don’t mix. Wisdom is contrary to their nature – vv7,9
- fools return to their folly just like dogs return to their vomit – v11
- people who see themselves as wise are more foolish than fools – v12

Sluggards - Sluggards are lazy people. Proverbs 26:13-16 gives an apt description of their self-destructive lifestyle, *“The sluggard says, ‘There*

is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!’ As the door turns on its hinges, so does the sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can give a discreet answer.”

Here’s a summary of truth about sluggards:

- sluggards always have an excuse for their laziness – v13
- sluggards stay in bed more than they should – v14
- sluggards sit around and often eat too much - v15
- sluggards do little, talk much, and view themselves as having more wisdom than people who are truly wise – v16

After seeing the description of fools and sluggards, the message is clear, “Don’t adopt either lifestyle!”

Contentiousness and the Tongue - Contentious people are argumentative and quarrelsome. They stir up trouble. Here’s what Proverbs 26:20-28 says about them:

“For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body. Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart. He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred covers itself with guile, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”

The truth about contention is clear:

- Contention often starts when one person gossips about another. If gossip is eliminated contention quiets down (vv20,21).
- It is hard to stop gossip because people like to hear it. It is like dainty morsels of food (v22).
- Gossipers are often motivated by hate (v23,24,28).
- Gossipers are cunning. On the one hand they trash others, and on the other, they speak graciously as if nothing is wrong. If a person is a gossip, don't trust him. His gracious words may be covering his evil intentions (v25).
- Gossipers eventually will be discovered and get what's coming to them (v26). They will fall into the verbal pits they have dug for others (v27).

Reflection

1. Describe a fool in your own words. Have you ever known one? What did the person do to gain that reputation?

2. What does the chapter teach about fools?

3. How does Proverbs chapter twenty-six describe sluggards? Would you add anything to the description?

4. Have you ever met a sluggard? How did being a sluggard affect the person's life?

5. Describe contentious people. Have you known any? How did you deal with them?

Proverbs 27

“Friendship, Finances, and Other Instruction”

Friendship

Everyone enjoys and wants to maintain healthy friendships. Proverbs chapter twenty-seven gives great advice. *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy”* (v6). If a friend corrects you, you may feel hurt, but realize he is trying to help. It is your enemies who will never tell you when something is wrong. *“Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man’s counsel is sweet to his friend”* (v9).



Friends are there to give wise counsel. How good it is to talk with a friend and to get advice! *“Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, and do not go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away”* (v10). Friends need to be loyal. We should not only be loyal to our friends, but also to family friends. In times of need, a friend who lives close (a neighbor) can be of greater help than a family member far away. *“He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be reckoned a curse to him”* (v14). Early in the morning when a person (like your spouse who is hopefully your best friend) is waking up, it is rude to greet him or her with a loud voice. We need to be careful we aren’t so comfortable with friends that we become impolite. *“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”* (v17). Friends can hold us accountable and keep us on life’s cutting edge.

Finances

“Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations. When the grass disappears, the new growth is seen and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, the lambs will be your clothing, and the goats will bring the price of a field and there will be goats’ milk

enough for your food, for the food of your household, and sustenance for your maidens” (vv23-27). It is vital for people to pay close attention to their finances. Proper management of those assets provides food, shelter and other life-necessities. Those who fail in financial vigilance may discover those resources dwindling. It is wise to manage assets so they grow or at least stay even with spending. *“Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger” (v13).* Once again, Proverbs warns against guaranteeing (becoming surety for) another person’s debt.

Humility

“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” (vv1,2). Scripture warns against boasting and self-praise. Neither is fitting for a Christain. *“The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and each is tested by the praise accorded him” (v21).* The praise of others is a test. We pass the test if we remain humble in the midst of accolades.

No Satisfaction

“Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied” (v20). Because of man’s sin-nature, he is never satisfied. The saying holds true, “The only thing that satisfies is a little bit more.” For example, a person may earn an adequate income, but find himself yearning for more. Likewise, a man may love his spouse, but discover he wants another woman. In both cases, the problem is dissatisfaction. The remedy is thanking God for what He has given, and choosing to be content.

Marriage

“Like a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man who wanders from his home” (v8). Birds that wander, neglect their mate and young, undermine their feathered families. Men who wander from their homes do the same. *“A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike; he who would restrain her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand” (vv15,16).* A nagging wife is a

huge irritant. Women need to be careful they don't drive their husbands away. Instead they need to create an environment of peace and love that endears them to their spouses.

Reflecting the Heart

“As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man” (v19). When a person looks into still water, he sees his own reflection. In the same way, a man's heart reflects his inner self. That's why it is so important for people to guard their hearts (Pr 4:23). If they do, their hearts will reflect godliness.

Reflection

1. Summarize the teaching on friendship found in this chapter.
2. Summarize what the chapter teaches about humility.
3. Explain verse nineteen in your own words.
4. How does “satisfaction” (v20) apply to finances and marriage? Are you struggling with being satisfied in any area of your life? If so, what should you do?
5. What truths in this chapter stand out most to you? Why?

Proverbs 28

“Taste and see”

Ripe fruit is delicious. A basket of it tantalizes the taste-buds, especially when there is a wide variety of items like apples, oranges, peaches, pears, plums, and grapes. Likewise, Proverbs chapter twenty-eight has a plethora of mouth-watering spiritual truth. Taste and see that the Lord is good!



The Pitfalls of Wickedness, and the Benefits of Righteousness - *“The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion”* (v1). Wicked people often are on the run, looking over their shoulder fearing their evil actions will be discovered. Righteous people are bold because they know what they do is right! *“Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand all things”* (v5). Evil people fail to understand true justice because they constantly practice wickedness. Conversely, those who seek God have great understanding because their justice is in line with God’s character. *“He who leads the upright astray in an evil way will himself fall into his own pit, but the blameless will inherit good”* (v10). *“A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days”* (v16). *“He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, but he who is crooked will fall all at once”* (v18). *“When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves”* (v12). Righteous living has personal and societal benefits. Wicked living, on the other hand, leads only to trouble.

The Importance of Obeying the Law - *“Those who forsake the law, praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive with them”* (v4). Laws are instituted for the good of society. For example, the speed limit law of driving twenty five miles per hour in a residential area protects children. When a person breaks the speed limit, he honors the wicked

because his actions say, “It’s OK to break the law and place children at risk.” Conversely, when a person obeys the law, he opposes wickedness. If you don’t want to support evil, obey the law! *“He who keeps the law is a discerning son”* (v7). By obeying the law, people not only protect themselves and others, they show respect for authority. *“He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination”* (v9). When people knowingly disobey the law and then come to God in prayer, God sees their prayers as hypocritical. If people say they love God, they need to be law-abiding citizens. God establishes governments (Rm 13:1-7) and expects Christians to obey them unless those governments establish laws contrary to God’s law. For example if the government passed a law outlawing worship, Christians would be obligated to disobey. They would need to choose God’s law over man’s law. Most laws, however, do not fall into this category. Therefore, obey the law!

Integrity is Priceless - *“Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked though he be rich”* (v6). In God’s eyes, a person’s integrity is more important than the size of his bank account!

Confess Your Sins! - *“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion”* (v13). If there is sin in a person’s life, God expects that person to confess it and turn to Him. Those who do, will find God’s forgiveness. Those who continue in sin will eventually suffer the consequences.

The Importance of Hard Work - *“He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty. A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished”* (vv19,20). *“A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth and does not know that want will come upon him”* (v22). Those who work hard will prosper. Those who follow get-rich-quick schemes may experience financial ruin.

Rebuke, Flattery, and Favor - *“He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue”* (v23). People often fail to correct others for fear of ruining a friendship or creating an enemy. Instead they use flattery and tell others what they want to hear. If rebuke is done sensitively in love, it can be appreciated.

Giving to the Poor - *“He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses”* (v27). God cares about poor people, and rewards those who help them. God’s people must care and help, too.

Don’t Trust Your Own Heart - *“He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered”* (v26). Trusting in ones own heart means trusting in emotions. Instead, people need to make wise decisions based on truth. Choosing wisdom over emotions will prevent all sorts of problems.

Reflection

1. Share some of the contrasts between wickedness and righteousness from verses 1, 5, 10, 12, 16, and 18.
2. Summarize verses nineteen and twenty in your own words. What are some of the empty pursuits that people follow?
3. Explain verse thirteen in your own words.
4. Explain verse four in your own words. Give examples of ways people sometimes break the law.
5. What truths stand out to you in this chapter? Why?

Proverbs 29

“Wisdom for life”

Proverbs twenty-nine contains great wisdom for life. Apply it, and you will find favor with God and people.



Responding Correctly to Reproof - Reproof is sharp scolding. It happens when one person tells another that he is doing something wrong. Verse one gives a strong warning regarding reproof, *“A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.”* If a person repeatedly fails to listen to reproof, he will bring trouble upon himself. For example, if he is told at work to improve his work habits and attitude, yet fails to do so, he may lose his job. Taking corrective action when reproofed is vital!

Make Your Father Glad - *“A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, but he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth”* (v3). Few things make parents happier than seeing their children make wise choices. Few things make parents sadder than seeing their children act foolishly. Do you want to thrill your parents? Live wisely!

Leading with Justice and Truth - *“The king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it”* (v4). *“If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, all his ministers become wicked”* (v12). *“If a king judges the poor with truth, his throne will be established forever”* (v14). Whether in a kingdom, a household, or a business, the application of “justice and truth” brings stability. When leaders are fair and truthful, God blesses their realm with steadiness and longevity.

Caring About Poor People - *“The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, the wicked does not understand such concern”* (v7). One sign of righteousness is a genuine concern for the less-fortunate. God’s

followers need to have a special place in their hearts and checkbooks for the poor.

Control Your Temper - *“When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, the foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest”* (v9). *“A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back”* (v11). *“An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression”* (v22). All of us have conflicts from time to time. When it happens we need to control our tempers rather than rage or laugh. If we fail to control ourselves, we risk fueling the controversy and being labeled as “fools.”

Discipline Your Children - *“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother”* (v15). *“Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul”* (v17). Child discipline imparts wisdom. If parents fail to correct their children, those children will grow up undisciplined and unruly, and will bring shame to their family. Child discipline is God’s way of helping children grow into mature, respectful adults.

Don’t be Hasty in Speech - Wise people think before speaking. Well-chosen words are persuasive and can calm an argument. Poorly-chosen words add fuel to the fire. Verse twenty states, *“Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”* If we want to honor God in our speech we must engage the mind before engaging the mouth.

Learn the Secret of Honor - *“A man’s pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor”* (v23). Everyone likes to receive honor for a job well done. But the way to honor is through humility, not self-aggrandizement. As a person humbly does his job, others will see his good work and honor him accordingly. If this doesn’t happen, the person can take comfort knowing that God sees and one day will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” This should keep us serving with a smile.

Trust God Rather than Fear Man - In today's world, many people worry about what others think of them. They fear doing something that might offend or upset those around them. Rather than fearing man, people need to trust God. If we are more concerned about what others think, than about doing what is right, we will compromise our values. It is better to "do right" and let God take care of the consequences than to "do wrong" and be a man-pleaser. Verses twenty-five and twenty-six affirm, *"The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted. Many seek the ruler's favor, but justice for man comes from the Lord."*

Polar Opposites - Righteous and unrighteous people are polar opposites. They'll never see eye-to-eye or be pleased with each other. Verse twenty-seven states, *"An unjust man is abominable to the righteous, and he who is upright in the way is abominable to the wicked"* It's OK to be disliked by evil people. Don't worry about it. They hate what you stand for. Keep focused on doing what is right.

Reflection

1. According to verse one what is the best way to respond to reproof?
2. How does a person make his father glad? Give examples. (v3)
3. What do verses 9, 11, and 22 teach about controlling ones temper?
4. Explain the "secret of honor". (v23)
5. Explain the phrase "trust God rather than fear man". (vv25,26)

Proverbs 30

“Words of Agur”

Most Proverbs were written by King Solomon, but chapter thirty was written by Agur, the son of Jakeh (v1). Agur wrote to impart wisdom to Ithiel and Ucal, two of his students. By teaching God’s Word, Agur did what all of us should do – share God’s truth with others. Put another way, “Don’t just keep the truth, give it away.”



A Humble View - Agur had a humble view of himself (vv2-3). He knew he lacked wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. Yet he asked five profound questions, *“Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know”*(v4). The obvious answer to each question is “God!” It is God who controls the heavens, the elements (like wind), the oceans, and the entire earth. Compared to God, all of us lack wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. We all, like Agur, should understand our humble estate. Notice, too, Agur asks the name of God’s son. The initial readers of Proverbs did not know his name, but we do! His name is Jesus!

The Double Request - If you could ask God for two things, what would they be? Many people would ask for fame and fortune. Agur asked for truthfulness and dependence, *“Two things I asked of You... Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God”* (vv7-9.) Agur wanted truthfulness to mark his life so he would be a good witness. He also wanted dependence on God. If God blessed Agur with too much wealth, Agur might forget God. If God

allowed him to be poor, he might steal and profane God's name. Agur simply wanted his portion. We, too, need honesty and dependence.

Four Kinds of People - In Proverbs 30:11-14 Agur identifies four kinds of people. First, the **profane** person who curses his father and fails to bless his mother (v11). Next, the **deceived** person who thinks he is pure when he is not (v12). Third, the **prideful** person who oozes arrogance (v13). Fourth, the **predator** who takes advantage of the weak (v14). We must guard against becoming like any of these.

Never Satisfied - Next, Agur reveals four things (vv15-16) which are never satisfied. First, **Sheol** (the grave). No matter how many people die, the ground can receive more. Second, the **barren womb**. Those people who want to have, but can't have children, remain frustrated. Third, the **earth** which is never satisfied with water. No matter how much rain falls, it runs off and makes room for more. Fourth, **fire** - no matter how much material is burned, the flames can consume more. These facts should make us ask, "Are we ever satisfied with what God gives us?" We should be. However, in our sinful state, it is easy to be dissatisfied. If we take time to count our blessings, we will realize how blessed we really are!

Too Wonderful for Me - Agur shares four incredible things he doesn't fully understand (vv18,19). First, the way of an eagle in the sky. Second, the way of a serpent on a rock. Third, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea. And fourth, the way of a man with a woman. In order to understand these, a person must grasp a myriad of scientific and social laws. Even then, certain things remain a mystery.

These Make the Earth Quake - Proverbs 30:21-23 states, "*Under three things the earth quakes, and under four, it cannot bear up. Under a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is satisfied with food, under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.*" Slaves who become kings know nothing about ruling, and can bring calamity to a kingdom. Fools with

full stomachs often turn their energies to foolishness. Unloved women who get a husband let the whole world know about it! Maidservants who supplant their mistresses cause scandal of epic proportions.

Exceedingly Wise - Agur lists four exceedingly wise creatures. **Ants** demonstrate the importance of **planning**; they store their food in summer (v25). **Badgers** show the value of **security**; they build their homes in the rocks (v26). **Locust** illustrate the power of **unity** - they go out in mass (v27). **Lizards** reveal the wisdom of **quality** – they choose to live in king’s palaces (v28). Every creature teaches us something!

Put Your Hand to Your Mouth - Agur also gives strong advice concerning speech and strife (vv32,33), *“If you have been foolish in exalting yourself or if you have plotted evil, put your hand on your mouth. For the churning of milk produces butter, and pressing the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of anger produces strife.”* If we want to avoid strife, we must learn to control our tongues!

Reflection

1. What view of himself does Agur have? (vv2,3) How does verse four apply? What can be learned from this?
2. What was Agur’s double request? (vv7-9). Why is his request a good example to follow?
3. What can be learned from ants, badgers, locust and lizards? (vv25-28)
4. What else has Proverbs 30:1-33 taught you?

Proverbs 31

“An Excellent Wife”

Proverbs chapter thirty-one was written by King Lemuel, but the words he shared were from his wise mother, “*The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him*” (v1).



Wine and Women

King Lemuel’s mom warned him not to give his strength to women. As king, Lemuel must not engage in sexual immorality (v3). Such behavior destroys kings. In addition, he must not get drunk (vv4-5). Drunkenness would make him forget the law, and pervert justice. If anyone needed a drink, it was those who were dying or whose lives were bitter. Alcohol might help them forget their miserable plight (vv6,7). This is not an endorsement of drinking!

By living a clean life, Lemuel could focus on kingly matters: speaking up for the rights of the mute and unfortunate, judging righteously, and defending the afflicted and needy. With high position comes great responsibility.

An Excellent Wife

Every future husband hopes he marries Mrs. Right, and every future wife hopes she marries Mr. Perfect. But what makes an excellent spouse? Important qualities for men and women are sprinkled throughout Scripture. But there is no clearer passage on the qualities of “an excellent wife” than Proverbs chapter thirty-one:

- an excellent wife is hard to find and is worth far more than precious gems – v10
- she gains her husband’s trust, and he knows her great worth – v11
- every day she does him good and not evil – v12

- she works with her hands and has a good attitude – v13
- she shops and keeps her household adequately supplied – v14
- she gets up early and makes meals for her household – v15
- she does “big things” like buy land and cultivate a garden – v16
- she keeps physically fit – v17
- she senses her gain is good, and stays up late when needed – v18
- she works with thread – v19
- she helps the poor and needy – v20
- she is not afraid of changes in weather, and ensures that her family is dressed well – v21
- she dresses well herself – v22
- her hard work supports her husband and allows him to do other important things – v23
- she makes and sell things – v24
- she possesses strength and dignity, and smiles at the future – v25
- her words are wise and kind – v26
- she takes care of her household and is energetic – v27
- she receives praise from her children and husband. They all recognize her excellence and speak openly about it– vv28,29

Proverbs thirty-one ends with a powerful observation, “*Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates*” (vv30,31).

Today, the world places great value on a woman’s beauty and charm, but God places greater value on character. Charm is often deceitful, and outer beauty fades, but a woman’s excellent character grows and shines like the sun. Marriages focused on externals can quickly fall apart. Marriages focused on godly character stand the test of time. In the long run, a woman’s work reveals her true beauty and awesome worth.

Men and women take note!

Reflection

1. What two warnings did King Lemuel's mother give to her son? What was her reasoning?
2. There are many qualities that make an excellent wife. Which ones stand out the most to you? Why? Are any surprising to you?
3. Explain Proverbs 31:30,31 in your own words.
4. What makes a woman valuable in your sight? Does your way of measuring a woman's value measure up to God's way?
5. Based on this chapter, are there any of your attitudes that need to change regarding women?



Final Thoughts on Proverbs

The book of Proverbs gives practical wisdom for everyday life. By learning and applying proverbial truth, you will bring great blessing upon yourself, and avoid much heartache. I hope you will make the study of Proverbs part of your life-routine. “The Proverbial Habit” will help you honor God, and it will be a powerful witness to those around you. Happy living!

Notes

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