

Proverbs

A Study by Dr. David A. DeWitt

Introduction

Proverbs has interesting interpretative challenges. Some proverbs are one verse long, some are longer. Solomon wrote Proverbs to his older son, an older child being defined as someone between puberty and marriage age.

The Structure of the Book

Proverbs is one of the few books of the Bible that is not best studied verse by verse from the beginning to the end—because it was not written that way. The book of Proverbs is a collection of six independent works. It was most likely brought together into its present form, either by the men of King Hezekiah (Proverbs 25:1), who reigned from 729 until 680 B.C., or by Ezra in the 400s B.C. (Nehemiah 8:8). The six works are:

1. The first 9 chapters are **a call to living by wisdom**, written by Solomon (who reigned from 971-931 B.C.). This section is not a collection of proverbs, per se, although several proverbs are used to make and illustrate the point. This is an exhortation by Solomon for his older, but not yet married, son to seek wisdom.
2. The next 13 plus chapters (10:1–22:16) contain 375 of **Solomon's own proverbs**. This is his own collection of his own proverbs. He may not have originated all of the ideas in each one; nonetheless, they are proverbs he himself wrote in the 900s B.C.
3. The next 2 ½ chapters (22:17–24:34) are 36 **“The words (or sayings) of the wise.”** This appears to be Solomon's personal collection of proverbs given by other wise men admired by Solomon. Their date and authorship is uncertain, but they probably were originally written before Solomon's time.
4. The next 5 chapters (25–29) are 126 of **Solomon's proverbs, a collection selected by the men of Hezekiah** made some 200 years after Solomon's death (around the year 700 B.C.). According to 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon *spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005*. This section seems to be a selective collection from those 3000 proverbs.
5. Chapter 30 is a collection of **proverbs written by Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle**. This is the only place he is mentioned, so we have no other information about him.
6. Chapter 31 is **the words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him**. Apparently, these are actually **the words of King Lemuel's mother**. But we do not know anything else about King Lemuel or his mother.

I have divided the proverbs up into 25 sections. These are subjective divisions. You may come up with different sections, but will probably be close to these divisions.

The Purpose of Proverbs

The word “proverb” (משל *masal*) comes from a verb which means *to be like* or *to be compared with*. This word can also be used of a parable (Ezekiel 20:49), or an allegory (Ezekiel 17:2). But the basic idea here is:

Proverbs is a collection of statements that make comparisons

Solomon states the purpose of Proverbs in 1:2-4 as attaining *wisdom, instruction, understanding, prudence, discretion*, and an ability to *discern sayings* (like allegories, parables, and riddles). And all of that seems to be a description of *wisdom*. Put simply: Proverbs is about wisdom.

The word for “wisdom” (חכמה *hokmah*) basically means “skill.” It is the same skill a carpenter would use in building a table, or an artist would use to paint a landscape. Wisdom is a skill for living life with **understanding**. So the purpose of Proverbs was to provide Solomon's son (and other Israelite boys) with the skill for understanding how life works.

The frequent use of the words *my son* or *my sons* suggest that the book was meant to be a tool for parents to use in teaching their children. Specifically, it is for parenting boys between the age of puberty and marriage, since the topics include things like the dangers of adultery and dishonesty in business. Although nearly all the principles can be transferred to girls, it was not written about parenting girls. The specific warnings and instructions are for the older son who is not yet married.

The book is, however, instruction for both parents. Although the father is the principle instructor and responsible for the teaching, there is a significant emphasis on the role of mothers (1:8; 6:20; 23:22-26; 31:1-31). Also, parenting is done by married people. Single parenting is not mentioned or even suggested in the Bible. In my opinion, divorce ends parenting. Parenting depends on how you treat your spouse, the father and/or mother of your child. The child will demand that you treat your spouse well. If single, what you should do is disciple those children—parenting will drive them to rebellion. Even in adoption—you cannot parent someone else’s child. Adoption is a ministry, not parenting. “Parenting” is the ability to create boundaries. “Discipleship” is giving advice, and it depends on winning the right to be heard.

Some suggest Proverbs was also to be used in a school environment. The claim is that teachers addressed their students as their *sons*. Maybe. But there is no biblical evidence that Proverbs was used that way. Basically, it seems Proverbs was meant to be a tool for parents to use while instructing their older children.

Some commentators say the purpose of Proverbs is to apply the Law and the prophets, thus rounding out the Old Testament. In a sense, that’s true. For sure, Proverbs focuses on application. But the Law itself contained exhortations for application, and we must keep in mind that the prophetic books were not written yet. So Proverbs must be compared and contrasted more with the Law than the prophets. It is more of a supplement to the Law than an attempt to round out the Old Testament.

The Law was a corporate document to govern Israel as a nation. Proverbs provided skill for the individual Israelite to move from being naïve to obtaining understanding. Proverbs is not so much about national obedience as it is about personal growth. Since the church is not a nation but a fellowship of individual brothers and sisters in Christ, Proverbs is often easier (than the Mosaic Law) for us to apply today.

Solomon lived in the 900s. In his day, Israel’s moral foundation came from the Law of Moses. Solomon had Genesis through Ruth and probably some writings of Samuel and the book of Job. He did not have the books of Kings or Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, or the prophetic books, since they were written after Solomon’s time. What he did have, besides the historical books and the Law, was the Psalms of his father David.

What David added to the Law was a passion for God. The Psalms of David looked **up** at God from our life situation with a desire for knowing God. What Solomon created in Proverbs, is a collection of sayings, which started with a fear of God and looked **down** to our life on earth. Where David often begins with his earthly situation and ends his Psalms looking up toward God, Solomon starts with the fear of God and ends his proverbs looking down at our life on earth.

The writing of proverbs is not unique to Solomon. Many ancient cultures, such as the Babylonians and the Egyptians, wrote proverbs. But the proverbs of Solomon contain a significant element not found in other ancient proverbs. All proverbs contain practical life strategies, mental acumen, and functional skill. But Solomon’s proverbs teach these things in the context of morally upright living. The wisdom in Solomon’s parables differs from the world’s wisdom in that it begins with the fear of God. (See 1:7 and 9:10. Proverbs emphasizes *the fear of God* 16 times.)

There is one other thing that should be noted for understanding the purpose of Proverbs. Solomon wrote about our free will decisions and their consequences. He did not write Proverbs to discuss the predestination of God. Solomon understood that both predestination and free will are 100% true and one should not be used to eliminate the other (8:27-31). Somehow it is true that every event is 100% predetermined by God, otherwise He would not be a sovereign God. Sovereignty demands predestination or there could be accidents over which God has no control, and that’s impossible (Romans 8:28–9:29; Ephesians 1:3-9). But even though we do not understand how it works out, the 100% sovereignty of God does not in any way limit the real 100% free will of man (Deuteronomy 30:19; John 1:12). Of course, we are limited by our capacities (we can’t fly or walk on water). But within our capacities, we have complete, real, unhindered free will. And it is that free will, not God’s sovereignty, which governs the purpose of Proverbs.

Interpreting Proverbs

1. Proverbs is poetic literature, so it must be **interpreted** as poetic literature. But that does not mean Proverbs is not literal. Proverbs is to be interpreted literally—like everything else. It is not historical narrative—like, for example, Genesis or Acts, but it often tells us something like a story. It is not prose like the Mosaic Law or the epistles of Paul, but it does tell us objective truth presented in logical statements. Proverbs are not parables or allegories, but they often present truth using metaphors and similes, whose words, of course, have to be understood from the context, not the dictionary.
2. Also, proverbs are generally true statements about life. They are not meant to be exclusive statements, which are always true without exception. For example, the first proverb of the second section reads: *A wise son makes a father*

glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother (10:1). Well, that might not be true if you have a stupid or immoral father or mother. But in general, usually, most of the time, you can count on the fact that *A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother*.

3. Proverbs must be interpreted as instruction for this life. Proverbs are not about the afterlife. There is nothing in Proverbs which deals with going to heaven or hell, getting saved, or obtaining eternal life. It is proverbially true that *whatever a man sows, this will he also reap* (Galatians 6:7). But, in Proverbs, the reaping is stated in terms of this life's experiences. We can become very confused if we attempt to bring heavenly objectives into Proverbs.
4. There is no John 3:16 in Proverbs. Actually, there is no offer of the grace of God at all. Actions have consequences, which are seen as an inevitable part of the life process. The idea of the grace (unmerited favor) of God, allowing one to repent and be released from the consequences of his action, is not in Proverbs.
5. But this only introduces a more basic interpretive issue. Proverbs was written during the age of the Law not the age of Grace. Therefore, there are times when the advice of the proverb, although true, must be set aside for the greater propose of the Gospel. **The eternal trumps the temporal.** The ministry of the Gospel, given by Jesus Christ, continued by the apostles, and recorded in the New Testament, as a directive for us in this age, focuses on heaven not on earth. For Solomon, the priority was life on earth. For Christ and the apostles, the priority was life in heaven, which of necessity involves deemphasizing life on earth.

For example, we read: *Ill-gotten gains do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death* (Proverbs 10:2). Solomon means that wealth obtained illegitimately will not, in the long run, lead to profit on earth, but a righteous (God-fearing) life will deliver one from an early untimely death. That was only true, however, only for the Israelites, living in the land of Israel, keeping the Law. Moses wrote: *So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time* (Deuteronomy 4:40). The promise was only for Israel, living *on the land*. It is not always true that all righteous people profit. Many of the laws and customs imposed upon Christians, living in various countries all over the world, work against physical earthly profit for those who live honest righteous lives.

Now look at the second half of the proverb: *righteousness delivers from death*. That certainly was not true of Jesus. Righteousness is what caused His death. The same is true for the apostles and many Christian martyrs all through history. Jesus said: *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh* (Matthew 5:3-12). That is certainly not the perspective of Solomon in Proverbs. But that's because Solomon was talking about life on this earth, for Israelites, living in the land of Israel. Jesus was talking about an eternal kingdom of God realized in heaven. So before we apply Proverbs to our church/grace age, we must first interpret it in light of the age in which it is written. Then we can apply it to those aspects of our life which have to do with this world, before heaven, being careful not to claim promises given only to Israelites living *in the land*.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Which of these is the best advice for a father to give his 18-year-old son who is about to leave for college?

- A. "Remember, son, heavenly rewards are better than earthly rewards."
- B. "Remember, son, heaven is important, but right now you need to prepare for wise living here on earth."
- C. "Remember, son, you are already saved, so now you must learn to live successfully in this world."

A is the best answer. Heavenly rewards should always be pursued over earthly rewards. College will only challenge that idea and only teach earthly rewards. Earthly wisdom should always be trumped by a heavenly perspective. B and C are essentially the same. Both are incorrect because they assume a heavenly perspective can be put aside while the son is pursuing an earthly education. Even the wisdom of Proverbs must be set aside when it conflicts with a heavenly perspective.

The Wisdom of Proverbs

Wisdom is a skill for living life with an understanding of how things usually are

There are no miracles in Proverbs. Wisdom is having a firm grasp of the obvious. It's a skill for recognizing life's regular things. For this reason, there are no miracles in the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is the way things usually are most of the time. The wise man knows what to expect. He has understanding because he thinks in terms of the regular things of life. Miracles are, by definition, not regular things. Therefore, they are not based on wisdom because wisdom is a skill for understanding life according to its regular things. So there is no place for miracles, mysticism, supernatural phenomena, magic, or wonders in Proverbs. The wisdom of God vs. the wisdom of the world is not about a belief in miracles. It's about starting with the fear of God.

There is no personal revelation from God in Proverbs. God's will is not sought by looking for signs, special circumstances, miraculous answers to prayer, or an individual divine leading. It is a book that focuses on (1) the revelation of God to be discovered in the Mosaic Law and (2) the way God has set up things to work naturally (much the same as Paul describes in Romans 1 and 2). Solomon assumes the truth of the Scripture already written, but he does not exhort his readers to look for their own personal word from God.

There is no place in Proverbs for being lucky. For example, playing the lottery would be something Solomon would consider foolish. Not primarily because it is a waste of money but because it destroys wisdom. Wisdom is thinking about life's regular events. Winning the lottery is an unusual event. So when someone buys lottery tickets, they think there is a chance they will win. Therefore, they live in an unreal fantasy world. That kind of thinking prevents wisdom. The same would be true of a boy in the ghetto thinking he will get rich playing professional sports, or an artistic person thinking they will be the next Rembrandt. You might say: "But that's the way to dream. That's the advantage of living in a free enterprise system. Maybe I **will** play professional sports or be a recognized artist." Maybe, but "maybe" is not wisdom. Wisdom is what is usually going to happen most of the time.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your teenage son is an excellent football player. He wants to pursue professional football as a career. What should you tell him?

- A. "If that's your dream, go for it."
- B. "Think of it as a hobby, not a career, because it is too dangerous."
- C. "It's reasonable to think you can play in college but not professionally."

C is correct because it focuses on what usually happens to most good athletes most of the time. They can probably get some scholarship money at some college, but playing professionally is very unlikely. Therefore, it is not wise to be thinking about football as a profession. Such thinking will keep your focus off of realistic career possibilities. A is incorrect because following your dreams can be an unwise waste of time and energy when your dreams are not something which is likely to happen most of the time. B can be good advice, but it is not as good as C because wise decisions are based on what is likely to happen, not how dangerous it is.

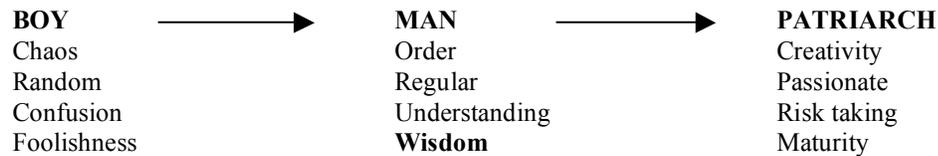
Proverbs Is about a Boy Becoming a Man

A boy is **foolish**, a man develops **wisdom**, and a patriarch develops **maturity**. The pathway from a boy to a man (chaos to order) results in wisdom. But if we look at patriarchs like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, Daniel, the prophets, and apostles, we see men who are more than just "not boys." They have moved into maturity by going beyond getting their chaos in order. They are pursuing the heart of God. They are not just keeping the laws of God, or living a wise life, they are in love with God Himself. But Proverbs is about becoming a man, not becoming a patriarch. Proverbs is about wisdom, not maturity. (Solomon talks about maturity more in Ecclesiastes than in Proverbs.) Understand, you cannot have maturity without having wisdom first. Wisdom is the foundation of maturity. But the path to wisdom is different than the path to maturity.

For example, Proverbs 19:20 says: *Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days.* But what board of directors told Noah to build an ark? Who counseled Abraham to leave Mesopotamia to become a wanderer in Canaan? What accountability group advised Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt? Who counseled Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem, Jesus to die on the cross, and the apostles to leave everything and follow Him? Proverbs 19:29 tells an older son to listen to counsel. Obviously, Solomon is talking about wise counsel, but wise counsel can only

advise you according to what is usually true most of the time. It cannot account for divine revelation, the pursuit of excellence, taking risks, or creative passion. Those things are about maturity. But first a boy must become a man. Maturity is always built upon order. And that takes wisdom. And that's Proverbs.

Patriarchs are risk takers, but their risks are based on a foundation of wisdom. Boys cannot afford to take risks because they are in chaos. For example, the lottery is a risk, but it's based on randomness not regularity. It's the risk of a boy not wanting to become a man. A patriarch's risk is based on the understanding of regular orderly wisdom. We might graph it like this.



Wisdom is about bringing our chaos to order, our randomness to regularity, our confusion to understanding. That's Proverbs. Proverbs is not about maturity per se. Wisdom is the foundation of maturity. Maturity must be built upon wisdom. There is no maturity without wisdom. But the two are not the same. Maturity requires creativity. Wisdom requires regularity. Wisdom is moving from chaos to order, from random, disorder, and confusion, to living in light of the way things usually are most of the time. Solomon's focus is putting the fear of God into the life of his son, or any son, so he will avoid the chaos of things like: being a sluggard, acting naïve, gaining dishonestly, or following a adulterous woman. That's Proverbs.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

- A 15-year-old daughter is hanging around people who party with drugs and alcohol. Her parents should:
- A. Forbid her to hang around with those people because they can only influence her in the wrong direction.
 - B. Tell her to hate the sin but love the sinners. She can be friends with them but not do alcohol or drugs.
 - C. Teach her to look at the character, morality, and beliefs of those kids. Is that the influence she really wants?

C is correct. The right approach is for the parents to help their daughter develop her own discernment. She needs to develop a wisdom which can judge between good and evil. The fact that she is hanging around kids who do drugs and alcohol shows that she is naïve and lacks discernment. A is incorrect because it only exercises the parents' discernment; it does nothing to develop discernment in the daughter. This would only be a good course of action when the parents have completely given up on the daughter becoming a wise woman. B is incorrect because the sin cannot be separated from the sinner. This phrase has put more sin in the church than anything in recent history. It falsely thinks it is being loving while neglecting truth and discernment. To send out a daughter with these instructions would be disastrous.

Proverbs Is about the Development of Character

Proverbs is a very practical book. It is more about life on the street than it is about religion or theology. In Proverbs, we do not find ourselves in church (or in synagogues or the Temple, for that matter). Proverbs focuses on our home, our business, our private time, those we meet on the street, on the farm, and in the marketplace. Proverbs focuses on:

- Character NOT Charisma
- Virtues NOT Values
- A Fear of God (our relating to God) NOT a Relationship with God (His relating to us)
- The Secular NOT the Sacred
- Practice NOT Theology
- Business NOT Ministry
- The Home NOT the Temple

Personality is not a focus in Proverbs (as it all too often is in selecting our spiritual and secular leaders today). Proverbs is interested in our character not the charisma of our personality. The focus is on virtues, not values. It's about what virtues are pleasing to God, not our own personal values. Proverbs is also not a book that tells us to, or how to, have a relationship with God. The focus is on the fear of God, not friendship with God. And, although Solomon assumes the theology of the Old Testament, his proverbs do not develop or expand on that. In Proverbs, good theology is an assumption, which is applied in character development. Ministry, as defined in the New Testament, is service to others

with eternal values in mind. But Proverbs does not have an eternal focus. It is about serving others, but only in a sense of daily life in business, at home, on the street, or in the marketplace.

Proverbs Looks at Life Realistically

In Proverbs, ignorance is not bliss, and being naïve is a vice not a virtue. While simplicity is not necessarily a sin, it can easily lead to it. We are to be knowledgeable, not gullible. Solomon does not want us to look at the world through rose-colored glasses. We are to see people for what they are and sin for what it is.

Proverbs describes life as it is, not necessarily as it should be. While it is wrong to pervert justice with a bribe (17:23; 29:2), in the world it is often a bribe that gets things done (17:8). Riches do not provide true security (11:4, 28), but *a rich man's wealth is his strong city* (18:11). Money gains friends (19:4, 6), but only for as long as it lasts (19:7). We can obtain wisdom only when we see life as it really is. Proverbs is a book of reality.

Proverbs as Literature

Proverbs is poetry. Poetic literature cultivates our imagination. But the imagination of Proverbs is not a liberal secular imagination, which tempts us to come up with our own interpretation (2 Peter 1:20-21). Biblical poetry is an interpretative challenge that involves us in the process of understanding. The antithesis would be something like television, which does all our work for us. Television gives us sound, pictures, narrative, and usually provides music for effect, so we don't have to be creative about what emotions to use. It puts our minds at rest. It is entertainment that does not require thought. Proverbs is quite the opposite. It is poetic literature which requires our imagination. We have to imagine an ant gathering her food in the summer (6:6-8), a sluggard turning in his bed as a door turns on its hinges, and one so lazy he can't even bring his hand from his dish to his mouth (26:14-15). We have to feel *vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes* (10:26), and imagine what a *false balance* looks like (11:1).

Proverbs is poetry which uses PARALLELISM. Here are the parallels used:

- ANTITHETICAL PARALLELISM. This is where the second line is a contrast with the first. It often begins with the word *but*.
Proverbs 10:27 *The fear of the LORD prolongs life,
But the years of the wicked will be shortened.*
- SYNONOMOUS PARALLELISM. The second line restates the idea of the first line in a different way. Here the purpose of the second line is to continue the thought of the first line.
Proverbs 22:17 *Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,
And apply your mind to my knowledge*
- SYNTHETIC PARALLELISM. The second line expands upon what has been stated in the first line. Here the thought of the first line is taken further and developed.
Proverbs 21:13 *He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor
Will also cry himself and not be answered.*
- NUMERICAL PARALLELISM. This parallelism uses numbers to structure the meaning.
Proverbs 30:21-23 *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.*

Did Solomon's Wisdom Fail Him in the End?

The last word on Solomon is that of tragic moral failure. We read:

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth

the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded (1 Kings 11:1-10).

In order to understand why Solomon failed, we need to ask: “What exactly was his failure?” Solomon did not fail because of wisdom. He failed because of women. He did not fail because he was unloving to those women. He failed because he *held fast to these in love*. And he did not fail because of adultery. He failed because of idolatry. The women who he followed to his destruction were his wives. **There is nothing in Solomon’s failure that came from his wisdom.** He failed because he did not follow his own wisdom. Just because we know the right thing to do does not mean we will always do the right thing.

For most of his life, Solomon followed his own wisdom. And it gave him the success the book of Proverbs claims it would. Solomon had a brilliant reign. He had the largest, most prosperous, most successful, most peaceful reign of any king of Israel. His construction in the land (including the chariot cities, the expansion of Jerusalem and the Temple) was without precedent, and his protection of his people with his military might was without parallel. And he was able to maintain it while avoiding war with all the nations of the world around him. It might be said that Solomon was more successful than any king ever (1 Kings 10:11-29).

His personal wisdom was also without precedent. We read: *So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart (1 Kings 10:23-24).*

So it is simply not true that Solomon’s wisdom failed. **Solomon failed because he was unable to distinguish between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God.**

In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote: *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1:19-21). ... Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away (2:6) ... , “The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless (3:20).*

Here’s the problem: **As he got older, he forgot the fear of God.**

Solomon obtained peace by marrying all those foreign wives. Nearly all of Solomon’s potential enemies had daughters or granddaughters married to Solomon. That meant they soon also had grandchildren running around Jerusalem. They saw themselves as having a piece of the action. Why would they attack Solomon when they were a part of his success? It was brilliant, sheer genius—except for one thing. Those wives also wanted their gods in Jerusalem. In order to maintain the strategy, Solomon had to bring their idols into Jerusalem.

It was idolatry that destroyed Solomon. Instead of going from wisdom to the maturity of seeking God, as his father David had done, he used his wisdom without the fear of God. When he did that, it became a worldly wisdom, which resulted in his ignoring the direct commands of God against idolatry. Solomon’s wisdom didn’t fail. Quite the contrary. He failed to follow his wisdom. He was so focused on his wisdom from God (2 Chronicles 1:1-11), he forgot the God of his wisdom.

Warning—Here is the warning in applying the book of Proverbs: The wisdom of Proverbs will help us live well, but living well is not all there is to do, nor is it the most important thing to do. Living in proverbial wisdom is a foundation. It is the way we are to grow up, avoid life’s chaotic pitfalls, and become men and women. But it is not sufficient. It will not get you to God. It will not by itself secure a relationship with God, establish a love for God, or give you an eternal future with God. And if you become wise and forget God, you may end up apart from God, forgetting the heart of God, and feeling justified in your disobedience because you are wise.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

An 18-year-old boy, who has enlisted in the military and is being sent off to war, should fear God because:

- A. Then he will not have to fear the enemy.
- B. Then he will be able to live a morally better life.
- C. Then he will make wiser decisions in combat situations.

B is correct. The fear of God will help him make better moral decisions. When a boy leaves home for the military, he is usually entering a morally decadent culture. The military prepares a boy for combat, and teaches him discipline, respect for his officers, and the technical training necessary for doing a specific task. But the military is not a good place to learn moral values. The fear of his superiors and the fear of his enemies will not develop his morality. Only a fear of God will do that. When he fears God, he develops a wisdom which will set him apart from his colleagues who are only fearing people. **A and C** are incorrect here because we are asked to *choose one best answer*. The fear of God may indeed be helpful in combat situations where he is afraid of his enemies. But the military will also train him for combat. The military will not train him for the most important part of his enlistment—living for the glory of God.

Applying the Book of Proverbs

Primarily this study is about interpretation, but I will make some applications as we go. Most applications come from Solomon's purpose to instruct his son. In a major sense: **Proverbs is about parenting older children**. Clearly, this is not advice Solomon is giving young children. As mentioned above, Solomon's comments about things like work, truth telling, and avoiding adultery are clearly not written to younger children. There are many other emphases in Proverbs but older children seems to be the focus.

Proverbs will help you live well. But living well is not all there is to do.

A Call to Wisdom—Proverbs Chapters 1–9

As outlined above, there are six major sections in Proverbs. This first section, and the last two small (one-chapter) sections, will be dealt with pretty much verse-by-verse as they were written. The exception is the verses of chapters 6–9 that deal with illicit sex. I have grouped them together. The collections of individual proverbs in chapters 10–29 will be dealt with topically. [Throughout this study, I shall quote Proverbs as translated by the NASV Bible. The capital letter, after the comma or space between phrases, is because the NASV begins a new line with each statement to indicate the parallelism. I shall also use “he” instead of “he or she” for convenience.]

1:1 *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*

This is a general call to pursue wisdom written by Solomon, king of Israel, from 971-931 B.C.

1:2 *To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding,*

1:3 *To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity;*

1:4 *To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,*

Verses 2-4 are Solomon's stated purpose for writing. *Wisdom* is discussed above under the subtitle “The Wisdom of Proverbs.” The word (מוֹסָר, *mosar*) for *instruction* can also mean *discipline* or *correction*. The word (שָׂכָל, *shacal*) for *wise behavior* in verse 3 is a different word than the basic word for *wisdom* in verse 2. The *wise behavior* of verse 3 is the word for *prudent, to comprehend, or to have insight*. The parallel of *Righteousness, justice and equity* is what makes Solomon's call to wisdom unique in his day. The proverbs of other nations did not include the context of righteousness.

Verse 4 is one of Solomon's biggest concerns. The word (פֶּתִי, *peti*) for *naive* basically means *simple*, or even *open minded*. Solomon sees the path of *knowledge and discretion* as one which shapes and focuses the mind. It makes the student more complex. As he learns, he becomes more discerning, less gullible, more critical and judgmental, not just more knowledgeable. So the philosophy of education presented in Proverbs is contrary to the whole idea of western liberal education.

Proverbs is not a liberal education. Although there are many parallels, I am not using the word “liberal” here in the sense of left-wing politics. A “liberal education” (for example, at a “liberal university”) means the opening of the minds of students to new ideas, new opinions, and new behavior, while questioning traditional answers. The idea is to broaden the student's general knowledge, rather than shaping their knowledge to a predetermined set of skills and values, as in

technical or professional training. Of course, today the philosophy of liberal education has penetrated all the way through the public school system so that it affects learning at all levels.

The application is to realize that, when your children attend the public schools in the western world, they are being taught with a philosophy of education Solomon would not have approved of. He would say our liberal education just keeps people naïve while giving them more information. It gives them facts they don't have the discernment to live with in a righteous way. The information is not taught in the context of any moral, theological, or ethical foundation. Therefore, the student is not equipped to determine the value of what he is learning, or even discern whether or not it is true. It is the wisdom of the world without the fear of God.

So today's student grows up to be intelligent but naïve. He can be a teacher, plumber, contractor, doctor, lawyer, or engineer, but he has no moral framework from which to love his wife, raise his children, treat his clients, determine religious truth, or avoid the adulterous woman. For example, our medical procedures and computer technology allow us to do more. But the knowledge to do those things does not carry with it the morality to know if they are good things to do. Actually, "thinking outside the box" technologically carries with it the same kind of thinking morally. Our western education attempts to bring people to maturity without wisdom. It defines leadership without morality. It attempts to pursue excellence without order. The result is what we see—a highly technical society living in moral chaos.

There's nothing wrong with technology if it's framed in the context of morality. But technology itself is not morality. It's merely what the people of the builders of the Tower of Babel did—they were creative without morality. Technology is amoral. But most people creating it are using it immorally. So it often seems to be immoral. For example, internet technology is not immoral, but it makes it easier to watch pornography.

In America, liberals and conservatives accuse each other of having a specific philosophy that they are promoting in their institutions (schools, media, magazines, newspapers, etc.). The interesting difference is that the conservatives admit that, but the liberals won't admit that. For example, if you go to a conservative college, they will label themselves as teaching a particular point of view, usually concerning religious or socio-political issues such as abortion, birth control, homosexuality, etc. If you go to a liberal college or university, they will never claim to teach a particular position but only to have an open exchange of ideas. The same is true in the media: TV, movies, advertisements, etc. Conservatives have a predetermined set of values they are teaching, whether they are Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, or Hindus, whether they are capitalists or communists, believe in democracies or dictatorships, etc. Conservatives understand that, admit that, and make a case for it. For example, George Bush believes that a free democracy is the best form of government, so they should have one in Iraq, i.e., he believes that people everywhere would do better under a free democracy. Liberals never admit they have a position beyond the open exchange of ideas. Conservatives usually believe in small government, lower taxes, and less government spending. Liberals do not usually say they are for higher taxes and more government. They just say they are in favor of what is best for the majority of people, an open exchange of ideas in religion, politics, morals, etc. So one might suggest that if liberals are open to new ideas, they should also be open to conservative ideas. But that is not possible, except superficially.

So how is it that liberals seem to have an agenda? They seem to be consistently in favor of larger government, higher taxes, socialism, homosexuality, abortion, and anything that is critical of the Bible or biblical Christianity. They even seem to favor Islam over biblical Christianity and Orthodox Judaism.

I suggest that a philosophy that believes in an open exchange of ideas will lead to a better life must of necessity believe at least three things, which are undeclared absolutes of the liberal mind:

1. Man is basically good, i.e., he is not a sinner. Liberalism cannot believe in sin. They must define it as sickness, or ignorance, or socially unacceptable behavior, etc., all of which are curable by education or rehabilitation or medication or therapy. But they never accept the notion of moral evil. Very smart liberals make very stupid decisions is because they do not believe in sin.
2. The liberal open exchange of ideas will only lead to a better life if one accepts the basic premise of evolution. Liberals define themselves as progressives. The idea of progress is that man is evolving. The evidence for this is always technological. Technology is bringing about progress in education, etc. Virtually, everyone is better off than 100 years ago, 10 years ago, or last year—we are evolving. But are we better off morally? If you are a liberal, you have to say that you are. An open exchange of ideas, thinking outside the box, has led to an acceptance of divorce, abortion, homosexuality, all religious views, and all views on sexual matters, as long as it doesn't hurt others.
3. An open exchange of ideas depends on the idea that truth is not absolute but is relative. Absolute objective truth is in a box. For example, Brian McLaren, leader of the Emmergent Church Movement, says the words

“absolute” and “relative” should not be used with the word “truth.” He describes his movement as not an organization but a discussion. That’s liberalism.

1:5 A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,

1:6 To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles.

Solomon would say our public education system does not cause an *increase in learning*, it just broadens a student’s knowledge and technical abilities. For Solomon, a broader education would not be a higher education. He would say a higher education could only be based on a platform of godly wisdom, and only through wisdom could learning increase. Otherwise, we are just learning things which might or might not be true, and with no discernment to know the difference.

For example, a friend of mine recently came back from a weekend with a man I believe to be a false teacher. He said: “I learned a lot from that guy.” I said: “I’m sure you did, but most of it wasn’t true.” Just because we are learning does not mean our knowledge of the truth is increasing. We could learn volumes about Buddhism or Hinduism, but most of it would not be true. An *increase in learning* is only possible in the context of having the wisdom to discern truth from nonsense.

Verse 6 brings up a very interesting question connected to wisdom. It’s also mentioned in verse 2. The question is: “Why does Solomon want us to be able to *discern ... sayings and understand ... riddles?*” Why not just say it plainly? Why should we have to figure out a *figure*?

The answer, it seems, is because riddles, figures, parables, proverbs, and other poetic expressions force us to **understand**, not just memorize and imitate. When I figure out someone’s riddle, I learn how he thinks. Riddles help us bridge the gap from knowledge to wisdom, in that they teach us how to trace the author’s thoughts.

Understanding poetic expression requires ingenuity, which in turn requires imagination, which is creative imagemaking. But it is not the creative thinking we might do while observing abstract art, which has no message of its own but asks us to conjure up our own conclusions. Biblical poetry requires a creativity that takes us from the rut of our own thought patterns to those of the author of the poetic expression. The understanding of biblical poetry requires the use of our imagination in a certain way (the author’s way), not in any way.

For example, the parables of Jesus were often given in such a way that, in order for the Pharisees to understand them, they would have to abandon their legalistic rabbinical way of thinking. They had to change not just their conclusions (for example, about the specifics of Sabbath keeping), but they had to think about their whole relationship with God in a different way. In order to understand Christ’s parables about “the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-32) and “the Prodigal Son” (Luke 15:11-32), the Pharisees had to change their concept of what it meant to be a good neighbor.

1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

As mentioned earlier, if there is one thing that separates the biblical proverbs from all others in the ancient world, it is the idea that everything we do should begin with the fear of God. The word (יִרָאָה *yirah*) is the very common word for *fear*. It includes the idea of reverence and awe, but its basic idea is that of being in terror, afraid of someone or something.

This word *fear* occurs 14 times in Proverbs. It is given as the foundation of:

- Knowledge (1:7, 29; 2:5)
- Morality (8:13; 16:6; 19:23; 23:17)
- Wisdom (9:10; 15:33)
- Long life (10:27; 14:27)
- Confidence (14:26)
- Avoiding trouble (15:16, 22)

In other words, what we think of when we think about God will determine the foundation of our knowledge, morality, wisdom, physical life, confidence, and what we consider trouble. If we just think of God as a friend who we have a reverence, awe, and respect for, but not someone we are afraid of, then we will never obtain the wisdom being taught in Proverbs. Since things like “awe” and “respect” are on our terms, then so will our “wisdom” be on our terms. Fear is not on our terms but the one feared. Only being afraid of God can bring about the wisdom of God.

1:8 Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, And do not forsake your mother’s teaching;

1:9 Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head, And ornaments about your neck.

Verses 8 and 9 tell us that Proverbs was meant to be a tool for parents not for teachers (such as rabbis or school teachers) in formal or classroom teaching. The wise man remembers the instruction of his mother and his father.

1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.

1:11 If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause;

1:12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit;

1:13 We will find all kinds of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil;

1:14 Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse,"

1:15 My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path,

1:16 For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood.

1:17 Indeed, it is useless to spread the baited net In the sight of any bird;

1:18 But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives.

1:19 So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors.

The basic theme of this section is a warning for a son to avoid the kind of peer group pressure that would involve him in sinful activity. The warning in verses 13-15 would include: avoid the places where they hang out, don't be part of their conversations (don't listen to them and talk like they do), and don't participate in their activities.

These particular sinners are thieves and murderers who victimize a person for financial gain. Their appeal is probably more subtle than the invitation of verse 11. I suspect Solomon means, "This may not be what they are actually saying, but this is what it amounts to."

Verse 17 is easy to understand but difficult to plug into this context. Taken with verses 18 and 19, it seems to mean even a bird would not jump into a net spread before him, and one who follows these sinners is dumber than a bird because they are jumping into their own net. The point is: if you plan to gain at someone else's expense, you will ultimately suffer the fate you had in mind for them. Gains made by violence take away the life of those who possess those gains.

1:20 Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square;

1:21 At the head of the noisy streets she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings:

We have a saying: "It's important to be **street smart**." Solomon would agree, but I think he would define it this way: "A part of wisdom is to observe what usually happens most of the time in the market place, the business world, and the inner dealings of city life, from the perspective of the fear of God." Business will ultimately take you to the city. Even if you are a hunter, farmer or fisherman, you will ultimately have to sell your goods in the city. So wisdom understands what usually happens there.

1:22 "How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, And fools hate knowledge?"

1:23 "Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

1:24 "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;

1:25 And you neglected all my counsel, And did not want my reproof;

1:26 I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes,

1:27 When your dread comes like a storm, And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you.

1:28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me,

1:29 Because they hated knowledge, And did not choose the fear of the LORD.

1:30 "They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof.

1:31 "So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, And be satiated with their own devices.

1:32 "For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them.

1:33 "But he who listens to me shall live securely, And will be at ease from the dread of evil."

The basic idea here is that wisdom must be sought. It must be pursued. Seek it and you shall find it. It will come to anyone who desires it, but it will not force itself on anyone. Those who desire it will be those who like knowledge (verse 22), reproof (verse 23) and the fear of God (verse 29). Fools hate those things.

But verses 24-31 tell us that we cannot wait until disaster strikes and then look for wisdom. It is not available in the midst of calamity (verse 26) when it has not been sought before. Knowledge, reproof, and the fear of God need to be developed over time so that when calamity comes they are available to deal with it.

The typical scenario of a fool is that he lives without pursuing knowledge; he refuses reproof and ignores the fear of God. Then he gets in trouble and has no wisdom to help him deal with it. So he then tries to find it. He goes to a counselor. He hires a lawyer. He goes to a Bible study. He starts asking his friends for help. He joins some program like Alcoholics Anonymous. But he has a hard time following their advice because he has developed habit patterns and thought patterns without knowledge, reproof, or the fear of God. Wisdom is unavailable. *So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way.*

2:1 *My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you,*
2:2 *Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;*
2:3 *For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding;*
2:4 *If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures;*
2:5 *Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God.*
2:6 *For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*
2:7 *He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,*
2:8 *Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones.*
2:9 *Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course.*
2:10 *For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;*

In this section, Solomon tells his son **how** to seek wisdom so when calamity comes, the wisdom will be available to deal with the calamity. The **how** is to *discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom* (verses 5-6). This, once again, is what makes Solomon's proverbs different from the others of the ancient world or our post-modern world. Solomon believes that wisdom originates in God and is defined by God, so it can only be obtained by pursuing the fear of God. The lesson is: don't just make up your own rules for your children or enforce those of the traditions you grew up with. If they aren't God's wisdom, they aren't valuable.

Should we accept the religion we grew up with? Here is a personal thought for application. It is my opinion that everyone should reject the religion they grew up with. You may come back to it, but make sure you know it is for good reasons. If we live by what we grew up with, we are being no more discerning than the Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu who does that. No religion, no culture, no parents are right about everything. As a young child you should follow them, unless you realize they are clearly unbiblical. But as you become an older child, say 18-25 years old, then you should reject your upbringing until you can verify it biblically. If you then look at all the nonsense being taught in the world, atheism, pantheism, agnosticism, skepticism, conservatism, liberalism, etc., you will come back to the Bible and see it as a solid foundation and that it describes a God worthy of your fear. Then you can evaluate the religion you grew up with.

2:11 *Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you,*
2:12 *To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things;*
2:13 *From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness;*
2:14 *Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil;*
2:15 *Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways;*

Here Solomon lists specific examples of evil men and what they delight in doing. *Discretion*, he says, will keep you from them. A good application would be the slogan: "We are to hate the sin but love the sinner." That usually translates into "Tolerate sin and include sinners in the fellowship." Solomon says that's a good way to be influenced by those *Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways* (verse 15).

2:16 *To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words;*
2:17 *That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God;*
2:18 *For her house sinks down to death And her tracks lead to the dead;*
2:19 *None who go to her return again, Nor do they reach the paths of life.*

Proverbs is filled with warnings against the adulteress woman. We shall consider this subject in detail when we discuss chapters 6-9. Here the description is pretty vivid. The woman willing to commit adultery is willing to violate her covenant with her husband and with God. And if you follow her into adultery there is no recovery. You are forever changed. *The paths of life* are no longer available to you. For example, you can never again be a one-woman man, you can never offer your wife or your children the example of celibacy before marriage (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

2:20 *So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous.*
2:21 *For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it;*
2:22 *But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.*

Verse 20 gives us one way to avoid the paths of the evil men. That path is to walk with good men. Avoid evil people like the plague and find good ones to hang around with.

Verses 21-22 are one of those promises only true of Israelites living in the land of Israel under the theocracy that God prescribed with the Mosaic Law. We do not observe in the countries of the world today *the wicked ... cut off from the land*. Of course, they will be after the Second Coming of Christ, but before then, they will increase until they become Revelation chapter 18.

3:1 My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments;
3:2 For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.

In chapter 3, verses 1 and 2 we have *years of life And peace* given as a result of keeping Solomon's commands. That is generally true of wisdom, when applied to earthly life. Just remember, earthly long life and earthly peace do not necessarily accompany heavenly values. Jesus told His disciples that they would be persecuted if they kept His commandments (John 15:18; 17:14).

God does promise a peace that passes understanding (John 14:27; Philippians 4:6-7), but that's a psychological peace, whereas Solomon is here talking about a physical and sociological peace. The days of Christ and the apostles were shortened, and they had less earthly peace because of their obedience. So verses one and two are only true in a physical earthly context which is sympathetic to the commandments of God—as the Old Testament theocracy of Israel was meant to be.

3:3 Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.
3:4 So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that kindness and truth generally lead to favor and a good reputation. These are the two foundational words for all our dealing with others. *hesed* and *emet*. The Hebrew word *hesed* is like the Greek word *agape*, but with more of an emphasis on loyalty. Literally *loyal love*. *Emet* is the common word for *truth*. We shall speak more of these words later, but notice here that they go together as a foundation for all relationships. Don't focus on one without the other. This gives *favor and good repute In the sight of God*. But it will only give favor in the sight of man in an earthly kingdom sympathetic to the truth of the Word of God. If you proclaim the eternal truth of the Gospel and the righteousness of the Kingdom of God in the societies of our world today, you will not generally find favor with men.

***Situation Question:* WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.**

Your daughter goes to a church which promotes the slogan "Love wins" to justify accepting divorce, remarriage, woman elders, and homosexuality. She tells you this is a good church because "they love everybody." What should you tell her?

- A. If they love Jesus, preach the Gospel, and respect the Bible, we are glad you are going.
- B. There is no perfect church, so when you go, make sure you understand where they differ from biblical teaching.
- C. Stop going to that church. If love is defined as tolerating sinners with no respect for the truth, this is not biblical love.

C is correct. Biblically, love is never defined outside the context of truth. The problem with this church is not just that they are emphasizing love over truth but that they do not have a biblical love. Love is to do the best good for the object of the love. It is not doing anyone any good to simply tolerate their sin. They would be like a hospital claiming to love people by tolerating their sickness. A and B are incorrect because the daughter said she thought this was a good church, and agreed with the church's concept of love without truth. Their response might be considered for a mature Christian looking for a ministry, but even then he has to be getting his fellowship somewhere else. It is very dangerous to be part of such a church for any reason because, as an old professor of mine once said, "You can't walk through a coal mine without getting dirty."

3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.
3:6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.
3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.
3:8 It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones

Verses 5 and 6 make the point that we should trust God, not our own understanding, as a basis for living. The fear of God should replace pride. Then our (פְּתִיחַיִם) *paths* will be (יְשָׁרִים) *made right, smooth, or straight*, and we will be refreshed, literally have (שָׁקַדְנוּ) *drink, to our bones*.

This passage has been used to validate the idea that we should look for an individual circumstantial leading of God for our lives. This popular teaching says that we should not go by our understanding but by the circumstances which God brings in to our lives through coincidental happenings and unusual events. For example, we might consider it an individual leading of God when someone calls us unexpectedly, we hear the same message from different sources, or we receive an unusual offer, challenge, or opportunity. These are seen by this view as “the individual will of God for our lives.” Some extend this to “conversant prayer,” saying, “Prayer is conversation with God and we should listen as well as speak.” The idea is that the thoughts or circumstances following a silent time after our prayers are the leading of God.

The problem is, Proverbs 3:5 and 6 refers to God’s revealed directive will, not circumstantial leadings. *Trust in the Lord* is in the context of *do not forget my teaching, and keep my commandments* (verse 1). So the historical context is the teachings and commandments of the Mosaic Law, not looking for unusual circumstances or receiving thoughts after praying. *In all your ways acknowledge Him*, means to *fear the LORD and turn away from evil* (verse 7), not to look for God in circumstances during or after “conversant prayer.”

Verse 7 says, *Do not be wise in your own eyes*. That means I should not think I am right apart from the path of wisdom. It means to not use my own way of looking at things to determine the way things actually are. Things are the way they actually are, not the way I think they are. And the way they actually are is determined by God. So it is the fear of the God of the Bible, and turning away from evil as He defines it, that gives me the real wisdom which directs my path.

3:9 Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce;
3:10 So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.

The point is to give to God from the best of what you have or earn, not what is left over. Donating things like used clothing, cars, and furniture can be very helpful. And it is certainly a form of giving. But a better application would be to give off of the top of your paycheck, or sales, or special income, before you use the rest of it.

However, we must relate this to our age. Remember, Solomon was living under the Law, which required that a tithe, and any free will offering, be brought to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:5-6). The idea was that the rest of their income was their own to use to become prosperous in the land of Israel. God promised that He would then add to their prosperity, *So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine*.

The church is not to focus on earthly prosperity, but on the kingdom of heaven and its heavenly rewards. All wealth belongs to God, and we are simply stewards of it. We are not to tithe or give part of our wealth, thinking that the rest is ours to add to our earthly prosperity—as it was for Israel. We will have more if we give more (Luke 6:38), but the context is that of heavenly rewards (Luke 6:35; 1 Corinthians 15:19) or the care of God in the midst of persecution (Mark 10:30), not prosperity in the land in which we live.

3:11 My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof,
3:12 For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

This passage is quoted and discussed in Hebrews 12:4-11. The point is: God will bring things into the life of His children which has the purpose of conforming them to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). What’s important to realize is that this is a work of God, not something we are to identify, label, and use for decision making. There is no way to know if any particular event in our lives is the discipline of God. We should discipline ourselves according to the commands of Scripture, not our life circumstances.

3:13 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding.
3:14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold.
3:15 She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her.
3:16 Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor.
3:17 Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace.
3:18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.
3:19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, By understanding He established the heavens.
3:20 By His knowledge the deeps were broken up And the skies drip with dew.

3:21 My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion,
3:22 So they will be life to your soul And adornment to your neck.
3:23 Then you will walk in your way securely And your foot will not stumble.
3:24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.
3:25 Do not be afraid of sudden fear Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes;
3:26 For the LORD will be your confidence And will keep your foot from being caught.

Here we have another paragraph on the value of wisdom, which was discussed in the “Introduction” above. The one unique addition in this section is in 3:19-20. These verses tell us that the way things usually are is the way God made them to usually be. The same wisdom we are to learn is the wisdom by which God made the 3-dimensional universe. There is just one true wisdom, and it’s connected to the character of God. It is an attribute of God, or at least a product of an attribute of God (a sub-category of omniscience). God made things a certain way, and wisdom is to understand that way and operate by it.

For example, I could use my eyeglasses to stir my coffee, my ink pen as an ice pick, or my shoe for a hammer. And that may work to a certain extent. But that is not the wisest use of my eyeglasses, ink pen, or shoes because that is not what they were made for. The best use of all things is something consistent with what their maker intended. And that’s wisdom. In the case of our life, we will be the best we can be, if we live the way God made us to be.

Verses 23-25 add another practical value of wisdom. If we understand the way things usually are, and know the usual effect of our actions, then we will be best equipped for *sudden fear* and *the onslaught of the wicked*.

3:27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it.
3:28 Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it,” When you have it with you.

Verses 27-28 could be an explanation of Romans 13:8 which reads: *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* Owe nothing means not to withhold something from someone you owe something to. If it is in your power to pay it, then pay it.

3:29 Do not devise harm against your neighbor, While he lives securely beside you.
3:30 Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm.
3:31 Do not envy a man of violence And do not choose any of his ways.
3:32 For the devious are an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright.
3:33 The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous.
3:34 Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.
3:35 The wise will inherit honor, But fools display dishonor.

Verses 29-31 give **3 specific “don’ts”** concerning human relations. The **first** (verse 29) is about your physical neighbor. **Don’t think up things that would harm him.** For some reason, it is tempting to think bad thoughts about our physical neighbors. His dog barks too much, his kids play loud music, he disagrees with me about the property line, his sewer backs up on my land, etc. Many neighbors will call the local officials to get their neighbors in trouble when it doesn’t affect them at all. Solomon says that is not wisdom.

The **second** (verse 30) says **don’t start an argument.** The specific command is not to (זָרָה) *strive, contend, argue, or complain.* The root word means *to rub.* So don’t rub someone the wrong way. If a person has done you no harm but you don’t agree with him, or he is obnoxious, or he is slandering you, let it go.

The **third** (verse 31) says **don’t model violence.** It is often tempting, especially for boys, to think violence is heroic. Many of our video games present a violent warrior as a hero killing everyone in his path. Solomon says don’t make violence heroic.

In verses 32-35, Solomon mentions 4 kinds of people God will curse: the *devious, wicked, scoffers, and fools.* These verses also mention 4 kinds of people God likes: the *upright, righteous, afflicted, and wise.* The obvious point: be part of the second group, not the first group.

4:1 Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding,
4:2 For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction.
4:3 When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother,

4:4 Then he taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live;
4:5 Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
4:6 “Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you.
4:7 “The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding.
4:8 “Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her.
4:9 “She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty.”
4:10 Hear, my son, and accept my sayings And the years of your life will be many.
4:11 I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths.
4:12 When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; And if you run, you will not stumble.
4:13 Take hold of instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life.
4:14 Do not enter the path of the wicked And do not proceed in the way of evil men.
4:15 Avoid it, do not pass by it; Turn away from it and pass on.
4:16 For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; And they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.
4:17 For they eat the bread of wickedness And drink the wine of violence.
4:18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.
4:19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know over what they stumble.
4:20 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.
4:21 Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart.
4:22 For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body.
4:23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.
4:24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth And put devious speech far from you.
4:25 Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.
4:26 Watch the path of your feet And all your ways will be established.
4:27 Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.

This is another call to acquire wisdom, repeating the value of wisdom with several poetic expressions. Although much of this passage repeats previous themes, there are a few observations we should make:

- Verse 3 tells us that both David and Bathsheba took the initiative to teach Solomon wisdom.
- The passage stresses that wisdom comes from the instruction of parents (not youth leaders, pastors, priests, or school teachers).
- Parents can only offer wisdom; they cannot force it on their child. No matter how much the parents teach it, the child must decide to acquire it or it will not take root.
- Verse 9 connects wisdom to beauty. The *crown of beauty* is a metaphor; nonetheless, it makes beauty an absolute thing not a relative thing. So beauty is not “in the eye of the beholder” but in the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of those with understanding.

The Danger of Adultery

Chapters 5-9 have probably the most extensive warnings in the Bible against adultery. Most of Chapter 5, some of chapters 6 and 9, and virtually all of chapter 7 are about sexual immorality. From the massive amount of text he dedicated to this, we can see that Solomon saw this as a crucial issue in training his son. I will next include all of those verses and then make some interpretations, and some application comments.

5:1 My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding;
5:2 That you may observe discretion And your lips may reserve knowledge.
5:3 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey And smoother than oil is her speech;
5:4 But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.
5:5 Her feet go down to death, Her steps take hold of Sheol.
5:6 She does not ponder the path of life; Her ways are unstable, she does not know it.
5:7 Now then, my sons, listen to me And do not depart from the words of my mouth.
5:8 Keep your way far from her And do not go near the door of her house,
5:9 Or you will give your vigor to others And your years to the cruel one;
5:10 And strangers will be filled with your strength And your hard-earned goods will go to the house of an alien;
5:11 And you groan at your final end, When your flesh and your body are consumed;
5:12 And you say, “How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof!
5:13 “I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to my instructors!
5:14 “I was almost in utter ruin In the midst of the assembly and congregation.”
5:15 Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well.

5:16 *Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets?*
5:17 *Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you.*
5:18 *Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth.*
5:19 *As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.*
5:20 *For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?*
5:21 *For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths.*
5:22 *His own iniquities will capture the wicked, And he will be held with the cords of his sin.*
5:23 *He will die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.*
6:23 *For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life*
6:24 *To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress.*
6:25 *Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids.*
6:26 *For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life.*
6:27 *Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned?*
6:28 *Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched?*
6:29 *So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished.*
6:30 *Men do not despise a thief if he steals To satisfy himself when he is hungry;*
6:31 *But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; He must give all the substance of his house.*
6:32 *The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it.*
6:33 *Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out.*
6:34 *For jealousy enrages a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance.*
6:35 *He will not accept any ransom, Nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts.*
7:5 *That they may keep you from an adulteress, From the foreigner who flatters with her words.*
7:6 *For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice,*
7:7 *And I saw among the naive, And discerned among the youths A young man lacking sense,*
7:8 *Passing through the street near her corner; And he takes the way to her house,*
7:9 *In the twilight, in the evening, In the middle of the night and in the darkness.*
7:10 *And behold, a woman comes to meet him, Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.*
7:11 *She is boisterous and rebellious, Her feet do not remain at home;*
7:12 *She is now in the streets, now in the squares, And lurks by every corner.*
7:13 *So she seizes him and kisses him And with a brazen face she says to him:*
7:14 *"I was due to offer peace offerings; Today I have paid my vows.*
7:15 *"Therefore I have come out to meet you, To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you.*
7:16 *"I have spread my couch with coverings, With colored linens of Egypt. I*
7:17 *"I have sprinkled my bed With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.*
7:18 *"Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with caresses.*
7:19 *"For my husband is not at home, He has gone on a long journey;*
7:20 *He has taken a bag of money with him, At the full moon he will come home."*
7:21 *With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she seduces him.*
7:22 *Suddenly he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,*
7:23 *Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, So he does not know that it will cost him his life.*
7:24 *Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth.*
7:25 *Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths.*
7:26 *For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain.*
7:27 *Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.*
9:13 *The woman of folly is boisterous, She is naive and knows nothing.*
9:14 *She sits at the doorway of her house, On a seat by the high places of the city,*
9:15 *Calling to those who pass by, Who are making their paths straight:*
9:16 *"Whoever is naive, let him turn in here," And to him who lacks understanding she says,*
9:17 *"Stolen water is sweet; And bread eaten in secret is pleasant."*
9:18 *But he does not know that the dead are there, That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.*

Elsewhere in Proverbs we read:

23:27 *For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well.*
27:13 *Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for an adulterous woman hold him in pledge.*
30:20 *This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, And says, "I have done no wrong."*

Although no one has given it as much emphasis as we see here, sexual immorality is discussed with stern warnings in both Testaments. For example, Paul told the Corinthians: *Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a*

prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body (1 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Solomon is probably using the word the NASV translates *adulterous* as referring to any woman having sex outside of marriage. The Hebrew word he uses is זָרָה *zarah*, which is the feminine form of the word for *stranger*. It can also be translated *estranged, alien, or foreigner*. The word *woman* is not in the text, but it would be assumed since זָרָה *zarah* is feminine. So the KJV translation *strange woman* is probably the best.

Here are a few interpretations from Solomon's discussion of sexual immorality in Proverbs:

1. Adultery and fornication are a devastating and disastrous form of immorality, which permanently damage a person with irreversible consequences (6:26). All sin is devastating, but some more so than others. Sexual sins are among the worse. The only thing consistently worse in Scripture is idolatry.
2. Sexual immorality is contrary to wisdom. It goes against the way we were made. It is like using my glasses to stir my coffee, etc. (5:1-2).
3. Sexual immorality feels good but leads to ruin. Every sexual encounter will be the most pleasing at the start (5:3). As it progresses, it produces less and less pleasure and more and more problems. The intensity of the sexual (romantic) pleasure continues until it can no longer accommodate the problems it is cultivating. When it leaves, its victims are *reduced to a loaf of bread* (6:26).
4. Those who commit adultery are personally unstable. Stable people find the wisdom to avoid sexual immorality (5:6). Everyone is tempted to sexual immorality. The wise have enough sense to understand that it will destroy them. Fools think they are the only ones since the beginning of creation who will not have problems because of it, who think they won't be discovered.
5. The only way to fight sexual immorality is to not go near it (5:8). Other than your spouse, don't flirt with, counsel with, socialize with, travel with, or be alone with someone of the opposite sex.
6. The only proper place for sexual or romantic notions is with *the wife of your youth* (5:15-19). This does not say that your spouse will satisfy you. Men think their spouse will satisfy them physically, and women think their spouse will satisfy them psychologically. It's a determination you must make to make yourself satisfied with your spouse.
7. Sexual immorality leads to financial ruin (5:8-11).
8. God observes all our ways, and that includes the paths which leads to sexual immorality (5:21). For women, it begins with relationships, and for men, it begins with physical lust.
9. Sexual immorality for a man begins with admiring a woman's beauty (6:25).
10. Adultery is worse than theft because a thief is punished and that's all. An adulterer is personally destroyed, permanently disgraced, and a target of relentless jealousy (6:25-35).
11. In Chapter 7, Solomon tells the story of a young man he observes through his window at night. The man is naïve and led by an adulterous woman *as an ox goes to the slaughter*. She entices him with kisses, sexy clothes, and food (7:14 indicates she has extra food which needs to be eaten right away—Leviticus 7:12-17). Then she informs him that her husband is on a long journey. This is what adultery looks like at its peak of pleasure. This is the decision point from which there is no return. Before this, they have been flirting, after this they will experience living death, and endless regret. The point: never be in the position of the young man in Chapter 7.
12. In chapter 9, Solomon presents a different kind of immoral woman. Instead of quietly seducing a young man at night, this woman's *folly is boisterous*. She may be guilty of many sins, but she seems to also be a professional harlot. She offers an advantage: she has no jealous husband for a young man to avoid. When she says, *Stolen water is sweet; And bread eaten in secret is pleasant*, she is probably referring to illicit sexual intercourse. And it is true. There is something about sex that produces greater pleasure when it is illicit, stolen, sneaky, even rough or wild. Sex requires an increased perversion to be satisfying. The point: avoid the professional harlot as well as the adulterous woman. Both lead to the same death.

Illicit sexual intercourse, be it fornication or adultery, is not the only misery producing pleasure on the planet, but it is way ahead of whatever is in second place. It causes affairs, divorce, financial ruin, hatred, outbursts of anger, rage, strife, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, jealousy, gossip, and crime. It leaves children without parents. It destroys families and extended families. It fosters hatred over things like alimony, child support, child visitation, and child custody. Divorced people are the most miserable people in a society and most of it is caused by illicit sexual intercourse.

One other question should be considered before we leave this subject. Why did Solomon only address the dangers of an adulterous woman preying upon a naïve young man? Why does he not address a man pursuing a woman, since that seems to be more common, or at least as common? Here are a few ideas:

- First is the most obvious thing. Solomon is not addressing his daughters. We can be pretty sure that at some point he did, and when he did, his warnings would be the same as far as the dangers of illicit sex. But it seems that girls were to be educated in the context of the home. They would move from the care of their fathers to the care of their husbands when they married. A boy's education began at home but moved out to the streets of the city.
- When addressing the young man, Solomon seems to be talking about his parenting of an older child—like an older teenager or one in their early 20s. Since girls were usually under the care of parents and not out at night or otherwise available for illicit sex (as they often are today), male illicit sexual aggression toward godly girls was not very likely.
- When a young man thought of sex with a young virgin, that was a form of romance, which ended in marriage sex, not illicit sex.
- If a married man wanted to pursue another unmarried woman, he would simply take her as an additional wife. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. (Admittedly, that was a bit much!)
- Solomon is presenting the need for wisdom among young men. So the focus is on the naïve not the sexual aggressor. It is the naïve fool, not the wicked aggressor, who is addressed here.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your 25-year-old married son has a new job. His boss told him to travel to a sales meeting with a young single woman employee. How should you advise your son?

- Refuse to travel alone with a woman, even if it costs you your job.
- Talk to the woman he is traveling with and explain your hesitations so safeguards can be put in place.
- Make the trip, but be in constant contact with your wife and some Christian accountability partner.

A is correct. You should advise your son to never put himself in a position of traveling with another woman anywhere near his age. He should never be alone with, or travel with, or be in private conversation with another young woman. To do so is inviting disaster. If your son or his employer or the other woman think that is silly, it's because they are foolish enough to not realize the devastation of a sexual encounter. It is like putting one bullet in the chamber of a six-shooter, pointing it at your head, and pulling the trigger. Chances are, nothing will happen. But the consequences if it fires are too devastating to make it a realistic choice. B and C are incorrect because, in the end, your son is still alone with another woman. That **will** develop some kind of a relationship that can gradually lead to your son being *reduced to a loaf of bread*.

Now we will move on to a few other subjects address in this first section of Proverbs.

Lending Money

6:1 My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, Have given a pledge for a stranger,

6:2 If you have been snared with the words of your mouth, Have been caught with the words of your mouth,

6:3 Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor.

6:4 Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids;

6:5 Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hunter's hand And like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

Solomon tells his son that if you have been foolish enough to cosign for someone else's financial responsibilities, then don't rest until you get out of that obligation. The most likely scenario is when the co-signee borrows money and defaults on the loan, then Solomon's *son* would be obligated to pay the debt.

What is interesting about this warning is that it is most likely based in good intentions—an attempt to help someone financially. They can't get a loan, so they convince you that the reason they need it is valid. You, then, are attempting to help them with what you determine to be a valid project. But Solomon says that's foolish (see also Proverbs 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26).

The problem is you are taking the wealth God has entrusted into your stewardship and risking it on someone else's project. Debt is always a problem, and you have not only allowed yourself to be responsible for debt, but a debt which someone else is managing. If you want to help someone out, then give them the money (Deuteronomy 15:10, 15; 19:17). If you feel that giving them the money would encourage them to be irresponsible, then becoming surety for their debt is surely irresponsible.

To be responsible for someone else's finances encourages them to not be responsible for their own finances. We are to be responsible for what we have. That's the essence of virtue and morality. When we take on someone else's moral responsibility, we take away their opportunity to be morally responsible, and take on a responsibility not given to us by God.

Self Motivation for Work

6:6 *Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise,*

6:7 *Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler,*

6:8 *Prepares her food in the summer And gathers her provision in the harvest.*

6:9 *How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?*

6:10 *"A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest"—*

6:11 *Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man.*

There is a lot in Proverbs about the sluggard, which we will consider in the next section. Here the real emphasis is on Solomon's philosophy of work. The ant is the model. The points made are:

- A good worker needs no boss or supervisor. He is self-motivated, self-directed, and self-corrected.
 - A good worker prepares and gathers. A salesman makes the calls, a farmer prepares the field, a business owner advertises and secures an inventory. Then he *gathers ... in the harvest*.
 - A good worker is never lazy. Sleep is seen as something required in order to work. It's not a goal or pleasure in itself. Love of sleep results in poverty.
-

The Worthless Man

6:12 *A worthless person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth,*

6:13 *Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers;*

6:14 *Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil, Who spreads strife.*

6:15 *Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing.*

The word here for *worthless* is בִּלְיָאֵל, *belyyal*. It comes from two root words (בִּלְיָ *bely*) meaning *not* or *without*, and יָאֵל *yal*, meaning *worth, use, or profit*. It transliterates into *belyya 'al*, a word similar to the one Paul uses of the devil in 2 Corinthians 6:15. This is the man who takes or gives bribes, cheats his customer or the government, lies about his product or service, or is otherwise dishonest, secretive, and not above board in his dealings. He generally gets away with it for a while, then falls suddenly because the word gets around about him, or the law catches up with him. *Therefore his calamity will come suddenly*, not gradually.

7 Abominations the Lord Hates

6:16 *There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:*

6:17 *Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood,*

6:18 *A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil,*

6:19 *A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.*

In other words, the Lord hates:

1. Pride
2. Dishonesty
3. Murder
4. Evil schemes
5. Evil actions
6. False witnesses
7. Trouble causers

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the sins God considers to be an abomination. The word *abomination* occurs 46 times in the Bible (NASV) and includes things like homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22), and idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:25). Also number 2 is similar to number 6, and numbers 4, 5, and 7 are similar. The point here is to tell the potentially naïve that God hates these 7 things. Therefore, these 7 things will keep him from wisdom. These are things which fools use as a shortcut to prosperity, but it keeps them in chaos, making wisdom impossible.

[The remainder of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 either deal with the value of pursuing wisdom or avoiding illicit sex. Both subjects have already been dealt with.]

A Concluding Call To Wisdom

8:1 *Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice?*

8:2 *On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;*

8:3 *Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:*

8:4 *“To you, O men, I call, And my voice is to the sons of men.*

8:5 *“O naive ones, understand prudence; And, O fools, understand wisdom.*

8:6 *“Listen, for I will speak noble things; And the opening of my lips will reveal right things.*

8:7 *“For my mouth will utter truth; And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.*

8:8 *“All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.*

8:9 *“They are all straightforward to him who understands, And right to those who find knowledge.*

8:10 *“Take my instruction and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold.*

8:11 *“For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things cannot compare with her.*

8:12 *“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge and discretion.*

8:13 *“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.*

8:14 *“Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine.*

8:15 *“By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice.*

8:16 *“By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly.*

8:17 *“I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me.*

8:18 *“Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness.*

8:19 *“My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield better than choicest silver.*

8:20 *“I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice,*

8:21 *To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries.*

8:22 *“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old.*

8:23 *“From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.*

8:24 *“When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water.*

8:25 *“Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth;*

8:26 *While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world.*

8:27 *“When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,*

8:28 *When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed,*

8:29 *When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth;*

8:30 *Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him,*

8:31 *Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having my delight in the sons of men.*

8:32 *“Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways.*

8:33 *“Heed instruction and be wise, And do not neglect it.*

8:34 *“Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts.*

8:35 *“For he who finds me finds life And obtains favor from the LORD.*

8:36 *“But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death.”*

Chapter 8 is entirely about a call to wisdom. In that sense, it is very much like chapter 1. It is almost like Solomon is starting over. But he isn't. After giving several applications of wisdom (the largest being about illicit sex), he comes back to an exhortation to wise living. The repetition is intentional and meant to drive home the absolute essential need for wisdom. There are a few things we should notice. These are not necessarily new, but they are put in a unique way, thus making a new emphasis.

- Verses 1-3 tell us again that wisdom is to be found everywhere in this world. It is a product of natural revelation, not special revelation. It is found on the street, not in miracles.
- Verses 4-13 call us to the precious value of wisdom, and once again connect it to the fear of God.
- Verses 14-16 tell us that wisdom is what successful leaders use to lead.
- Verses 17-21 tell us that wisdom is what successful business people have—those who have *Enduring wealth*.
- Verses 22-31 tell us that wisdom is what God used to create the world. Key phrases include: *The LORD possessed me, From everlasting I was established, When He established the heavens, I was there, and having my delight in the sons of men.*

[Verses 22-31 also tell us some interesting things about creation which we do not have elsewhere. Genesis 1:1 says: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Proverbs 8 tells us:

- A. The mountains seem to be established independent from, if not before, the fields and the dust—verses 25, 26
 - B. The heavens were established apart from the creation of the earth—verse 27
 - C. The earth was created as a sphere—verse 27, also, Isaiah 40:22 says *It is He who sits above the circle of the earth*
 - D. The atmosphere was established before any living thing was created—verse 28
 - E. The sea of the antediluvian earth had a predetermined shoreline. It seems that land was in one place and the sea was in one place. Our multiple seas of today are probably a configuration from the splitting up of the earth during the flood—verses 28, 29.]
- Verses 32-36 tell us that wisdom is a product of a free will search which one must determine to do. It is available, but it must be earnestly pursued.

9:1 Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars;

9:2 She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table;

9:3 She has sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city:

9:4 “Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here!” To him who lacks understanding she says,

9:5 “Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed.

9:6 “Forsake your folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding.”

Chapter 9 begins with another general call to wisdom. The interesting thing here is that wisdom almost sounds like it is calling in a way similar to how the adulteress calls. Both wisdom and the adulteress come from everyday life. Both are established in their ways. Both call out to the naïve. So it is up to the naïve to choose which way he will go.

9:7 He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.

9:8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you.

9:9 Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning.

9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

9:11 For by me your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you.

9:12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, And if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

The word *רֹבֵץ* *lits* means *a scoffer; one who speaks to someone in a scornful, derisive, or mocking way.* This is someone who is mocking someone rather than offering a substantive argument, reasoning from evidence. The word *יָכַח* *yakach* means *to reprove, argue, or prove.* Solomon says to not reprove a scoffer because he will only insult you and hate you for your efforts. But if you reprove a wise man, he will love you and be still wiser, increasing in his learning.

Jesus said, *Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces* (Matthew 7:6). A good application of this is in the area of evangelism and discipleship. To argue with a mocker is a waste of time. But discipleship of those who want to learn increases their learning, understanding, and wisdom.

This was the pattern of ministry for Christ and the apostles. They would speak in places like synagogues, homes, wilderness areas, and the seashore. That would create both mockers and followers. After that, they spent very little time trying to convince the mockers but focused on the followers. It is not that they did not *reprove, argue, or prove.* It is that they did it with those open to understanding.

The difference between a wise man and a scoffer is that the wise man fears God and desires the knowledge of God. The absence of the fear of God is manifested in those who are willing to ignore the commandments of God—say, with respect to divorce/remarriage, women teaching men, homosexuality, fornication, honesty, etc. Those uninterested in the knowledge of God are those uninterested in theology, ignoring the study of things like sin, sanctification, and prophesy. Those scoffers will not be available for instruction. Why not just disciple everybody? Because most people aren't interested in the fear of God or the knowledge of God.

This concludes the first section of the book of Proverbs. The next part of this study will consider the subjects covered in the 3 collections of proverbs.

The Individual Proverbs of Solomon—Chapters 10–29

This is the main body of the book of Proverbs. It contains 3 collections of proverbs. To review, they are:

- Solomon’s own proverbs—10:1–22:16
- Solomon’s own collection of other proverbs—22:17–24:34
- Hezekiah’s collection of Solomon’s proverbs—chapters 25–29

So these are (one way or another) all Solomon’s proverbs. He agreed with them, he favored them and he took ownership of them, even though he did not personally create all of them. According to 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon *spoke 3,000 proverbs*. This is a selective list of those proverbs.

There is a total of **537** proverbs in the three collections of this section.

I will list all 537, but I shall not comment on them all. I have arranged them in 25 topics, some much larger than others. This is, of course, a bit subjective. Others may not have chosen the same headings as I have. Some proverbs can fit several topics (although I have used each proverb only once). Some proverbs will address one topic in the first phrase and a different topic in the second or succeeding phrases. Nonetheless, I believe that anyone who does a serious analysis of this massive book will come pretty close to identifying these same topics as the main thrust of the book.

I have attempted to be **exhaustive** only in the sense that I have categorized all of the verses. But I have been **selective** in which verses to discuss. The reasons for my selectivity are: (1) the book is so large that dealing with every proverb would occupy very many pages, (2) many proverbs are similar (repeated for the sake of emphasis or because they are in different collections), and (3) to comment on every proverb would be repetitive—I would be repeatedly saying, “see comments on such-and-such a proverb.”

One more thing. Before looking into the mind of Solomon through these proverbs, we should remember that when Solomon became king *the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what you wish me to give you”* (1 Kings 3:5).

Here is Solomon’s request and God’s response. *“So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you* (1 Kings 3:9-12).

No matter what we think of Solomon or his failures later in life, the proverbs he stated were the result of the *wise and discerning heart* he received from God.

25 Subjects Addressed in 537 Proverbs

The Nature of the Natural Man

As we look at specific proverbs, we need to think a bit about human nature and what is involved in making moral/ethical decisions to do, or not to do certain things (in this case follow Solomon’s proverbial advice). Everyone, since the Fall of Adam and Eve, has a sin nature to the extent that in both the Old and New Testaments it says: *There is none who does good not even one* (Psalms 53:1-3; Romans 3:10-23; 5:12-14). So we all appear to have a sin nature, which is defiled, incurable, and unacceptable to God. The question is: “How did godly men like Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel and the *righteous man* of Proverbs become men of God with such a nature?”

In this age, we have the opportunity to put on a new self, given to us by God at salvation. So Paul says, *be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth* (Ephesians 4:23-24, emphasis mine, see also Colossians 3:9-10).

Yet God continually called upon people before this age, with nothing but that old nature, to be good. For example, Solomon exhorts his son to be a *righteous* man 61 times in this section of Proverbs (chapters 10–29). Abel was told: *If*

you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7). Micah 6:8 reads: *He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you, But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?* Through Isaiah, God told the Southern Kingdom: *Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good* (Isaiah 1:16-17). Even in Romans, Paul, speaking of the natural man, says: *God ... will render to each person according to his deeds; to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life* (Romans 2:6-7, all emphases mine).

So we must conclude **two things** about the natural man (the one who has no special assistance from the indwelling Holy Spirit):

First, his spiritual nature is stained by sin, making him unacceptable to a Holy God. It is only through the cross of Christ that he is able to have his sins wiped away and be holy, and thus have a relationship with God. Before the cross, God accepted his faith as a righteous act (Genesis 15:6) because Christ would ultimately pay for his sins on the cross. After the cross, we are to receive Jesus Christ (John 1:12) in order to *become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21) positionally. In this age, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit when we are saved. But we still have the same sin stained spiritual nature.

Second, the natural man is capable, from within that old nature, of doing good by mastering sin, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. Not perfectly, not without some sinful tendencies mixed in, nonetheless, he is capable of doing good (Romans 2:1-10). It would seem, then, that the spiritual nature everyone possesses, which Paul calls the natural man (1 Corinthians 2:14 ff), is the good spiritual nature breathed into Adam in the Garden, which has been stained by the Fall (eating the fruit which made man morally independent from God—Genesis 3:22). But it seems like our spiritual nature polluted by sin is also our basic spiritual nature from which we must make good decisions.

For example, when Paul says: *put on the new self* (Ephesians 4:24), he is not speaking as from the new self, as if that is all we are, but from somewhere outside of the new self, making a decision to put it on. But if that is the case, then there must be something within us capable of a good decision or a bad decision outside of the new self, or we couldn't decide to put it on or not put it on. I take it from Romans 6 that in heaven we will only have a new sinless spirit. But I take it from Romans 7 that, while we are still here in the flesh, we have a nature capable of both good and evil.

Bear with me for an illustration. It is as if we are looking in our closet seeing a dirty shirt and a clean shirt. It seems that Paul is telling those of us living in this church/grace age to put on the clean shirt (the new self). But the clean shirt was not available to the Old Testament believers. They had no option but to clean the old shirt.

What we share in common with the Old Testament saints is that spiritual decision to live in sin or strive for righteousness. The real decision lies not in the shirt but in us as we face the closet. There is no way to escape the fact that, whether we live in this age or Solomon's age, we are capable of good and evil. We are like a cup of coffee where pure water was stained by ground coffee beans. There is pure water there (the spirit breathed into Adam in the Garden of Eden), but it is all stained by coffee (the sin nature resulting from the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3).

In my illustration, the believer looking into the closet today is different in one significant way. Unlike the Old Testament saint, the believer of this age has been regenerated (Titus 3:5), indwelt (1 Corinthians 3:16), baptized (1 Corinthians 12:13), and sealed (Ephesians 4:30) by the Holy Spirit. This results in an opportunity to be filled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and put on the new self, literally the *new man* (Ephesians 4:24).

But what is even more interesting is that there is no evidence that true Christian believers of today are any better people, or more obedient to God, than the Old Testament Israelites. There is, for example, no evidence that the apostles were better people than the patriarchs or prophets of Israel. We have more available to us, yet we are not necessarily better saints. The same is true of Israel compared to the ages before them. They had the advantage of the Law of Moses, but they were just as rebellious as the people, for example, at the time of the flood or the Tower of Babel. Those in the Millennial Kingdom will have more available than we do, and they will also rebel against God (Revelation 20:7-10). This side of heaven, our nature, as we look into the closet, is to choose the dirty shirt.

#1 Positive Personal Character Development

11:20; 11:23; 11:30; 12:2; 12:3; 12:12; 12:28; 13:5; 13:6; 13:9; 13:20; 14:14; 14:19; 14:22; 14:30; 14:32; 15:9; 15:21; 16:17; 16:20; 17:2; 17:26; 19:16; 19:22; 20:25; 20:29; 21:15; 24:15; 24:16; 27:19; 28:1; 29:10; 29:27

As we look at positive character development in Proverbs, we need to realize it is not the same as today, in that they did not have an indwelling Holy Spirit filling them with a conviction to choose a new nature. But what they had, we also have, in that we must decide from the depth of our fallen or stained spiritual nature to follow God or follow sin.

Now some specific proverbs about positive spiritual development.

11:20 *The perverse in heart are an abomination to the LORD, But the blameless in their walk are His delight.*

This verse could be the title of this topic. It is a general statement which includes those who are an abomination to the Lord and those in whom He delights. Most of these proverbs are half about the good guy and half about the bad guy. We will deal with the foolish/evil man in the next topic. The emphasis to notice here is the word דֶּרֶךְ *derek* for *way* or *path*. Those the Lord delights in are, as we say today, “not just talking the talk but walking the walk.”

11:23 *The desire of the righteous is only good, But the expectation of the wicked is wrath.*

Here we learn that what makes the righteous man righteous is his (תַּאֲוָה *taavah*) *delights* or *desires*. Good people are good because they delight in being good. They want to be good. The second thing we learn is that their desire is to be *only* good. The word אַךְ *ak* usually means *only*, or *surely*, and sometimes *nevertheless*. So Solomon does not see doing good as merely a result of discipline but consistently desiring to be good.

Of course a righteous man does not always do good, even though he always desires to do it. It is much like Romans 7:21-25 where Paul says: *I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.*

But, of course, Paul only has this conflict because of his desire to do only good. A bad man would not have the conflict.

A good man has a desire to only do good. The problem is, that's not his only desire. He also has a sin nature which inclines him to do only what is evil. So what we have learned is that a good man is good because something inside of him desires for nothing but good. [Remember, I am using the male gender only for the sake of convenience.]

13:20 *He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.*

Here we learn another significant positive character attribute. Those with a positive character (in this case the *wise*) will find others of positive character to associate with. Actually, Solomon indicates here that a major **source** of wisdom is walking with the wise. Unfortunately, the converse is also true. Those who walk with fools will suffer the harm fools bring upon themselves.

14:22 *Will they not go astray who devise evil? But kindness and truth will be to those who devise good.*

In 14:22, we learn that the foundational virtues come to, or belong to, those who *devise* (*plan* or literally *plow*) *good*. **The foundational virtues are love and truth.** We looked in brief at these two words in Proverbs 3:3. Here we shall take a little closer look. The words are חֶסֶד *hesed*, the very common strong word for *love* or *loyal love*, and אֱמֶת *emet*, sometimes translated *reliability*, *stability*, or *faithfulness*, but basically it is the word for *truth*.

Actually, the two words are very often used together (Genesis 24:27; Exodus 34:6). David and Solomon regularly use these two words to describe the foundation of the ministry of God (Psalms 25:10; 26:3; 40:10; 57:3, 10; 61:7; 85:10; 86:15; 89:14; 108:4; 117:2; 138:2; Proverbs 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; 20:28). These are the two foundational virtues, which describe those who have a positive character. Godly people do not speak truth without love, nor do they exhibit love without truth. Neither Moses, David, nor Solomon would agree with the Beetles, “All you really need is love.”

14:30 *A tranquil heart is life to the body, But passion is rotteness to the bones.*

The lead phrase of 14:30 literally reads: *Life of the flesh [is] a tranquil heart.* The common word for heart denotes not just emotions but our inner spiritual being. The descriptive word is מַרְפֵּי *marpe*. It says this kind of heart is *tranquil*, *soothing*, or *healing*. Its root word is *healthy*. The *passion* of the second phrase is better translated *jealousy* or *envy*. So a

healing spirit is being contrasted with a jealous spirit. The point is, our inner spiritual condition directly affects our physical condition.

19:16 *He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, But he who is careless of conduct will die.*

With 19:16, we see the foundation of wisdom—keeping the commandments. Remember (from our “Introduction”), the moral foundation of Solomon’s day was the Law of Moses (all 613 commandments in Exodus through Deuteronomy, not just the 10 from Mount Sinai). He did not have the Old Testament prophetic books or the New Testament.

The command here is not to develop spiritual maturity or even get to know the heart of God. Those things are for the patriarch but not the man (as explained in the “Introduction,” under the section called “Proverbs Is about a Boy Becoming a Man.” Here Solomon is talking about wisdom, and wisdom (the foundation of maturity) depends on order, and order depends on law-keeping.

The second phrase literally reads: *But he who despises his way will die. His way* is the Law’s way, which is also our way because we were made to live according to the laws of God. And for the people of Solomon’s day, that was the Mosaic Law. So the point of this proverb is that positive character cannot be developed unless we are keeping the specific laws of God for our age. After declaring he was not under the Mosaic Law, Paul said that he was not *without the law of God but under the law of Christ* (1 Corinthians 9:21).

24:15 *Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; Do not destroy his resting place;*

24:16 *For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in time of calamity.*

Verses 15 and 16 are one proverb. The point is to describe the resiliency of the righteous. It is very hard to effectively attack a good man. For example, one of the most common ways to discredit a witness in a courtroom trial is to attack their personal character. Their sinful history is their vulnerability. You can attack a righteous man, of course, and even cause him to fall with lies, slander, bribes, accusations, and complaints. But before long, he is back on his feet because the truth eventually comes out, and his ongoing righteous character gains him respect.

28:1 *The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.*

The wicked flee when no one is pursuing them because they are afraid someone might be after them. They are always thinking that someday they will get caught. By contrast, the righteous are bold. This word; *בָּטָח* *batach*, for *bold* is usually translated *trusting* and sometimes *confident*. *Bold* is probably a good translation for this context, but it doesn’t capture the main idea of the word. The righteous are confident, trusting in their righteous ways, as a lion (actually, it’s the word for a *young lion*) trusts in his strength. The point is, positive personal character makes a person confident.

29:27 *An unjust man is abominable to the righteous, And he who is upright in the way is abominable to the wicked.*

This is the last proverb in this collection. Possibly it is meant to be a concluding comment. The point is the righteous and the wicked can’t tolerate each other. Both are *abominable* to each other. So a righteous man is not one who is tolerant, compromising, accepting, fellowshiping, or associating with the wicked. There is no separation between the sin and the sinner. Both are an abomination to the righteous. If the sinner wasn’t an abomination to the righteous man, then the evil of the sinner would be influencing the righteous man, and he would no longer be righteous.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

If your 19-year-old son is an alcoholic you should tell him,

- A. “Get into a rehab program where they can help you recover.”
- B. “Stop drinking and grow up, life is not a beer commercial.”
- C. “Stop hanging around with guys who drink all the time.”

B is correct. All of these answers are probably good advice but only B puts the responsibility where it belongs, on the 19-year-old himself. He has the capacity within himself to grow up and stop drinking. He will probably deny that he is an alcoholic, and that’s okay because the real issue is his taking responsibility for his actions, not blaming them on others or looking to others for an answer. **A** and **C** are good advice but they are not the best answer because they do not deal with the real issue, and that’s the spiritual nature of the boy himself. Others can help, but only when the boy himself makes the decision to become a righteous man.

#2 The Fool

10:23; 13:23; 14:7; 14:8; 14:9; 14:15; 14:18; 14:33; 15:14; 16:29; 16:30; 17:4; 17:12; 17:13; 17:15; 17:16; 17:19; 17:24; 18:2; 18:3; 18:5; 18:6; 18:7; 19:29; 21:7; 21:8; 21:16; 21:18; 21:27; 22:8; 23:9; 24:1; 24:2; 24:7; 24:8; 24:9; 24:19; 24:20; 25:19; 25:26; 26:1; 26:6-12; 27:3; 27:12; 27:22; 28:17; 28:26; 29:6

The problem with a fool lies in his inner spiritual nature. Therefore, he is not correctable with external discipline. You can discipline a domestic animal because it has a personality (intellect, emotion, and will) but no spirituality (sense of morality, purpose/destiny, or creativity). A natural man has a spiritual nature which is also sinful and cannot be programmed or trained. The liberal concept of rehabilitation assumes man is a higher animal who can simply be retrained. What they don't understand is that man has a sin nature, which cannot be improved or cured.

Today, spiritually evil fools can be regenerated through the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), which comes only with repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal God and Savior (John 1:12). This adds the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the possibility of the filling of the Holy Spirit and a new spiritual nature, which a person can now put on to combat the old sin nature (Ephesians 4:22-24).

But this is not a consideration for Solomon. Believers in the Old Testament were saved by faith in God (Genesis 15:6). But they were not regenerated, indwelt, baptized, or sealed with the Holy Spirit as believers in this age are when they are saved. So Solomon can only deal with the existing spiritual condition of the fool, he cannot encourage him to *put on the new self* (Ephesians 4:22).

Now some specific proverbs about the fool.

14:7 *Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.*

Foolishness is always presented in Proverbs as a close association with wickedness or evil. Here we have the general principle that we tend to model those we hang around with. Specifically, here we learn that *הַיְהוּדָה הַיְהוּדָה* *being in the presence of*, literally *to walk from opposite of*, a fool destroys discernment. The point is: if we fellowship with fools, pretty soon we will begin to think like they do, and even when we hear *words of knowledge*, we will not be able to understand. This is why education is not the salvation liberals think it is. You can educate a fool, but his foolishness will not allow him to glean wisdom from his knowledge. So his education does not enhance his discernment.

14:9 *Fools mock at sin, But among the upright there is good will.*

Here we have a different word for fool. In 14:7, we have the word *כֶּסֶל* *kesil*, for a *fool* or *stupid* person. Here in 14:9, we have the word *עוֹלָם* *evil*, which is someone who is either *foolish* or *evil*. What they do is *mock* or *scoff* at *sin* (or the word for *sin* can mean a *sin offering*). Evil fools do not have a concept of sin. What makes today's liberals stupid is they do not believe in sin. They believe only in malevolent actions which are caused by ignorance and poor socialization. So they believe the need is for education and rehabilitation. They mock sin.

17:12 *Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, Rather than a fool in his folly.*

17:12 emphasizes the collateral damage caused by foolishness. Here we have the word (used in 14:7) for a *stupid fool*. The warning here is to avoid those who are unwise because of the damage they cause to those around them. Don't marry a fool. Don't hire a fool. Don't form a partnership with a fool. Don't hang around with a fool. Even if they are not evil, those without wisdom cause collateral damage. Beware!

17:24 *Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, But the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.*

Once again, the word for fool here is the *stupid fool*. We cannot be sure specifically what Solomon had in mind by *the ends of the earth*. It would include, however, not focusing on the reality of his present situation. For example, a fool will buy lottery tickets because he thinks that he will be lucky. Some day he will get rich by chance. Some day his ship will come in all by itself. So his eyes are on some unrealistic *ends of the earth* scenario, not his present reality.

18:2 *A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.*

The first phrase of 18:2 is easily translated as the NASV does above (the word for *fool* is the *stupid fool*). But the second phrase literally says *לְבַי אֲבִי-הַתְּהוֹלָה לְבַי*, *that his heart may uncover itself*. King James translates it: *that his heart may*

discover itself. The idea seems to be not so much one of *revealing his own mind*, as it is one of self-discovery. The fool looks inside himself for answers. Instead of seeking an objective understanding of the way things actually are, he looks in his own heart to discern his own personal needs and desires. He wants to find himself. But Jesus said: “*He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it*” (Matthew 10: 39). So the fool looks inside his own feelings, his own desires, and his own moral/spiritual notions for direction. So true understanding is unavailable to him.

23:9 *Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.*

23:9 tells us that there are some people (*stupid fools*) who we should not even speak to in the sense of trying to help them understand sound thinking. The reason is not that the fool won't understand what we are saying, it's that he despises wisdom itself. So our words will only be despised. For example, this is the biggest problem with democracy. The vote of a fool who despises wisdom can vote, and his vote counts as much as that of the wise.

24:7 *Wisdom is too exalted for a fool, He does not open his mouth in the gate.*

In 24:7 the word for *fool* is the *evil fool*. The city gate is where all the social decisions were made (Genesis 34:20-24; Deuteronomy 22:15; 25:7; Ruth 4:1ff; Esther 4:6-8). These decisions are about making reasonable judgments in every day matters. They involves looking at things the way they actually are and coming to logical decisions. This is impossible for the fool because he lives in a world of chaos and short-term feelings with unreasonable dreams. Wisdom is too high for him.

26:1 *Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool.*

26:1 tells us that it is inappropriate to honor a fool. The word for fool is the *stupid fool* and the word for *honor* is קָבוֹד *kabod*, better translated *glory*. Glory is making value known. We can think of it in capitalistic terms as advertising. The point is, we should not advertise the fool because it gives the impression that his foolishness is unimportant.

An illustration would be an award ceremony which honors talented actors who are immoral fools. I think Solomon would say, “The whole point is to not honor a fool when you are tempted to do so.” A fool may be someone who has excelled at immorality, such as a group of guys honoring one another for their sexual exploits. But it could also be a legitimately talented person who should not be honored because they are a fool. When a fool is awarded, either the award is discredited or the foolishness is overlooked, thus encouraging the idea that it is okay to be foolish if you are creative enough to be talented.

27:22 *Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, Yet his foolishness will not depart from him.*

27:22 uses the word for an *evil fool*. Solomon sees no possibility of his rehabilitation because no one can change someone else's spiritual character. As mentioned above, the fool is not an animal who can be retrained. His foolishness comes from his spiritual nature, which Solomon sees as incurable. This is the usual Old Testament approach to evil fools. There are conversions (such as the people of Nineveh—Jonah 3:7-10 and King Manasseh—2 Chronicles 33:10-13). But they are rare and unexpected.

Proverbs 27:22 would still describe the person in our age who has not received Christ. The Christian has the advantage of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), the guiding of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14), and the capacity to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). But the Holy Spirit can be resisted (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). When a believer quenches the work of the Holy Spirit, he is no more correctable than the fool of Proverbs 27:22.

28:26 *He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.*

The fool here is the *stupid fool*. His problem is he trusts his own heart. Interestingly, this is very common advice given in our culture today. In the movie series *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker is told to trust his feelings as a way to tune into *The Force*. In everything from romance to religion, we are told to trust our feelings. The idea is, we are spiritually morally independent creatures who can decide for ourselves what is right. And that, by definition, is right as long as it does not hurt anyone else (the only restriction on your freedom is that it ends at my nose).

Solomon says that will make you into a fool because instead of learning wisdom, the way things actually are in the real world, you make decisions based on your feeling and desires. Unlike our postmodern thinkers, Solomon believes in a

definition of **truth**, which describes **the way things actually are**. Truth for Solomon is not an individual, subjective, relative thing, but a general, objective, absolute thing.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your daughter is taking a class in college where the professor constantly mocks Christianity. What should you tell her?

- A. The professor is a fool, and fools cannot be convinced of sound wisdom. Take a stand for truth but expect persecution.
- B. Challenge the professor, maybe you will convince him or some of the others in the class.
- C. Don't say anything. Just parrot back on tests what he wants to hear, and don't take any more of his classes.

A is correct. The professor is a fool and fools cannot be convinced. She should take a stand for the truth of the Word of God, not Christianity, per se. Many atrocities were committed in the name of Christianity. She should take a stand for the truth because it honors God. But she should expect to be persecuted for it by both the professor and others in the class. B is incorrect because it assumes fools can be convinced of the truth. The professor is a fool, but he has the pulpit for his class, which usually means a majority of his class will support his views and his right to teach them. Those people will not be convinced and will use what you say to make you look foolish. Convincing fools is never a good idea. C is incorrect because we should stand up for the truth. Just understand the reason for it is because it honors God, not because it will convince a fool of his foolishness.

#3 Family Relationships

10:1; 11:21; 11:29; 13:1; 13:22; 13:24; 15:20; 17:6; 17:21; 17:25; 19:13; 19:26; 20:7; 20:20; 21:12; 22:6; 22:15; 23:13; 23:14; 23:15; 23:16; 23:22; 23:23; 23:24; 23:25; 24:3; 24:4; 27:8; 27:11; 28:7; 28:24; 29:3; 29:15; 29:17

In Proverbs, and throughout the Bible, parents have the responsibility for raising their children, but they are not responsible for the character of their children.

When there are problems, responsible people ask: “What did I do wrong? What sin did I commit? What mistake did I make?” If we committed sins, we should repent (1 John 1:9). If we made mistakes, we should learn and change. But just because things are difficult does not mean we sinned or made mistakes. There are two other huge factors—the sovereignty of God (not emphasized in Proverbs) and the character of other people (a major emphasis in Proverbs).

Parents have responsibilities and children have responsibilities, but neither are responsible for the character of the other. What the parent does affects the growth of the child, and what the child does affects the life of the parent. But each one is only responsible for his own character.

Bad parents can have good children, and good parents can have bad children. Consider statements like: *a foolish son is a grief to his mother* (10:1). Only a good mother would be grieved by a foolish son. Grief because of badness, assumes goodness on the part of the one who is grieving (Ephesians 4:30; 2 Peter 2:8).

Many claim the reason some of the good kings of Israel and Judah had bad sons is because they didn't take time to parent them. Maybe. But the Bible never says that. For example, Solomon went to great lengths to train his son with less than desirable results. David is hailed by God as the model king. It even seems that he taught his children (Proverbs 4:3-4). But many of his children did not have his godly character.

What about passages which tie parental responsibility to the child's conduct? For example, Proverbs 22:6 says: *Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.* We shall look closely at this proverb later, but here notice that the premise to *Train up a child in the way he should go* does not assume that a parent is always able to do that. There is no guarantee such training is possible for all children. It is actually only possible for children willing to accept the training. **Proverbs gives us principles but not promises.** For example, while diligence is essential for prosperity, diligence does not guarantee prosperity.

The same is true in the New Testament. A parent is responsible for the discipline and instruction of his child, but he is not responsible for his child's character. A command like Ephesians 6:4, *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord,* tells us how fathers are to *bring them up*. It does not say the father is responsible for the outcome or their character.

Proverbs describes the naïve, the fool, the evil man, as well as the wise, the prudent, and the righteous man. But all these have one thing in common. They are all personally responsible for who they are. A person's character is ultimately the responsibility of each individual.

In Ezekiel 18:20, we read: *The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.* Here God clears up an old idea that parents are held responsible for the sins of their children. Essentially, God says, "Not so. Each one's sins *will be upon himself.*"

1 Timothy 3:4-5 reads, *He [the elder or overseer] must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?).* Many say this means that a church elder is to be evaluated by the character of his children. But that is not at all what the passage says. It says an elder should be evaluated by how he **manages** his children, how he controls them, not how they "turn out." Their outcome depends on lots of things, including their character not just their management. In the same way, good elders are not those who guarantee a good character for all those in the church. They are only those who **manage** the goodness and badness of the people under their care (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Let's say you own and/or manage a small business. Are you responsible for the morality of the people in your business? Most would answer, "Yes." But if one of your employees gets a divorce, or turns out to be a homosexual, is that your responsibility? Most would say, "No, not if it doesn't affect the management of the business." And that's true because you can be responsible for managing your business, not determining the character of your employees.

But what if the child refuses to come *under control with all dignity*. We might ask the question: "What should good Christian overseers do in a local church situation if someone in the church is continually unrepentantly, living in an obviously sinful manner and refuses to change?" Clearly, they should deal with it according to passages like Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; and Galatians 6:1. But the overseer's qualifications are based on what they do, not on what the sinner is doing. Otherwise, we would disqualify Jesus because of Judas and Paul because of those who left him for the world.

There are many ways to manage sin. The particulars will vary with the child and the sin. Some parents might refuse to attend the wedding of a child entering an unbiblical marriage. Some might refuse to pay college tuition for a child living with his girlfriend or her boyfriend. Some might refuse to allow a child to bring their homosexual partner to family functions. But verbally communicating where you stand is not management. Management of sinners requires actual life style change. You cannot simply state your objections verbally and say, "Well, they know where I stand." Management affects real life activities.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Christian parents have a 23-year-old son who claims to be a Christian, and he is a practicing homosexual. He is living on his own with a homosexual partner. He wants to be considered part of the family. What should the parents do? [Note that the Bible prohibits homosexuality in the following passages: Genesis 19:4-7; Leviticus 18:22; 20:23; Judges 19:22; Matthew 19:4-5; Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:10.]

- A. They should sit down with their son and explain the biblical passages on homosexuality, allowing their son to give his position and respond to their position.
- B. They should allow their son to be part of family functions, but only as long as he does not bring his homosexual partner with him.
- C. They should have regular discussions with their son and his homosexual friends, using the biblical passages prohibiting homosexuality as a foundation.

B is correct because it is the only response that includes the parents taking some action against homosexuality as an abomination to God. There are many possible stances that could be taken, and the right approach would depend upon the particulars of the situation. But some action must be taken. And since the parents cannot prevent the homosexual practices of their son, they must think about what **they** should do, not what their son should do. In this case, they decided to not allow their son to display his homosexuality before the family. This says to the rest of the family that what God says matters. **A** and **C** are incorrect because no action is taken. Of course, it is essential to have such discussions, but only in the context of taking some physical action which makes a statement to their son, their other children, and to God.

Proverbs Discussing the Responsibility of Parents

11:21 *Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished, But the descendants of the righteous will be delivered.*

The **first** responsibility of a parent is to **be righteous themselves**. The first phrase of this proverb guarantees the punishment of the evil man. The KJV translates this more literally: *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished*. The second phrase has just 3 Hebrew words: תָּרַע צְדִיקִים נִמְלֵט, *the seed, of the righteous, will escape*. Once again, proverbs are principles not promises. This is not a guarantee that the children of the righteous will escape punishment, but it is more likely. The point is, the children of godly parents are much more likely to be godly. So the best thing we can do for our children is to pursue righteousness ourselves.

10:1 *The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.*

11:29 *He who troubles his own house will inherit wind, And the foolish will be servant to the wisehearted.*

23:22 *Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.*

A **second** responsibility of a parent is to **stay married to their child's mother or father, and to treat them well**.

Parenting in Proverbs (and everywhere in the Bible) is a married thing not a single, or divorced, or remarried thing. It is always presented as a work of two married parents with the father having the primary responsibility. Single parenting is not a possibility. It simply does not exist. Singles can disciple their children, but not parent them. Discipleship involves winning the right to be heard and giving advice. Parenting involves giving directives and enforcing those directives.

All mothers and fathers should attempt to disciple their children. But the impact of parenting is unique and irreplaceable. A biological parent, married to his child's mother or father, treating their spouse in a godly manner (not being one who *troubles his own house*) has a unique, powerful, impact on a child's development. It is almost frightening how much a child will look up to such a parent.

If you are not married to your child's mother or father, do not try to parent your child! They will only rebel. Small children can, of course, be forced into obedience, but it will not last. The older child (which is the focus of Proverbs) is saying: "If you want to parent me, stay married to my mother or father, and treat them well." Functionally, there is no such thing as a "single parent." It's a contradiction in terms the liberal community wants you to believe because it doesn't believe in sin.

If you are a single, or remarried, mother or father, make every effort to **disciple** your child. The difference is that parents can set specific parameters for their children's activities. They can, as it were, draw a line in the sand and say: "In our family we will not violate this standard." Discipleship is different in that it wins the right to be heard, then offers counsel which becomes convincing as it proves to be true over time. If you attempt to disciple your child, he will be less likely to rebel, and more likely to follow Christ.

17:21 *He who sires a fool does so to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy.*

24:3, 4 *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.*

A **third** responsibility of a parent is to **build a household based on wisdom, understanding, and knowledge**. As discussed in the "Introduction," wisdom is defined with understanding and knowledge. Wisdom is the skill of living life, understanding how things usually are most of the time. This requires real objective knowledge. So a wise household is not based on luck, or chance, or religious mysticism. It is based on real things, which usually happen, most of the time, in the real physical world. This doesn't just fill the house with riches (a mafia family might do that). It fills the house with *pleasant* riches, those which are not just luxurious but *precious*.

13:24 *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*

22:15 *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.*

23:13, 14 *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.*

A **fourth** responsibility of a parent is to **discipline his children**. There are two significant issues here. The first is to understand the nature of discipline. And the second is to understand the role of spanking – *the rod of discipline*.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

You have repeatedly told your 15-year-old daughter not to watch a certain video. She agrees. Now you find out she has been watching it at a friend's house. You are angry because she disobeyed and lied to you about it. What should you do?

- A. You should let your wife or someone else deal with it because you are angry and would say things you would regret.
- B. You should deal with it yourself immediately, just don't let your anger be expressed in a quick temper.
- C. You should wait three days and then deal with it yourself as a serious offense causing you to take certain actions.

C is correct. Every situation looks different after three days. Then your anger can be put in perspective and you can think through what you are going to do. Since your daughter has willfully, knowingly, disobeyed you, the question is no longer what should she do but what should you do. The specific response will vary with each child, but three days will give you a chance to think that through, talk it over with your spouse and other mature Christians, and come to a wise decision. Just make sure you **do** something not just say things. A is incorrect. This is something you should not delegate. It's your move. B would be good advice for a young child because small children don't tend to think back three days, and you are going to be thinking primarily about what **they** should do. But this is a 15-year-old, and the main issue is not what your daughter should do, that has already been made clear. The question is what are **you** going to do.

The Nature of Discipline

Discipline, don't punish. First of all, we need to understand that parents are called upon to discipline their children, not punish them. Here are some dictionary definitions.

- Punishment is *the infliction or imposition of a penalty as retaliation for an offense.*
- Discipline is *the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior.*

So parents should never punish their children but they should always discipline their children. Punishment is paying back a person for what they have done. It is an attempt to balance the scales of justice. Discipline has nothing to do with justice or pay back. Discipline is about getting someone who has wandered off the path back on the path, or keeping them on the path. It is corrective not punitive.

We should never punish anybody. Ultimately, punishment is up to God. On earth it has been delegated to territorial governments. Peter said: *Submit yourselves... to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers* (1 Peter 2:13-14; see also Romans 13:1-3 and Titus 3:1). Governments should not attempt to discipline people, and other civil institutions (like families) should not attempt to punish people.

Discipline actions, not motives. All the discipline in Proverbs is aimed at actions. Motives are up to God to determine (Proverbs 16:2; 1 Corinthians 4:5). We don't even necessarily know our own motives. We must not discipline our children for what we think they intended to do, but for what they did.

Discipline does not always require an explanation. If you can't explain to a teenager why he is being disciplined, your discipline is probably not justified. But sometimes a small child will have to settle for an understanding that this is simply what his parents consider unacceptable behavior.

Discipline is for disobeying God, not just disobeying you. It is legitimate to discipline a child for disobeying the Word of God (lying, cheating, destroying someone else's property, selfishness, etc.), even if you have not specifically forbidden that activity. Your child should follow your rules, but (1) don't have too many extra biblical rules and (2) your rules should be negotiable. God's are not.

The Role of Spanking

The second issue is that of spanking a child. [I shall equate *the rod* with physical spanking.] Here is what I understand about spanking:

1. Spanking should be part of your disciplinary process. If you do not spank at all, you will not be able to deal with some disciplinary issues. Most children some of the time, and some children most of the time, respond to spankings. If you refuse to spank your child, you will probably be neglecting some aspect of his development.
2. Some issues require spanking because spanking can force a child to abandon his own value system (which is usually based on selfishness). Spankings are helpful when a child doesn't get it. When he doesn't understand right and wrong, he can understand pain.
3. Spanking should not be your only disciplinary tool. In Proverbs, children were disciplined with instruction, restriction of activities, and scolding. Also *the rod* of correction in Proverbs is sometimes metaphorical for discipline in general. And some children seem to have a cast iron bottom, and spankings are not very effective.

- Things like age, sex, physical condition, and the personality of the child determine the effectiveness of spankings. The parent who just spanks a child for every offense is probably not communicating very effectively.
4. Spanking is necessary because children are not born morally neutral. They are born sinful and naïve. And sometimes children are naïve about what is sinful. Sin is independence from God. The reason liberals don't believe in spanking is because they don't believe in sin. They believe each child should be morally independent. But God wants children to be morally dependent. They are to learn His standard of goodness. When they are not capable of discerning good and evil, the only way to keep them on the path is by injecting pain when they leave the path.
 5. Never spank a child because you are angry, and never refuse to spank a child because you are angry. The question is: "Will spanking be effective in discipline?" In most cases, you are probably angry, but that must not motivate your spanking nor prevent it.
 6. When spanking produces fear, it ties the immature child to their parent's morality. It is the fear of God that ultimately motivates us away from our independence from God to dependence on God. The love of God only motivates us to follow Him when we agree with Him. Fear motivates those without understanding or agreement to conform to a different standard. Therefore, spanking can serve to conform a child to his parent's moral standard, even when he wishes to be independent from it because he doesn't understand or accept it. So spanking can produce one of the strongest bonds between parents and their children.

***Situation Question:* WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.**

Your daughter told you she was spending the night with a girlfriend, but they went to a rock concert you consider immoral and had previously forbid her to attend. What should you tell her?

- A. You are grounded because you intentionally spent the night with your friend in order to go to that concert.
- B. You are grounded because you went to a rock concert I clearly forbid you to attend.
- C. You are grounded because you lied to me, deceiving me about why you wanted to spend the night with your friend.

B is correct. The discipline should be because of forbidden action. The only clear issue is attending an activity her parents forbid her to attend. **A** and **C** both involve judging motives. You do not know what her intentions were. What she intended to do is usually unclear, it may even be unclear to your daughter. Never discipline motives. What someone intended is a motive.

22:6 *Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

The **fifth** responsibility of a parent is to **train his children**. The Hebrew text of the first phrase of this verse is quite difficult. Literally it reads: הִנֵּה לְנַעַר עַל-פִּי דְרָכָיו *train (or dedicate) a youth (or young man) over his mouth way (or manner)*. Many expositors suggest that this phrase should be translated: *Train up a child according to his own way or according to the way which is his*, instead of the way it is translated in both the NASB and the KJV (*in the way he should go*). The point they are making is that each child is unique and should be trained up according to his own way.

But this idea of individual training according to his own way is not found elsewhere in Proverbs and, although it is not contradictory, it is not Solomon's point in Proverbs. Even if we were to translate it *according to his own way*, we would understand, in the context of the whole of the book, that Solomon would be defining *his own way* as the right way, the wise way, the righteous way, not his own individual way.

The significant thing here is to notice that parents are not just to discipline a child but to train him. This reminds us of Deuteronomy 6:6-7: *These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.*

17:6 *Grandchildren are the crown of old men, And the glory of sons is their fathers*

The **sixth** responsibility of a parent is to **think in terms of an extended family**. The first phrase reads: עֲטֹרַת זְקֵנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים *The crown of elders is sons of sons*. The interesting thing here is Solomon is writing this to his son, whose age is between puberty and marriage. The goal of a young man should include being an elder of an extended family. But he will only do that if he sees it as a valuable thing. And he is most likely to see it as valuable when it is modeled in his own family.

13:22 *A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.*

The **seventh** responsibility of a parent is to **leave an inheritance for the next generation**. There used to be a popular bumper sticker which read: "I am spending my children's inheritance." Solomon would not find that amusing. It smacks of carelessness and irresponsibility. Our responsibility to our children is not over when we are older and they are on their own. We should leave behind something which can help them financially.

Wealth, be it small or large, should flow through the generations. It is not something any generation should use up or spend on themselves. The amount we should pass on is dependent on our life situation and how much God has given us. But there is no biblical rule which says each child should start from scratch. A child is to be responsible for what he has but not necessarily to start over. Some children are born on third base. So be it. They don't need to learn how to get to first base. They need to be responsible for how to act on third base.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Certain parents have 4 older children. Three have godly marriages and one is in prison for multiple repeated crimes.

- A. The parents are responsible for the outcome of all 4 children.
- B. The parents are not responsible for the outcome of any of their children.
- C. The parents are not responsible for outcome of the child in prison, because the others turned out well.

B is correct. The outcome of a child depends on many factors, but one of them is the child's character. And only the child himself can be responsible for that. Since no one can be responsible for the character of another, and a child's outcome includes his character, the parents cannot be responsible for the outcome of any of their children. **A** is incorrect because of the reason just given. **C** is incorrect because it is an argument based upon the good children. It is true (as with the other children) that the parents are not responsible for the outcome of the child in prison. But it is not because the others turned out well, it's because character is a factor in how a child turns out.

Proverbs Discussing the Responsibility of Children

27:11 *Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, That I may reply to him who reproaches me.*

The **first** responsibility of a child is to **pursue wisdom**. This is the most basic theme in Proverbs, and it is ultimately up to the child to pursue it. When a child becomes wise, he learns the way things usually are most of the time, and lives in accordance with that. This has two effects mentioned here. One, it makes his father's heart glad, and two, it helps his father in his social interactions.

20:20 *He who curses his father or his mother, His lamp will go out in time of darkness.*

The **second** responsibility is to **verbally honor his parents**. The first Hebrew word of this proverb is the main verb of the sentence. It comes from the root word *qalal*, *to be slight, swift, or trifling*. The form here is accurately translated *curses* but the idea is *to make light of or slight one's parents*. The second half of the phrase is more difficult to interpret. Literally it says: *the lamp of the pupil of his eye will be put out with darkness*. This is probably a warning that such a son will die (light is a common figure for life – Job 3:20; Proverbs 13:9) when trouble comes.

23:22 *Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old*

The **third** responsibility of a child is to **pay attention to their biological parents all their life**. With broken homes dominating our world today, there are many qualifications which will come to everyone's minds. Foolish parents, divorced parents, and remarried parents all make for unique situations. Also, meddling parents should not be allowed to interfere with a child's marriage and the establishment of his own family.

But Solomon is looking at this from the standpoint of biblical families. When your parents stay married and are basically trying to follow God's Word, then listen to them, and don't despise them, even when they are old.

#4 Prosperity

10:2; 10:3; 10:15; 10:22; 10:24; 10:25; 10:30; 11:4; 11:5; 11:6; 11:28; 12:12; 13:7; 13:8; 13:25; 14:20; 14:21; 14:24; 16:8; 17:18; 18:11; 18:23; 19:1; 19:4; 19:7; 19:10; 20:16; 20:21; 21:5; 21:14; 21:20; 21:22; 22:1; 22:7; 22:16; 22:22; 22:23; 22:26; 22:27; 23:1; 23:2; 23:3; 23:4; 23:5; 23:6; 23:7; 23:8; 25:16; 27:7; 27:23-27; 28:3; 28:6; 28:8; 28:11; 28:20; 28:22

Financial/material prosperity in Proverbs is not seen as coming from God as a gift or a blessing. Nor is it seen as coming by chance, or luck. Prosperity in Proverbs comes from wisdom, diligent effort, and righteous living. Material prosperity is described as valuable, useful, and earthly. Its limitations are (1) when it is obtained or used without moral integrity or (2) thought of as valuable when facing the judgment of God.

Eight Principles from Proverbs about Prosperity

10:2 *Ill-gotten gains do not profit, But righteousness delivers from death.*

16:8 *Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.*

22:1 *A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.*

22:16 *He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself Or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.*

(1) Prosperity is only valuable when it is obtained and used with righteousness. The first phrase of 10:2 reads: לֹא־רוּחַ־טוֹב לְאִזְעִילוֹ אוֹצְרוֹתָא, *There is no profit in the treasure of wickedness.* It is clear that Solomon believes in a profit motive. So did Jesus (Luke 12:33) and the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 13:1). But, unlike Jesus and Paul, Solomon's profit motive was for earthly prosperity. What they share, however, is the concept that profit must be connected to the righteousness of God. Any other prosperity is not profitable.

Nevertheless, personal profit is the real objective. Personal profit is what every autonomous creature will seek. God made us that way and expects us to do what is in our own best interest. But prosperity is only in our best interest when it is defined by God. Therefore, 16:8 informs us that it is not the amount of material prosperity which is our first concern, but the righteous context in which it is obtained and used.

10:15 *The rich man's wealth is his fortress, The ruin of the poor is their poverty.*

13:8 *The ransom of a man's life is his wealth, But the poor hears no rebuke.*

14:20 *The poor is hated even by his neighbor, But those who love the rich are many.*

14:24 *The crown of the wise is their riches, But the folly of fools is foolishness.*

(2) Prosperity serves as a person's material foundation and protection. In these verses, financial prosperity is called a man's fortress, a ransom for his life, a cause for many to love him, and a crown of his wisdom. It is clear that Solomon sees material prosperity as a valuable thing. It protects him, bails him out of many problems, makes his social life easier, and is a reward for his wisdom. The obvious implication is that a young man should pursue material prosperity.

11:28 *He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.*

23:4, 5 *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.*

(3) Prosperity should not be trusted as a person's foundation or protection. Along with an encouragement to seek material prosperity, Solomon warns his son not to trust in his riches. Material prosperity should not lead to materialism. The perspective in Proverbs is that prosperity is good as far as it goes. It can be very helpful in daily life, but it is no replacement for righteousness, and it is of no value without righteousness. It will be helpful in dealing with people, but it will not impress God. So Solomon recognizes the value of prosperity, but discourages the pursuit of wealth.

11:4 *Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.*

(4) Prosperity will be of no value in dealing with the judgment of God. Solomon is not here thinking about eternal judgment. The point he is making is: if God is angry with you, He will not be impressed by, or appeased by, your material prosperity. He may not take your wealth, He may take your life while you are still wealthy. Applying this to an eternal perspective, it says your earthly prosperity will not help you when you face God in judgment. Notice again that a true profit motive is important. The reason not to pursue riches without righteousness is, it will not be profitable.

18:11 *A rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own imagination.*
18:23 *The poor man utters supplications, But the rich man answers roughly.*

(5) Prosperity tends to give us a false sense of pride. One of the dangers of material prosperity is, it tends to make us think more of ourselves than we should. It lets our imagination tell us we are better and more capable than we actually are. We tend to disregard the input of the poor. The rich will usually support the poor in some way. Most wealthy people are generous. But many do not regard the poor as having valid wisdom, or relevant things to say. They answer the poor roughly.

21:5 *The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.*
21:20 *There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up.*
23:4 *Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it ...*

(6) Prosperity should not be pursued. We should pursue work, not wealth. Solomon stresses diligence, wisdom, and responsibility in the context of holiness as the means of a stable life situation. When we pursue wealth as a goal, we tend to neglect virtues and think "The end justifies the means." We will have a tendency to ignore, or justify, sin when it helps us reach our goals to obtain wealth.

22:7 *The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower becomes the lender's slave.*
22:26 *Do not be among those who give pledges, Among those who become guarantors for debts.*
22:27 *If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take your bed from under you?*

(7) Prosperity obtained by borrowing will always make you a slave of the lender. Lending money in the Scripture was only approved in the context of helping the poor. The borrower was supposed to consider himself responsible to pay it back, but the lender was to consider it a gift (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:8; Luke 6:34-35). Borrowing and lending were never approved of in the context of trying to gain in wealth. Whenever you borrow to gain wealth, you will fill your life with tension because you become a slave of the lender. If you guarantee such a debt, you join the borrower in his slavery.

25:16 *Have you found honey? Eat only what you need, That you not have it in excess and vomit it.*
27:23-27 *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 for 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.*

(8) Prosperity should not result in luxury. Solomon says if you have somehow (through your work, chance events, or an inheritance) become prosperous, live modestly. Live in such a way that your family and those for whom you are responsible have their daily needs met. Pay attention to your wealth, but don't live in luxury.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

You are fairly wealthy and about to retire as president of a small, but profitable, business. Your 28-year-old unmarried son wants to take your place and run the business. What should you tell him?

- A. You cannot run the business until you have spent time working your way up doing the manual labor of the company.
- B. You can run the business, but you cannot start out receiving a large salary.
- C. You can run the business, and make a considerable amount of money, but don't use it to live in luxury.

C is correct. There is nothing wrong with your son stepping into your role if he is qualified for the job. There is also nothing wrong with him making lots of money. But using the money to live in luxury is a sin. Once your son starts buying a newer and better car or house, fancy clothes, and expensive toys, there is no turning back. Very few people decrease the luxury of their lifestyle without being forced to. **A** is incorrect because it assumes the son should not start on third base. He must learn the regular work of the business first. But there is no reason for that. What he needs is a good work ethic, a humble attitude, and a respect for the other workers in the corporation. He need not start at first base, what he needs is to learn to do an excellent job at third base. **B** is incorrect because it assumes a young person should not make a lot of money, or that money will corrupt him. Money is not the problem, living in luxury is the problem. The real challenge is to help your son realize that one should not lead to the other.

#5 The Significance of Our Words

10:6; 10:10; 10:11; 10:13; 10:14; 10:18; 10:19; 10:20; 10:21; 10:31; 10:32; 11:9; 11:13; 12:6; 12:13; 12:14; 12:16; 12:18; 12:19; 12:23; 13:2; 13:3; 14:3; 15:1; 15:2; 15:4; 15:7; 15:26; 15:28; 16:13; 16:21; 16:23; 16:24; 16:27; 16:28; 17:7; 17:20; 17:27; 17:28; 18:4; 18:8; 18:20; 18:21; 19:28; 20:15; 20:19; 21:23; 25:15; 29:20

Solomon sees great significance in what we say. His proverbs do not deal with our motives or our spiritual nature or even our thoughts, per se. Proverbs are not so much about our deepest thoughts, but how they are expressed. Proverbs discuss how life is lived. And one of the most dominating effects of how we live is what we say. Solomon tells his son that what we say has an impact which cannot be ignored. (See also Psalms 34:12-13; James 3:8; 1 Peter 3:10.)

Five Principles from Proverbs about Talking:

10:11 *The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.*
17:20 *He who has a crooked mind finds no good, And he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.*

(1) Our character is displayed by the way we talk. There is a direct connection between who we are and what we say. Our words are the fruit of our personal, moral, spiritual character. Jesus said: *So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit* (Matthew 7:17-18).

12:13 *An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will escape from trouble.*
12:14 *A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, And the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.*
12:19 *Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment.*
18:21 *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.*

(2) Our quality of life is impacted by the way we talk. The way we speak not only reveals who we are, it ensnares us in trouble, or helps us escape from trouble. Speaking righteously satisfies us and establishes our future. The tongue is a very dangerous thing, but Solomon does not conclude that we should therefore hate or avoid the use of our tongue. He says *those who love it will eat its fruit.*

15:1 *A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.*
15:2 *The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly.*
16:24 *Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

(3) The words of the wise make truth acceptable. A wise man is not just one who knows the truth but one who can convince people of the truth. He knows how to give a gentle answer (yelling is never appropriate). He knows how to soothe people's souls with pleasant words without compromising the truth.

10:19 *When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.*
11:13 *He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.*
13:3 *The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.*
15:28 *The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.*
16:23 *The heart of the wise instructs his mouth And adds persuasiveness to his lips.*
17:27 *He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.*
17:28 *Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.*

(4) A righteous person will edit his speech. A wise man does not always say what he thinks. He is able to restrain his lips, conceal matters that don't need to be said, and ponder his thoughts without speaking. First, he allows his heart to instruct his mouth, and then he considers how to be persuasive in what he says. Then and only then does he speak.

12:18 *There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.*
16:28 *A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.*
20:15 *There is gold, and an abundance of jewels; But the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing.*

(5) Our speech determines our ministry. Ministry in the New Testament is serving people with eternal values in mind. Solomon does not have eternity in mind, except in the general sense of afterlife judgment. Ministry for Solomon is serving people living on the land in Israel in the context of the fear of God. But for both Solomon and us, the way we use our tongue will determine the impact of our ministry.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your 18-year-old son uses a lot of “trash talk” and blasphemy, especially when he is angry. What should you tell him?

- A. “Your bad language is a habit, which will be etched in your brain, and it will ultimately destroy you. You think can stop any time, but you can’t. When those words come to mind edit them out before you say them.”
- B. “Letting your anger out with some form of rage is better than bottling it up inside until it explodes. But you must find a way to express your rage without ‘trash talk’ and blasphemy.”
- C. “Your real problem is your anger. Outbursts of anger are never good. You must learn to control your anger.”

A is correct. Your son is developing a bad habit. It’s as addictive as alcohol or drugs, and possibly harder to break. Bad language gets entrenched on your brain. He cannot avoid anger. Sometimes anger is the appropriate response. But “trash talk” and blasphemy are never appropriate and should always be edited out of our speech. B is incorrect. This is the psychologist’s answer. But they are wrong because they do not believe in moral evil. When you express yourself with uncontrolled outbursts of anger, you allow your sin nature to express itself. Such expressions are evil and only cultivate our ability to express evil. C is incorrect because anger itself is not the problem. We should be angry about sin and express that anger. But we should not express it with uncontrolled outbursts of foul language.

#6 The Earthly Impact of a Righteous People

10:7; 10:16; 11:7; 11:10; 11:11; 11:18-19; 11:31; 12:7; 12:8; 12:9; 12:21; 13:14; 13:15; 14:11; 14:34; 14:35; 15:6; 15:24; 16:7; 16:31; 17:11; 19:12; 25:25; 27:23-27; 28:10; 28:18; 29:16

10:16 *The wages of the righteous is life, The income of the wicked, punishment.*

11:10 *When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, And when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting.*

11:31 *If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, How much more the wicked and the sinner!*

12:21 *No harm befalls the righteous, But the wicked are filled with trouble.*

16:7 *When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.*

28:18 *He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, But he who is crooked will fall all at once.*

Solomon’s proverbs repeatedly declare that both the righteous and the wicked will reap the consequences of their actions on earth. But in some proverbs he also declares that the general population of the earth will be better off because of the righteous. Actually, the prosperity of the righteous results in rejoicing for his whole city.

The more prosperous people there are in a city (or country), the better off that city is economically. That’s because wealthy people spend their money on things which create jobs. But the character of those wealthy people impacts the nature of those jobs. A wealthy mafia boss will create jobs which demoralize a city. A wealthy man of God (like Job, Abraham, Joseph, David, and Solomon) creates wholesome jobs which lift the city up morally, and do so for a longer time.

This has been the case all through history. But there is one exception, and that is the last world empire before the Second Coming of Christ. The empire of the Antichrist, as described in Revelation 18, will be both prosperous and immoral. And the immorality will aid the prosperity. We read: *For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality* (Revelation 18:3). The immoral prosperity of the Antichrist’s system will continue until it is suddenly ended by Christ at His Second Advent. We seem to be headed in that direction faster than at any previous time in history.

#7 The Value of Being Teachable

10:8; 10:17; 12:15; 13:16; 17:10; 18:13; 19:2; 19:25; 21:11; 21:28; 29:1; 29:19; 29:21

Here are three observations:

10:17 *He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, But he who ignores reproof goes astray.*

13:16 *Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool displays folly.*

21:28 *A false witness will perish, But the man who listens to the truth will speak forever.*

(1) **Being teachable is a valuable thing, but only in the context of discretion and knowledge.** A fool may be teachable in the sense of being open to the foolishness of his subculture. So there is value in being teachable in the ways of wisdom and righteousness.

12:15 *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.*

18:13 *He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.*

(2) **A person will not be teachable when they are right in their own eyes.** When people see themselves as right, they will give an answer before they hear. They are not open to knowledge because for them “if it’s new, it’s not true, and if it is true, it is not new.”

17:10 *A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.*

19:25 *Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, But reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge.*

29:21 *He who pampers his slave from childhood Will in the end find him to be a son.*

(3) **Those who are teachable will also have understanding.** It is as Jesus said: *For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away* (Matthew 25:29). Those who have understanding will receive more understanding, and fools will lose what little understanding they have.

But understanding is also an attitude, so it is more a matter of one’s discretion than one’s achievement. And understanding is an attitude that can best be instilled in a person over time with long-term exposure—like a slave from childhood.

#8 The Value of Work, and the Sin of Laziness

10:4; 10:5; 10:26; 12:11; 12:24; 12:27; 13:4; 13:11; 14:4; 14:23; 15:19; 16:26; 18:9; 19:15; 19:24; 20:4; 20:11; 20:13; 21:25; 22:13; 22:29; 24:27; 24:30; 24:31; 24:32; 24:33; 24:34; 26:13; 26:14-15; 26:16, 27:18; 28:19

Throughout Proverbs, Solomon includes statements about the value of work and the sin of laziness. Work is seen as productive and responsible activity because it provides riches and security. Work is not seen as valuable in itself (although it is) but only for what it produces. But that is how all of Proverbs are presented. **Virtue is presented as having pragmatic value.** Here are a few specific points Solomon makes about work.

Solomon repeatedly tells us of the value of hard work. But how can a person be motivated to do that hard work? Solomon only has some general suggestions for that:

(1) Look toward future manhood where you reap the benefits of hard work.

(2) Focus on the fear of God, and you will work hard simply because it pleases God.

(3) You will be respected in your city if you are a hard worker.

(4) Hard workers are born and raised with the value of work. So they don’t feel right if they are not working.

But we can be confident that *people who are diligent at their work have found a way to make their work interesting.*

Here are 5 thoughts from Proverbs on the value of work and the sin of laziness:

10:4 *Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.*

18:9 *He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys.*

13:4 *The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, But the soul of the diligent is made fat.*

(1) **The virtue of work is not just having a job but doing the job diligently.** For several years I disciplined a man who worked with an inner city ministry. He told me his biggest problem was not finding people a job, but keeping them on the job. He said: “They all want a job, but a lot of them don’t want to work. As soon as they get a little money in their pocket, they don’t show up.”

Many middle class people have good paying jobs they don’t do diligently. They do just what they can get by with. There is an old management expression which says: “You get what you inspect, not what you expect.” It is a sin to work *with a negligent hand.*

10:5 *He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.*

24:27 *Prepare your work outside And make it ready for yourself in the field; Afterwards, then, build your house.*

24:33-34 *“A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest,” Then your poverty will come as a robber And your want like an armed man.*

(2) The virtuous worker makes his work a priority. It has been said: “The difference between a job and a career is 20 hours a week.” If your only motive for work is to put in your 40 hours a week and collect a pay check, it is unlikely that you will ever be a diligent worker. The virtuous worker gathers in the off-season, prepares his field before his house, and realizes that untimely relaxation can ruin him. He actually is thinking about his work nearly all the time.

12:11 *He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues worthless things lacks sense.*

(3) Work is only valuable when it is pursuing something valuable. Most retired people say something like: “I don’t know how I ever found time to go to work.” For most of us, being busy is easy. But Solomon would only consider that work good if it is working at something valuable to the general public or your family’s well being. Being busy at a hobby or a personal interest, which has no general value, is not real work. The question is: “Is somebody willing to pay you to do that?” If not, then it is probably not valuable work.

14:4 *Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, But much revenue comes by the strength of the ox.*

14:23 *In all labor there is profit, But mere talk leads only to poverty.*

(4) Profitable work may be messy. Cleanliness is not always next to godliness. It can also be next to laziness. Don’t judge the value of work by how messy or physically dirty it is. Dirt may be a sign of progress. A professional chef once told me: “If you are worried about making a messy kitchen, you will never be a good cook.”

21:25 *The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, For his hands refuse to work.*

22:13 *The sluggard says, “There is a lion outside; I will be killed in the streets!”*

26:14 *As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed.*

26:15 *The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again.*

(5) Lazy people have no valuable desires. The desire of the sluggard is simply to do nothing. What makes a sluggard a sluggard is that he has no good desires. There is nothing worthwhile that motivates him to get out of bed in the morning. He is adrift in life and sees nothing desirable enough to work for. So he ends up working hard at coming up with excuses to not do productive work. This is almost an epidemic in America today.

The western capitalistic society has produced some people highly motivated to work, and a horde of people, mostly men, who are not motivated to do anything productive. The American dream is that everyone has the freedom to follow their desires. The problem with the American dream is that many men have no valuable, productive, desires (or no desires at all) that they want to pursue.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your son is in college, but he get poor grades and parties on weekends because he is lazy. What should you say and do?

- A. I should explain the value of work and study something like this section of Proverbs with him.
- B. I should stop giving him spending money and force him to get a job on weekends if he wants to stay in college.
- C. I should tell him that I will restrict his finances and restrict his activities until he desires something valuable to work for.

C is correct. The reason the son is lazy is because he has not found some reason to work. The fact that he has not found something he desires enough to work hard for is not necessarily his fault. It’s just the way things are. So his parents should not scold him for what he cannot help. But they should point out the problem and what they must do until he can find the motivation to make work interesting. **A** is incorrect because it is not sufficient to just explain things to him or study with him. Something must actually be done to manage his activities. **B** is incorrect because it is not helpful to limit his activities without reasoning with him about why you need to do that.

#9 Honesty and Integrity

10:9; 11:1; 11:3; 12:17; 12:19; 12:20; 12:22; 13:17; 14:5; 14:25; 15:27; 16:11; 17:8; 17:23; 19:5; 19:9; 20:10; 20:14; 20:17; 20:19; 20:23; 21:6; 24:28; 28:13; 28:21; 29:5; 29:24

This is clearly one of the major subjects throughout Scripture. Here are 5 principles from Proverbs on the subject of honesty and integrity.

10:9 *He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out.*

12:19 *Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment.*

29:5 *A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.*

(1) Honesty is connected to long term security. The honest man defines profit as a long-term thing. He is able to walk securely because he does not have to be constantly looking back over his shoulder to see if his dishonesty is going to be found out.

For example, if someone flatters you, they are saying things which are not true in order to gain some short-term advantage from you. If someone tells you something true about you, which is not pleasant to hear, they are interested in your long-term security. They don't have to keep wondering if you are going to find out the truth.

17:8 *A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner; Wherever he turns, he prospers.*

17:23 *A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom To pervert the ways of justice.*

28:21 *To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress*

(2) Dishonesty often has short-term advantages. The whole motivation for dishonesty is short-term gain. Bribes, lies, showing partiality, cheating, all offer short-term value. They mortgage the future for the present. Dishonest people either: (1) do not think about future consequences at all, (2) believe they will not be discovered, or (3) assume it will not matter. But every action has consequences (Galatians 6:7), and there are no secrets which will not be revealed (Luke 8:17).

11:1 *A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight.*

12:20 *Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy.*

(3) Outward expressions of honesty or dishonesty are connected to inner moral integrity. A false balance refers to dishonest traders who bought and sold goods with a balance scale, but had different weights for buying than for selling. It's a way to cheat your customer. But Solomon says it is not just an outward act. It is a moral sin. It's *an abomination to the LORD*. Deceit is not just an action, it is a condition of the heart. It's inner moral evil. The balance scale illustration also shows how God is interested in the details of our life and what we do.

15:27 *He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.*

(4) Dishonesty causes collateral damage. The consequences of sin are rarely restricted to the sinner. Usually, everybody close to a sinner suffers collateral damage from his sin. And the first to suffer from the sins of a sinner are usually those of his own family and extended family. What most dishonest people do not understand, or think about, is that their dishonesty is causing trouble for their own family. The same is true of nearly every sin.

28:13 *He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.*

(5) Confession results in compassion. We all sin. We have sin natures which will entice us to commit transgressions against God (Romans 3:10-23). Those sins will cause trouble for us and those close to us. But if we conceal our transgressions, which we usually do, then we will have some additional problems. (1) We will suffer the consequences of two sins. (2) We will destroy our long-term prosperity. (3) We will not find compassion either from our friends and family, or from God.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your son just got married and took a very lucrative position in the firm of his wife's father. But his father-in-law is asking him to misrepresent their company and its products. What advice should you give your son?

A. Your son should go to his father-in-law, explain the situation, and give him time to change.

- B. Your son should explain the situation to his wife and quit his job.
- C. Your son should tell his father-in-law and his wife that it would be better if his work was disconnected from the family.

B is correct. The son should make the decision to not be involved with an employer who requires him to be dishonest, even if it is his father-in-law. Then he should explain his decision to his wife. He should not look to his wife to make the decision, but she should be the first to know about it. **A** is incorrect because no decision should be based on the hope that someone will change. The father-in-law should be approached in such a manner by some of his spiritual elders in the manner of Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5, but that is not a job for your son. **C** is incorrect because it is also dishonest. Dishonesty is not the cure for dishonesty.

#10 Discipline

12:1; 15:5; 15:10; 15:31; 15:32; 16:22; 19:27; 20:30; 22:5; 22:10; 26:2; 26:3-5; 28:23

Here are 4 points Solomon makes about discipline:

- 12:1 *Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid.*
- 15:31 *He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof, Will dwell among the wise.*
- 15:32 *He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.*

(1) Discipline is essential for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Proverbs is about wisdom, especially for the older child. Wisdom understands how life works. It knows what usually happens most of the time. And, of course, one cannot understand without knowledge of the way things actually are. But we know all that already. The insight added by these verses is that discipline is the key to all that. Discipline is the *life-giving reproof* which allows us to acquire understanding. This means we will not tend to get wisdom on our own without discipline. Someone using something must force us to learn to make the right choices.

- 20:30 *Stripes that wound scour away evil, And strokes reach the innermost parts.*
- 22:5 *Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards himself will be far from them.*

(2) Discipline is essential for avoiding evil. The other reason we need discipline is we are morally evil. We have a sin nature which will pervert everything we do. Discipline will *scour away* at that sin nature. Discipline will never make us holy, but it will help keep us from being *perverse*.

- 26:3-5 *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.*

(3) Discipline will even help those without understanding do the right thing. Some people are fools and will always be fools. These people will not understand the truth about life so as to acquire wisdom. But discipline can even help them. Answers do not help because they have no understanding to comprehend them. But discipline can save them from disaster if it can be imposed.

- 22:10 *Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.*

(4) Discipline will ultimately drive a scoffer away. If the naïve is not willing to pursue wisdom, he will become a fool. If a fool can be disciplined, then he can be saved from life's disasters. But if a fool refuses to be disciplined, and there is no way to impose discipline on him, then he must be socially excluded. Because *strife and dishonor* will not cease wherever he goes. Others must be protected from him.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your 19-year-old son is in college, but he is getting poor grades, mainly because he is not motivated to study. He wants to drop out of college, but he has no idea what he wants to do. What advice should you give your son?

- A. Discipline yourself to stay in college and learn as much as you can until you find something you want to do.
- B. You can drop out of college, but be sure you have a job where you learn some significant trade.

- C. Stay in college because, if you don't, you will be wondering the rest of your life what difference it would have made.

A is correct, although all these answers are pretty good. A is the best because the son has no particular ambition. He needs to discipline himself to learn some general information until he finds a desire he wants to pursue. Most college graduates don't work in the area of their college major anyway. So he needs to learn from discipline until he can find a desire. B is not the best because he will be in no better place than he is in college. Doing a job without motivation is no better than going to college without a motivation. C is good advice but not the best motivation to stay in college. The real issue is he has no occupational desires. So discipline must replace desires until he finds some occupation he desires.

#11 The Character of God

15:3; 15:11; 16:1; 16:2; 16:3; 16:4; 16:33; 17:3; 17:5; 19:17; 19:21; 20:12; 20:24; 20:27; 21:1; 21:2; 21:30; 21:31; 22:2; 22:12; 29:13; 29:26

Solomon's proverbs emphasize at least four attributes of God:

15:3 *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.*

(1) The omnipresence of God. God is everywhere present. The omnipresence of God is not the same as the pantheistic idea of an impersonal god-force which is everywhere. Pantheism says everything is God and God is everything. The pantheistic God is everywhere but isn't anywhere. The God of the Bible is everywhere but is also somewhere. He has a localized presence.

Solomon uses *eyes* as a figure of speech for God's omnipresence. Then he reminds us that those omnipresent eyes are watching the evil and the good. The point is, nothing we do escapes His notice.

15:11 *Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, How much more the hearts of men!*

(2) The omniscience of God. God is all knowing. God knows all things actual and possible. He knows what has gone on, what is going on, what will go on everywhere, and what could have possibly gone on which did not go on, and will not go on anywhere. The point of Proverbs 15:11 is that the omniscience of God extends even into the hearts of us all. The first phrase says God also knows the afterlife. *שְׁאוֹל וְאַבְדּוֹן*. *Sheol and Abaddon*, refer to the place of death (*Sheol*) and the place of destruction after death (*Abaddon*). The KJV calls it *hell and destruction*. That translation is possible, but *sheol* is not necessarily hell. It is used at least four ways: for extreme suffering, for death, for the place where people go after death, and a place of suffering after death. The point here is that God knows what is going on in the afterlife.

16:1 *The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.*

16:4 *The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.*

16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.*

20:24 *Man's steps are ordained by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?*

21:1 *The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.*

22:2 *The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all.*

(3) The sovereignty of God. Out of the knowledge of everything that could possibly happen, God devised a plan which is the actual course of events. That's sovereignty. This plan is for God's own pleasure and it leaves us with the confidence that there are no accidents (Isaiah 53:10; Philippians 2:13). This is Solomon's biggest emphasis concerning the character of God.

- First (16:1), he says that man plans and God plans. But when man finishes the plans of his heart and then begins to execute those plans, the *answer of the tongue* is from the sovereign plan of God.
- Second (16:4), he says everything is for God's purpose, even wicked people who are foreordained for destruction are serving the purpose of God.
- Third (16:33), Solomon wants us to know even what we consider to be luck or chance is a decision of God.
- Fourth (20:24), he tells us that we cannot possibly understand our life situation because all of our steps are predetermined by God. The point is, we cannot know what God is doing in our life.
- Fifth (21:1, 22:2), whether it be kings or poor people, God controls them all. For example, government leaders may think they are directing things, but even the thoughts of their hearts are being directed by God.

16:2 *All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.*
 17:3 *The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests hearts.*
 20:27 *The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, Searching all the innermost parts of his being.*
 29:26 *Many seek the ruler's favor, But justice for man comes from the LORD.*

(4) **The justice of God.** This says God deals with everyone from the same standard, which is His own character. That is not to say God treats everyone the same. We are not all created equal. But we will all be judged by the same standard. Solomon wants his son to know that the knowledge of God extends to the judgment of God. In 17:3, he says *the Lord tests the hearts*. *Tests* may not be the best translation here. The word is בָּחַן *bachan*, which means *to examine* or *try*. But the trying is not in the sense of tempting but rather *searching out*. The first phrase of 17:3 would also indicate that it includes the refinement of our hearts.

20:27 is a difficult verse. The lamp of the Lord is the נִשְׁמַת *nishmat* (from נִשְׁמָה *neshama*) the *spirit* of man. This is not the usual Hebrew word for *spirit* (רוּחַ *rauch*). Here the word for *breath* is the one used in Genesis 2:7 when it says of Adam, *The Lord ... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*.

So it appears that this spiritual nature, which God breathed into Adam at his creation, is what God uses to search and judge *all the innermost parts* of our being. We all seem to have that same spiritual nature Adam walked out of the Garden of Eden with, and it is the core of our spiritual nature. We use it to make all our moral decisions, and it includes our deepest motives (16:2), many of which we may not even be aware of. But it is from this that *justice for man comes from the Lord*.

#12 The Fear of God

10:27; 10:29; 13:13; 14:2; 14:26; 14:27; 15:16; 15:33; 16:6; 18:10; 19:3; 19:23; 21:3; 22:4; 23:17; 23:18; 28:5; 28:14; 28:25; 29:25

Before the 3 collections of individual proverbs we are looking at here, in his beginning exhortation to seek wisdom (chapters 1-9), Solomon gave us two foundational principles: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge* (1:7), and *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (9:10). Neither of those are reiterated in this main body of the 3 collections, but there are 20 parables here which refer to the fear of God. The “Brown, Driver, and Briggs Lexicon” describes this word as follows: יִרָאָה [yirah] n.f. fear

1. *fear, terror*
2. *a terror = obj. of terror*
3. *fear of God, reverence, piety*

So this word includes the idea of reverence and piety, but it also has the idea of fear and terror. Remember, reverence without terror means (1) I am in charge of the relationship and (2) obedience will be defined as agreement. To love God without fearing Him means I will only obey Him when I like what He says.

There are at least 5 basic ideas about “fear” in Proverbs. The first two come from the introductory section (chapters 1–9).

(1) **The fear of God is the beginning, that is, the foundation, of knowledge** (from 1:7).

(2) **The fear of God is the beginning, that is, the foundation, of wisdom** (from 9:10).

10:27 *The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.*
 14:26 *In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge.*
 14:27 *The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.*
 19:23 *The fear of the LORD leads to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.*
 22:4 *The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life.*

(3) **The fear of God makes *this life* better.** Solomon tells his son that the fear of God also has some definite advantages for this life. It will prolong life, give you confidence, establish a refuge for your children, help you avoid the snares which can kill you, allow you to sleep better, and aid you in obtaining riches and honor.

14:2 *He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is devious in his ways despises Him.*
 16:6 *By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.*
 29:25 *The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.*

(4) The fear of God makes me better. Solomon also told his son that the fear of God would make him a better person. It would cause him to walk in uprightness, keep him away from evil, and avoid having to fear other people.

21:3 *To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.*

28:5 *Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all things.*

(5) The fear of God establishes my relationship with God. Besides the verses in Proverbs which actually state *the fear of God*, there are also proverbs (like 21:3 and 28:5) that imply and assume the fear of God. The point is: a relationship with God, based upon the fear of God, will result in an emphasis on righteousness and justice, not religious ritual.

#13 Happiness

10:28; 11:8; 13:12; 13:18; 13:19; 14:10; 14:13; 15:13; 15:15; 15:17; 15:30; 17:1; 17:14; 17:22; 18:14; 21:17; 24:13; 27:20

Remember, Solomon is only discussing happiness on earth. There is no consideration in Proverbs of eternal life, salvation, or life with God in heaven (except for general references to ultimate judgment). So any New Testament directives concerning our eternal state would trump these principles of earthly happiness. Nonetheless, we all currently live on earth, so these principles are still very timely.

Here are four basic ideas Solomon presents about happiness:

13:12 *Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But desire fulfilled is a tree of life.*

15:30 *Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones.*

24:13 *My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;*

(1) Happiness is a result of fulfilled desire. In a sense, 13:12 is a cure for the sluggard. The sluggard is lazy because he has no hopes and desires. The solution for the sluggard is to find some. A person without desire is incapable of happiness. Fulfilled hopes and desires are the honey of life, which should be eaten *for it is good*.

14:10 *The heart knows its own bitterness, And a stranger does not share its joy.*

14:13 *Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, And the end of joy may be grief.*

15:13 *A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken.*

15:15 *All the days of the afflicted are bad, But a cheerful heart has a continual feast.*

18:14 *The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, But as for a broken spirit who can bear it?*

(2) Happiness and grief are ultimately internal and personal. Repeatedly, Solomon tells his son that happiness is a matter of the *heart* or the *spirit*. So although happiness is the result of fulfilled desires, it is not to be found in any external accomplishment. Happiness is ultimately an internal factor, a condition of our psychological and spiritual makeup. Even external laughter has nothing to do with happiness.

The *heart* here is, of course, not the physical organ that pumps blood, but neither is it just our personality. Solomon's use of *the heart* is a metaphor which seems to connect personality (intellect, emotion, and will) to spirituality (our concepts of morality, purpose, and destiny). So when we are happy or sad, it is not just a function of our personality but also our spirituality. That's why psychological and psychiatric counseling are only partially helpful. Psychology and psychiatry can only deal with our personality. For example, animals also have personality, but they have no spirituality. They can have fear or contentment, but they can never be happy or sad because they have no sense of morality, purpose, or destiny.

Sickness and handicaps can be endured, unless they give us a broken spirit. So it is crucial to see our sickness or handicaps in such a way that they do not destroy our sense of morality, purpose, and destiny. Serious diseases, handicaps, and the problems connected with aging, take away our earthly future. So they force us to more realistically evaluate what makes us happy. Ultimately, there is no happiness on earth at all. That's the conclusion Solomon makes in the book of Ecclesiastes—all is vanity.

15:17 *Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox served with hatred.*

17:1 *Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.*

(3) Happiness is directly connected to a loving, peaceful household. There is no happiness with a troubled household. Things like hatred, strife, divorce, arguments, and resentments in the family will eliminate the possibility for happiness. People often respond to such things with jokes and laughter, making sin sound normal or funny. But it's all a cover-up. There is no happiness in their hearts. So they attempt to ignore reality with addictions to alcohol, drugs, food, sports, sex, anything which will dull the senses to the fact they are not really happy.

17:14 *The beginning of strife is like letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.*

21:17 *He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.*

27:20 *Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.*

(4) Happiness can never be obtained by pursuing pleasure. There is an interesting thing about physical, material, earthly pleasure. It cannot be maintained for any period of time. We can only pursue pleasure, not obtain it. Pleasure is a carrot on the end of a stick. If we obtain it, we either find it does not provide the happiness we expected, or it is quickly replaced with another pursuit—*the eyes of man are never satisfied*.

Solomon tells his son not to love pleasure, because it will make you poor. It is pursuing things like responsibility and excellence that make one rich, not pursuing pleasure. If we love *wine and oil*, or cars, houses, food, clothes, and toys, we will not be happy. The reason is, if I pursue pleasure I will tend to ignore the things that produce happiness, such as family responsibilities, moral integrity, a healthy work ethic, a sense of purpose, and the fear of God. Those are the things which bring true happiness. But they will seem only to be distractions if I am pursuing pleasure.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

What should a father tell a 20-year-old son who lives for his weekend parties?

A. Parties will never give you the pleasure you are looking for.

B. The deceptive thing about parties is they can continue to give you pleasure while robbing you of happiness.

C. Weekend parties are always focused on fulfilling your desires, and our desires are the source of all our problems.

B is correct. Parties, or any pleasure-based activity, can continue to give you short-term pleasure. But as we continue to pursue pleasure, we tend to neglect our relationship with God, our spouse, our families, our ministry, and our work responsibilities. But these responsibilities are where happiness lies. Pleasure is not just fleeting, it is competing with happiness. **A** is incorrect because parties can indeed give you the pleasure you are looking for, that's why they are attractive and destructive of happiness. **C** is the philosophy of Buddhism—our desires are the cause of all our suffering. But this is incorrect. Quite the opposite, good desires are the motivation for all virtuous acts. And the fulfillment of those desires is what brings about happiness. For example, the reason the saints are happy in heaven is because they have a desire to serve God and be pleasing to Him.

#14 Pride and Humility

11:2; 14:16; 15:25; 16:5; 16:18; 16:19; 18:12; 20:9; 21:4; 21:24; 25:14; 25:27; 27:1-2; 27:21; 29:23

Pride assumes value independent from God. So in the Bible, pride is always evil. The basic concept, found in both Testaments is: *God is opposed to the proud, But gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Psalms 138:6).

Here are four principles from Proverbs on pride and humility:

11:2 *When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.*

16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.*

27:1 *Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

(1) Pride leads to things like dishonor, destruction, and stumbling. Humility leads to wisdom. One thing Solomon tells his son about pride is that it has practical disadvantages. It will ultimately destroy you. And that is hard for a young man to understand. For example, in our culture, sport heroes, movie stars, business leaders, all successful people seem to be people of pride. Everywhere you turn, somebody is proud of somebody. Pride is even taught as a basis for success. But Solomon says, don't listen to them. Pride will lead you away from wisdom and end in your destruction.

16:5 *Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.*

(2) Pride is always sinful. Never be proud of anything or anybody, because pride *is an abomination to the LORD*. The most basic reason to avoid pride is because it places value somewhere other than in God. It is an attempt to rob glory from God. That's why it is an abomination to God. For example, when it comes to the accomplishments of your children, instead of being proud of them, be thankful and appreciate whatever talents God has given them.

16:19 *It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

(3) Humility is better than pride, even if it connected with a lowly lifestyle. Actually, humility is always connected to mentally seeing ourselves as lowly. This attitude is better because it leads to wisdom and gives glory to God.

25:14 *Like clouds and wind without rain Is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely.*

25:27 *It is not good to eat much honey, Nor is it glory to search out one's own glory.*

27:2 *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.*

27:21 *The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, And each is tested by the praise accorded him.*

(4) Never praise yourself. And we get very clever at that. We tend to tell our life stories in such a way that we are the heroes, or at least we were right. Subtle boasting is still based in pride. Praise should come from others, not ourselves. But even praise from others should be played down. 27:21 seems to say praise is a test or a refining process. It should not be accepted if it gives us glory independent from God.

Situation Question: Choose one best answer.

Should you be proud of a son or daughter who has completed college while maintaining a positive testimony for Christ?

A. Yes. This is a kind of pride lets your child know how much you appreciate them and their stand for Christ.

B. Yes. This pride is actually a form of thankfulness for what God has done in answering your prayers for your children.

C. No. Pride always places value on people independent from God and is therefore never appropriate.

C is correct. Pride of any kind is inappropriate because it says there is value in some person or group independent from God. That may not be what you mean when you say: "I'm proud of my children," but that is what you are saying. When you use words like: *thankful* or *grateful* it conjures up thought of humility rather than pride. **A** is incorrect because pride expresses independence from God not your child's accomplishments due to the grace of God. **B** is incorrect because pride is not a form of thankfulness; it's the opposite of thankfulness. Pride is about independent accomplishment.

#15 Leadership

16:10; 16:12; 16:14; 20:2; 20:8; 20:26; 20:28; 22:11; 24:21; 24:22; 25:1; 25:2; 25:3-4; 25:5; 25:6-7; 28:2; 28:4; 28:12; 28:15-16; 28:28; 29:2; 29:4; 29:12; 29:14; 29:18

Solomon is writing Proverbs for his son who will one day be king. Most of us are not kings or governing officials. But we are leaders in other ways—family leaders, business leaders, church leaders, or discipleship leaders. So I have tried to glean some general principles of leadership from Solomon's exhortations about the king. They will be very different from most "successful leadership" type of courses because they are based in the fear of God.

Here are four principles about leadership:

16:10 *A divine decision is in the lips of the king; His mouth should not err in judgment.*

(1) Leadership should be based on accurate judgment. Leaders are judges in the sense that they represent godly discernment to their followers. They must constantly be making decisions which help those they lead to recognize false teachers in the schools, churches, and throughout their community. If you don't want to be judgmental, then don't assume a place of leadership.

20:28 *Loyalty and truth preserve the king, And he upholds his throne by righteousness.*

29:14 *If a king judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established forever.*

(2) Good leaders will preserve truth and righteousness. Leaders must be loyal to those they lead. But loyalty must always be in the context of truth and righteousness. The American President Richard Nixon made that mistake in "The

Watergate Scandal.” His men broke the law, and his loyalty to them took precedence over the truth, so he lied to protect them. Those lies cost him the presidency.

20:26 *A wise king winnows the wicked, And drives the threshing wheel over them.*

25:5 *Take away the wicked before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.*

(3) Good leadership includes the removal of wicked people. Wicked people should not surround the leader or the people he leads. If wickedness is allowed to continue unchecked, others will suffer, because wickedness tolerated is wickedness approved. Unrepentant sinners must not be permitted to influence those I lead. But neither should they influence me. Borrowing on Solomon’s words: *take away the wicked before the leader, and his leadership will be established in righteousness.*

25: 2 *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*

28:2 *By the transgression of a land many are its princes, But by a man of understanding and knowledge, so it endures.*

29:18 *Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law.*

(4) Good leaders provide vision that includes knowledge and understanding. God, being infinite, provides us with mysteries. We do not know much about the nature of the Trinity, the details of God’s eternality, what heaven is like, or how God can be sovereign and yet offer us real free will choices. The glory of God conceals matters.

But this is not to be so with human leaders. It is our job to *search out a matter*, and give as good an explanation as is reasonably possible. But our search has to be based upon understanding and knowledge, not mysticism. This *vision* provides laws, or reasonable principles, which people can follow.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your Christian 17-year-old daughter has four Christian girlfriends she hangs out with, and has, all through junior high and high school. Recently two other Christian girls have started doing things with them who make no apology for the fact that they sleep with their boyfriends. What should you advise your daughter to do about these new girls?

- A. She should be a leader by insisting the new girls stop sleeping with their boyfriends, or stop hanging out with them.
- B. She should be a leader by showing love toward these new girls and look for an opportunity to discuss the biblical statements against fornication.
- C. She should be a leader by having the parents of all the girls get together and discuss the situation.

A is correct. Your Christian daughter should take the leadership and confront the new girls. She should give them time to change and consider the biblical passages on fornication as sinful behavior inappropriate for anyone claiming to be a Christian. But the bottom line is they must stop sleeping with their boyfriends or stop hanging out with the others because it is a bad testimony and a bad influence on the others. B is a good start but it is an incorrect response because it does not include taking a stand by doing something about the situation. Explanations are meaningless without action. C is incorrect. This might be the way to go with little girls, and undoubtedly the parents will become informed along the way if your daughter confronts the fornicating girls. But this is a solution where your daughter would not take leadership. Punting the problem to someone else is not leadership.

#16 Counsel/Advice

11:14; 12:5; 12:15; 12:25; 13:10; 14:10; 14:12; 15:22; 15:23; 16:25; 19:20; 20:5; 20:18; 24:5; 24:6; 25:11-13; 25:20; 27:5-6; 27:9; 27:14; 27:17

Solomon believed in giving and receiving wise counsel.

His advice to his son included these three principles:

11:14 *Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory.*

14:12 *There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*

15:22 *Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.*

24:6 *For by wise guidance you will wage war, And in abundance of counselors there is victory.*

(1) The counsel of several other wise people keeps us from making bad decisions which seem right. 14:12 is a much-quoted proverb, which tells us that we cannot always make the best decision using our own wisdom. This is true, no matter how much education we have had, and no matter how capable or intelligent we are. There is a built-in flaw in our reasoning powers that will make certain bad decisions seem right. We know our spiritual nature has been perverted by sin, which cannot be cured with education. A similar perversion warps our reasoning power. Exactly what that is Solomon doesn't say, but the cure is in having available and abundance of wise counsel.

We should note that Solomon is **not** suggesting **decisions** are to be made by a committee. Decisions, for Solomon, were only made by himself, because he was the king. The same would be true for his son when he became king. What he is suggesting is multiple counselors, not multiple decision makers. Also, multiple counselors will not necessarily give you the right decision, but they can keep you from making an obviously bad one, which seems right to you.

15:23 *A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!*

24:5 *A wise man is strong, And a man of knowledge increases power.*

27:17 *Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.*

(2) A wise man will sharpen his knowledge through appropriate counsel. Education, knowledge, and experience are good when accompanied by understanding and wisdom. But Solomon says there is one other significant factor. Your wisdom will be **sharpened** by the appropriate answer of the right person in the right place, at the right time – as *iron sharpens iron*.

27:5 *Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.*

27:6 *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.*

27:9 *Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.*

(3) The counsel of a true friend will include rebuke. Multiple counsel is helpful in decision making, and individual counsel will sharpen our knowledge, but there is one area of counsel which must come from a friend—personal rebuke.

If you are in a position of leadership, you will undoubtedly get a lot of criticism. But that is not the same as personal rebuke. Criticism has to do with your job or function in a company or a project, and does not necessarily come from a friend. Criticism is defined as *an expression of disapproval based on perceived faults or mistakes*. But rebuke is defined as *disapproval of a person's behavior*. Rebuke is personal and deals with more than just your actions.

A true friend is someone who will rebuke you, but he is also someone who has won the right to be heard before he rebukes you. Counsel, even critical counsel, can come from a committee, or a board of directors, or even an informal group of acquaintances. But rebuke that is loving, and *sweet* and *faithful*, comes only from a friend who has won the right to be heard.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

The most important reason our older children need to have a godly Christian friend is:

- A. Advice in making decisions.
- B. Rebuke for his sin.
- C. Influence over his lifestyle.

B is correct. The primary asset of an older child having a close godly Christian friend is for rebuke when he sins. A young person can get advice from many sources, but only a close friend who has won the right to be heard can effectively rebuke him when he sins. **A** is incorrect because advice for older children is probably best obtained from many counselors, and the best advice will usually come from older mature people, such as his parents, teachers, coaches, or elders. **C** is a good answer but it is incorrect here because it is not the most important asset of a close friend. The influence on his lifestyle comes from many sources, and it is crucial they be a godly influence, but only a close friend can effectively give rebuke.

#17 Giving

11:17; 11:24-26; 11:27; 12:10; 14:31; 18:16; 19:6; 21:13; 21:26; 22:9; 24:10; 24:11; 24:12; 27:10; 28:27; 29:7

Solomon believes in generous, compassionate giving.

Here are four of his ideas about generosity:

11:24-26 *There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more,
And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want.
The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.
He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.*

(1) A generous giver will prosper. Solomon is not saying that every act of generosity will be rewarded with an equal reciprocation. And giving, by definition, leaves you with less. Also, stingy people can increase as well as generous ones. But stinginess is based on a foundation that will ultimately result in *want*.

Specifically, Solomon says to scatter our wealth rather than withhold it. We should look for true needs, and make our wealth available to those in need. But Solomon is also sensitive to irresponsibility. So, for example, concerning those who need grain, he says sell it to them. Often giving is better than selling, or expecting some sort of reporting of how gifts are used. But care must be taken to be sure we are meeting needs, not rewarding laziness or sin.

19:6 *Many will seek the favor of a generous man, And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.*
28:27 *He who gives to the poor will never want, But he who shuts his eyes will have many curse*
24:10 *If you are slack in the day of distress, Your strength is limited.*

(2) A generous giver will be powerful. *The greatest giver will always be the leader in every situation.* For example, Jesus Christ is the leader of the church because He is the greatest giver. The greatest financial giver on a Christian board of directors is leading the board meeting, no matter what his title. Unless ... there is a greater giver, like an excellent pastor or missionary who is giving more with his preaching, teaching, or pastoring, than the philanthropist is giving with his money. But this principle is true at all levels. In any community of people, stinginess limits our leadership capacity, and generosity increases our leadership capacity.

24:11 *Deliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back.*
27:10 *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.*

(3) A compassionate person will be a generous giver. Compassion always results in generosity. The driving motive for the compassionate person is to *deliver those who are being taken away to death*. Matthew revealed something of the heart of Jesus when he wrote: *Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd* (Matthew 9:36).

And Solomon says, don't forget this compassionate giving includes your relatives. Because we know more about their sins, we are often less willing to help those in our extended families. But our families should be seen as people to give to, not people we get things from.

14:31 *He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.*
24:12 *If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts?
And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?*

(4) A compassionate giver is rewarded by God. The biggest problem with stinginess is that it *taunts* God. Whereas being *gracious to the needy honors Him*. Therefore, it is a proper motive to give to others in order to be rewarded by God. So one motive for generosity is personal profit. But the profit you are to seek is not from the one you help but from the one *who keeps your soul*.

#18 Anger, Hatred, and Contentions

10:12; 14:17; 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 17:9; 18:19; 19:11; 19:19; 20:3; 22:24; 22:25; 25:23; 25:28; 26:17 26:18-19; 26:20, 22-24, 26, 27; 26:21, 25, 28; 29:8; 29:9; 29:11; 29:22

Anger, hatred, and contentions run together in Solomon's proverbs. They are indeed different, but they impact each other in such a way that one leads to the other.

Here are four of Solomon's thoughts on the subject of anger, hatred, and contentions:

14:29 *He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.*
16:32 *He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.*
26:22 *The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.*
26:23 *Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross Are burning lips and a wicked heart.*
26:24 *He who hates disguises it with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.*

(1) **Anger is connected to a lack of understanding and therefore a lack of wisdom.** Solomon sees the quick-tempered person as a fool who cannot rule his own spirit. Interestingly, animals also display anger from their personality (not having a spirituality). But Solomon says that, for man, it is a moral condition rooted in his spirit. Animals display anger with fear. But a man has angry contentions because *he lays up deceit in his heart*.

15:18 *A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to anger calms a dispute.*
18:19 *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a citadel.*

(2) **When someone is offended, brought into contentions by anger, it is unlikely he will ever be satisfied.** We do not usually realize the long-term impact of causing, or participating in, strife. When we get angry over insignificant issues, or less than crucial matters, we can establish life-long enemies. A hot temper seems satisfied at the moment, but it stirs up a mountain of problems, which may not be resolvable.

19:19 *A man of great anger will bear the penalty, For if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.*
20:3 *Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.*
26:17 *Like one who takes a dog by the ear Is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him.*
26: 20 *For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.*

(3) **The best solution for contentions is to simply to leave them alone.** Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying: “If you wrestle with a skunk, you might win or you might lose, but either way you get awful dirty.” Solomon says if you try to resolve angry contentions, *you will only have to do it again*. And if you add wood to the fire, by, say, gossip, then it will continue to burn. But *where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down*. So stay out of it, leave it alone, don’t keep on talking about it.

26:26 *Though his hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.*
26:27 *He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.*

(4) **Those who cause anger, hatred, and contentions will be found out.** Trouble causers will always be found out. They always think they can cover it up with some sanctified sounding reasons, but before long, people figure them out. As in everything else, there are no secrets (Mark 4:22).

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your Christian daughter told a girl, who claims to be a Christian, she should not be sleeping with her boyfriend. Because she is angry, the girl is now spreading lies about your daughter. What advice do you have for your daughter?

- A. First, go to the other girl and confront her about the gossip she is spreading. Then bring others into the discussion.
- B. Tell people the truth whenever it is appropriate and ignore the gossiping girl.
- C. Tell everyone in your circle of friends the truth about the lies she is spreading.

B is correct. Any time your daughter discusses this, she will be tempted to judge the other girl and get back at her with some gossip of her own. The only way to avoid that is to leave it alone. Your daughter can discuss the situation with her close friends, being careful not to condemn the other girl or discuss her at all. But she should not initiate discussions about this with others. **A** is incorrect because the Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5 process is for mature adults, not for children. Adults should handle conflicts with the parents of the gossiping girl. It is the parents of the girl who need to deal with her. **C**. is incorrect because of what I mentioned above, it will only lead to more gossip.

#19 Prayer

15:8; 15:29; 28:9

Prayer is *communicating a message to God when He is not physically manifested*. When the patriarchs and prophets talked with God (called a theophany) or when the apostle spoke with Christ, that was not prayer because God was physically manifested. Meditation and vague or unexplainable feelings are not prayer. Prayer is an intentional, rational, message communicated from man to God, when man is not experiencing God with one of his five senses. As you can see, Solomon barely mentions prayer in Proverbs.

But Solomon did say 3 significant things about prayer:

15:8 *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.*

(1) Prayer should only come from upright people, not wicked people. Prayer demands a moral context. Solomon wants his son to know that, although everybody prays (there has probably never been a thinking human being who has not prayed), their prayers are not necessarily good. Wicked people pray, too, especially when they get in trouble or when they are suffering. But their prayers are not welcome in heaven. They are *an abomination to the Lord*. The point is, don't act wickedly and then pray for God to bail you out of the consequences of your wickedness.

15:29 *The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.*

(2) God hears the prayers of righteous people. The other side is, God does hear the prayers of the righteous. This does not indicate that every prayer of the righteous will be answered but that God gives attention to it. It is not just so many words but a communication which God is aware of.

28:9 *He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.*

(3) The prayers of those who refuse to obey the Bible are an abomination to God. The *law* is Solomon's Scripture. For us, that would be the Old and New Testaments. If we refuse to obey the revealed Word of God, then our prayers are *an abomination to God*. For example, God says a woman should not teach or be in authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:12). So if you elect women to be pastors or elders, your prayers are *an abomination to the Lord*.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Your unmarried 26-year-old son claims to be a practicing homosexual but attends church regularly. What should you tell him?

- A. A church where homosexuality is welcome demonstrates that the church is bad, not that homosexuality is good.
- B. Church is normally a place of prayer. Practicing homosexuals are acting wickedly, and, therefore, should not pray.
- C. Going to church will not offset the sin of practicing homosexuality.

All these are true answers, but **B** is the best here. The point of Proverbs concerning the one who intentionally disobeys the Word of God is: *his prayer is an abomination*. Since church is a house of prayer, their attendance at church should be condemned. **A** and **C** are true statements but not the emphasis of Proverbs.

#20 Women

11:16; 11:22; 12:4; 14:1; 18:22; 19:14; 21:9; 21:19; 25:24; 27:15-16; 22:14; 23:26-28; 27:13.

I suppose if Solomon were writing to his daughters, he would have a subject we might call "Men." But since he is writing to his son, **most** of the book is about men. But scattered through his writing are proverbs which speak of women, in the sense of what his son should take heed to as he looks for a wife.

[The later verses listed above are about the adulterous woman, but since we discussed that subject earlier, I have not commented on it here.] Here are four of Solomon's thoughts about women:

11:16 *A gracious woman attains honor, And ruthless men attain riches.*

(1) Honor is inevitable for a gracious woman. The root word for *gracious* here is חַן *chen*, meaning *favor, grace, or elegance of form, appearance, or speech*. Solomon says such a woman will always attain honor.

11:22 *As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, So is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.*

(2) A beautiful woman should not be mistaken for a woman of discretion. Solomon is not against a woman being beautiful. Beauty is included in the graciousness of the woman in 11:16. The Bible emphasizes the physical beauty of several significant godly women (Sarah, Abigail, Esther, Ruth). But beauty will not make up for discretion. The word for discretion is תָּאֵם *ta'am*, meaning *discretion, discernment, or taste*. This describes a woman who is wise in the way she talks. She knows the appropriate thing to say.

12:4 *An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who shames him is like rotteness in his bones.*

14:1 *The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.*

18:22 *He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD.*

19:14 *House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD.*

(3) An excellent wife is the best thing a man can have this side of heaven. Solomon says an excellent wife: (1) is a crown to her husband, (2) builds her house, and (3) is שָׂכֵל *sakal*, *prudent, understanding or discerning* (19:14). Finding such a wife is considered not only to be a good thing but finding favor from the Lord.

21:9 *It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.*

27:15-16 *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.*

(4) A contentious wife is the worst thing a man can live with. Quite the opposite of a gracious or prudent wife is one who is contentious. The word מַדוֹן *madon* means to cause *strife or contention*. Solomon says two things about the contentious woman: she is agony to live with, and there is no way to restrain her.

#21 Friends and Neighbors

11:12; 12:26; 14:21; 18:1; 18:24; 20:6; 21:10; 21:21; 25:8-10; 25:17-18

Friends (those with whom you have a bond of mutual affection) and neighbors (those you are living near or next door to) are both important to Solomon. And, although they are not the same, there is a big overlap between them. The difference is, a neighbor is someone who is physically unavoidable. In Solomon's thinking, your friends may not be your neighbors, but it is best if your neighbors become you friends.

In the parable of "the good Samaritan," Jesus defined a neighbor as anyone who helps those they encounter when they have needs (Luke 10:25-37). In our global society, relationships are impacted by technology, making our neighbors those we encounter who are physically unavoidable, not necessarily those we live next to (as in it was in 900 B.C.).

Here are four of Solomon's thoughts about friends and neighbors:

11:12 *He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent.*

14:21 *He who despises his neighbor sins, But happy is he who is gracious to the poor.*

18:1 *He who separates himself seeks his own desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom.*

(1) It's important to make friends of your neighbors. Solomon does not like the idea of isolated living. If we despise our neighbors, we are both sinning and lacking sense, because it leads to separation from them. A separated person is a selfish person, one who seeks only his own desires. That *quarrels against all sound wisdom* because the way life usually operates (wisdom) is through social interaction. Some men (more so than women) prefer social isolation as a means of dealing with conflict. Solomon says that's unwise.

18:24 *A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

20:6 *Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?*

(2) Good friends are not numerous. Just as it is important to have friends, it is important not to have too many friends. Actually, if you think you have a lot of friends, you are mistaken. Friendship includes being loyal and trustworthy.

Loyalty is a firm support or allegiance. It is physically impossible to be loyal to a large number of people, or have a large number of people loyal to you. Popularity is not friendship.

25:17 *Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, Or he will become weary of you and hate you.*

(3) A good neighbor will not wear out his welcome. If you want to make a friend of your neighbor (and you should want to do that), then don't wear out your welcome. This is especially true when it comes to interrupting his time at home. Don't call people before 8:00 A.M. or after 10:00 P.M. unless it is an emergency. Don't just hang out at your neighbor's house, unless he has specifically invited you, or there is a special occasion for it. When you are always in your friend's or neighbor's house, you disrupt his time with his family and the time when he relaxes from his day. Respect that.

25:8-10 *Do not go out hastily to argue your case; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?*

Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another,

Or he who hears it will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

25:18 *Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow, Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.*

(4) Your enemies are usually former friends. In these proverbs, Solomon discusses several aspects of conflict with your neighbor. Most of the particulars are dealt with elsewhere. But notice the general principle. Conflicts are usually not with strangers, and when they are, they are usually not significant. Significant, long-term, life-changing conflicts are usually with your friends and neighbors, those you are physically and personally close to. Actually, many people cannot tell their friends from their enemies. Enemies are usually former friends.

#22 Drunkenness and Gluttony

20:1; 21:17; 3:19; 23:20; 23:21; 23:29; 23:30; 23:31; 23:32; 23:33; 23:34; 23:35

Actually, Solomon is not completely against drinking wine. The rewards of honoring the Lord with giving in 3:9-10 include: *your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.* In Proverbs 31:6, King Lemuel's mother writes: *Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter.*

But the one who *loves wine* (21:17), or *linger long over wine* (23:30), are presented by Solomon as dangerous, foolish, and destructive. In the first section, he connected drunkenness with violence (4:17), and the adulterous woman (9:2 and 5). Here in the three collections of 537 proverbs, wine is always presented with its dangers. The main section is a large paragraph (23:19-35), which is in the collection called *The Sayings of the Wise* (which are the proverbs Solomon obtained from other wise men).

Here are three principles from the main collections:

20:1 *Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.*

21:17 *He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.*

(1) The love of wine, like any love of pleasure, is a lack of wisdom. These two are Solomon's own proverbs, and they reiterate his theme to seek wisdom and avoid things which destroy it. The love of wine will destroy wisdom because it produces chaos, and chaos keeps us from understanding the regularities of life.

23:19 *Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.*

23:20 *Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;*

23:21 *For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe one with rags.*

(2) Drunkenness and gluttony both lead to poverty. Solomon put gluttony in the same category with drunkenness because they both lead to, or come from, laziness. *And drowsiness will clothe one with rags.* What the glutton and the drunk have in common is they are focused on short-term pleasure, mortgaging the future for the present. And living for short-term pleasure never provides wisdom.

23:29 *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?*

23:30 *Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine*

- 23:31 *Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly;*
 23:32 *At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper.*
 23:33 *Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things.*
 23:34 *And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea,
 Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.*
 23:35 *“They struck me, but I did not become ill; They beat me, but I did not know it.
 When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.”*

(3) Drunkenness is an addiction. Again, it is not wine per se, but *those who linger long over wine*, who are in danger of losing wisdom. Wine (obviously, because of its alcoholic content) is dangerous when it leads to an addiction. An addiction is a pleasure inclination that lies to you in two ways: it says you cannot live without it, and it promises to satisfy you.

It is a strange perversion of the human psyche that is not found in any other creature. Short-term satisfaction can become a pleasure inclination which falsely promises long-term satisfaction. **The truth is, we can always live without any particular pleasure inclination.** The excessive food or alcohol, the drugs, the pornography, the gossip, the other woman, the toys, all can become addictions, which we do not need at all.

But addictions tell us that our wants are our needs. Outwardly, we may deny these wants are needs, claiming, “I can quit any time,” or something. But we really don’t believe it. The pleasure inclination is too intense. Then our addictions also become habits. So our lifestyle becomes organized around these addictions. Because they are perceived as needs, we fight to keep them, even when we know very well they are destroying us, and those around us.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

You have a 15-year-old son who is significantly overweight, with terrible eating habits. What should you tell him?

- A. You need to lose weight now. Statistically, you will never weigh less than your high school graduation weight.
- B. Your eating habits are just as much of a sin against God as if you were an alcoholic.
- C. You are addicted to junk food, and, like any addiction, it will destroy your wisdom.

B is correct. The most crucial issue with gluttony is that it is a sin, and in Proverbs it is listed with an excessive use of alcohol. Gluttony is one of the most overlooked sins, and it needs to be addressed as an offence to God. **A** is incorrect because, although that statistic is generally true, the biggest problem with gluttony is that it is an offense to God, not that it will remain a difficulty for your son. **C** is incorrect because, although it is probably true that he is addicted to food, addiction is hard to prove. What matters is that he is clearly a glutton. The loss of wisdom is a crucial reason to eliminate addictions, but disobedience to God is the more central issue.

#23 Property

22:28; 23:10; 23:11; 23:12

- 22:28 *Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set.*
 23:10 *Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless,*
 23:11 *For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.*

Respect you neighbor’s property. Deuteronomy 19:14 says, *You shall not move your neighbor’s boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.* Solomon is simply reminding his son not to violate the Mosaic Law in the area of moving a property line. Moving a property line is simply a way of stealing property. In their case, it was a property line that was determined before they entered the land and should never be moved.

God not only gave the land to the Israelites, He had it distributed according to tribes by lot from the elders, especially Joshua (Joshua 15–19). How that became divided among specific families, we are not sure (it was most likely also by lot), but those boundaries were not to be changed. All sale of property was to be returned to its family ownership every 50th year, the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10).

Of course, we do not have such a thing. And, although the churches have attempted to recognize a Sabbath Day (by turning Saturday into Sunday and going to a meeting), they have, for some reason, never recognized a Sabbatical or

Jubilee year. The application for today would be to honor property lines and not try to infringe on your neighbor's property. This would be relevant to the many lawsuits over property lines.

#24 Decision Making

18:17; 18:18; 24:23; 24:24; 24:25; 24:26

We are often called upon to make decisions where the right thing to do is not clear. Our children will constantly present us with the need to make these decisions, as will most of our jobs, and the regular conflicts with neighbors and relatives. Determining justice is part of our daily lives. There are decisions we make for ourselves which should be based upon wise counsel (discussed in #16 above), and decisions we are called upon to make for others. Only the later is discussed in these verses.

Here are three principles about decision making:

18:17 *The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him.*

(1) Be sure you hear every view examined. It's not just hearing both sides of the story, it's also hearing each side cross-examined. Whenever possible, allow those representing both sides of an issue to question each other in your presence (if it can be done calmly, without a shouting match).

18:18 *The cast lot puts an end to strife And decides between the mighty ones.*

24:23 *These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good.*

(2) Do not be partial to the better person. When deciding on a matter, be sure you are looking at the case being described, not the way you perceive the character of those describing it. Also, if you cannot make a reasonable decision based on the evidence, casting lots is a legitimate way to make a decision.

24:24 *He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;*

24:25 *But to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.*

24:26 *He kisses the lips Who gives a right answer.*

(3) Make sure you judge based on justice and righteousness, not fairness. Solomon says it is important to get it right. But you can only do that if you are distinguishing between righteousness and wickedness, not measuring one person against another. The basis for judgment is God's absolute standard, not what is fair for people. For example, suppose you have two sons. One has had a pornographic magazine for months. Then the second son gets one and you discover it and take away both boys' magazines. The second son could say that is not fair my brother had one for months. But it's not about fairness, it's about God's standard or righteousness.

#25 Revenge

20:22; 24:17; 24:18; 24:29; 25:21-22; 27:4

20:22 *Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.*

24:17 *Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;*

24:18 *Or the LORD will see it and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.*

25:21-22 *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.*

Do not seek revenge, and don't be happy about your enemy's problems. Revenge is an attempt at justice, balancing the scales with an eye-for-an-eye. Clearly, this is God's job. And although territorial governments are to attempt it, individuals are not (Romans 12:19; 13:1-4; Hebrews 12:30). Being happy about your enemy's problems is a heart condition whereby you are getting vicarious revenge. It is a revenge you imagine in your thoughts.

The Proverbs of Agur

30:1 *The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal*

We know very little about Agur. He identifies himself as the son of an oracle. The word *סִגְרָא* *massa* for *oracle* is often used of one who speaks orally but usually with the idea of giving divine revelation. The KJV translates it *Agur the son of Jakeh even the prophecy*.

Some early church leaders and rabbis identified Agur with Solomon, but there is no evidence for that, especially since the style of this chapter is quite a bit different. More likely, he was a student of Solomon's who taught Solomon's proverbs to other students and continued to write some of his own. *Ithiel and Ucal* are probably students or disciples he taught.

30:2 *Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man.*

30:3 *Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.*

30:4 *Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? His name or His son's name? Surely you know!*

30:5 *Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.*

30:6 *Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.*

Agur sees the #1 qualification for wisdom as humility. There is no way for a man to obtain wisdom by himself without the revelation of God. All man's knowledge and research are like gathering the wind in his fists. There is no wisdom and no *knowledge of the Holy One* apart from divine revelation. We have both general revelation in nature (Romans 1 and 2) and special revelation in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), but we can only know about God and understand life from what He has revealed. And we should *not add to His words* (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18-19).

The *who* of verse 4 could refer to what God can do (NASV) or what man cannot do (KJV). Either way, the pursuit of wisdom on our own without taking into account the revelation of God is like gathering the wind in our fist (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

30:7 *Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die:*

30:8 *Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion,*

30:9 *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.*

Agur writes proverbs with what is usually called NUMERICAL PARALLELISM. This parallelism uses numbers to structure the meaning. Here there are two things he asks for. It does not mean that is all he wants before he dies, but there are two important points he wants to make.

The first is about honesty. He finds deception intolerable, as we should.

But the main point of this section is about riches. Agur makes a significant, and unusual, point about wealth. *Give me neither poverty nor riches*. Most want riches but not poverty. A few, like monks in cloistered monasteries, want poverty not riches. But Agur wants neither. The reason is, either one will be a temptation to sin. The danger of forgetting God when we prosper is a common theme in Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:12; 31:20; Hosea 13:6). The surprising addition of Agur is that poverty is also a temptation to sin. When we are in want, we tend to steal. We may steal from friends, strangers, employers, or the government. When we are poor, we tend to take what another has earned and feel justified in doing so. The real problem is, when I feel justified in stealing, *I profane the name of my God*. Neither wealth nor poverty are sinful, but both are a temptation to be sinful.

30:10 *Do not slander a slave to his master, Or he will curse you and you will be found guilty.*

The point is not to slander anyone. The *slave to his master* comment is just an illustration. Slander is, by definition, a lie, and this lie will likely be discovered when the slandered one defends himself.

30:11 *There is a kind of man who curses his father And does not bless his mother.*

30:12 *There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, Yet is not washed from his filthiness.*

30:13 *There is a kind—oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised in arrogance.*

30:14 *There is a kind of man whose teeth are like swords And his jaw teeth like knives, To devour the afflicted from the earth And the needy from among men*

I am not sure where the NASV gets the translation *There is a kind of man who*. The opening word for each of these proverbs is דֹר *dor*, which means *period, generation, or dwelling*. The KJV translates it *There is a generation*. The point is that certain periods of time or generations have certain sinful tendencies. Of course, most sin is common to all generations, but some are emphasized at certain periods in history. These sins will be especially dangerous because it will seem normal and socially acceptable to commit them. For example, at certain times in history it seemed right to build idols, use temple prostitutes, go on crusades, exploit women, trade slaves, or use internet pornography “because everybody else is doing it.”

The specific sins Agur mentions are: not respecting parents, self-righteousness, arrogance, and taking advantage of the afflicted. Sure, these sins are always there, nonetheless, certain generations are less sensitive to certain sins.

30:15 *The leech has two daughters, “Give,” “Give.” There are three things that will not be satisfied Four that will not say, “Enough”:*

30:16 *Sheol, and the barren womb, Earth that is never satisfied with water, And fire that never says, “Enough.”*

30:17 *The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it.*

This poem is all about the child who is disrespectful to his parents. The one who *mocks a father And scorns a mother*. The word לָגַל *l'ag* for *mock* and בִּזָּה *buz* for *scorn*, both mean to *despise*. And both have a secondary meaning of *laughter*, which in the Bible is always a mocking laughter, rather than a humor laughter.

Agur sees little hope for a son or daughter who mocks his parents. [And remember, this is an older child between puberty and marriage.] This child is like a leech that sucks blood from an animal. This leech of a child says to his parents “Give,” “Give.” It would be illustrated today with an older son who is lazy, or an alcoholic, or on drugs. He mocks his parents in that he refuses their discipline, but he keeps getting in trouble financially, or with the law. If his parents keep bailing him out, as many do, the son will eventually drain them of all their assets and leave them with nothing.

Situation Question: WHAT DO YOU THINK? Choose one best answer.

Suppose you have a son who has graduated from college and moved back home without a job. You should tell him:

- A. As long as you live a decent life, stay out of trouble, and you are looking for or working at a responsible job, you can live at home.
- B. You can live at home, but after a time (say, 6 months), you need to pay for your room and board.
- C. You cannot live at home very long because as long as you live here, you are not responsible for your own life.

C is correct. As long as the son is living at home, his parents are giving him financial support one way or another. And the giver is always the leader. This means the son is not leading his own life. He needs to be in a living situation where he can take the leadership of his life and begin giving not just receiving. A is incorrect because the parents are giving support to the son, which means they are leading him, when he needs to be leading himself. B is not too bad, but it is not the best answer because it is only a temporary solution and it does not explain to the son the reason why he needs to pay room and board.

30:18 *There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Four which I do not understand:*

30:19 *The way of an eagle in the sky, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the middle of the sea, And the way of a man with a maid.*

This poetic proverb is all about the last phrase *the way of a man with a maid*. Agur’s point is not only that we cannot completely understand any of these things, but that we cannot trace their step with any understanding. The course of romance is as untraceable as *the way of an eagle in the sky*. A young man will do things for his girlfriend which make no reasonable sense in any other situation.

But we cannot be sure that Agur was referring to a specific girl or just *a man with a maid* in general. For example, it has been repeatedly established that men will do better on IQ tests when the test is taken in a room of only men, than in a place where women are also present. This same thing is not true of women. I have led many men’s groups and conferences, and couple’s groups and conferences. I can tell you that men are much more open to nearly every form of learning when there are not women present. No one can explain *the way of a man with a maid*.

30:20 *This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, And says, “I have done no wrong.”*

There is some question as to whether verse 20 is meant to be an independent proverb or part of verses 18 and 19. I take it as a separate proverb. The point is, the adulterous woman has warped her conscience to the extent that she no longer feels guilt for adultery. It is as common to her as eating. She justifies it by ignoring the commandments of God. So she, as with most perpetual sinners, is not defining good as obedience to God but as what she determines for herself to be in her own best interest. When we decide for ourselves what is good and evil, instead of defining good and evil as obedience or disobedience to God, we will end up perverting our conscience into justifying sin.

30:21 *Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up:*

30:22 *Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food,*

30:23 *Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.*

Agur lists four things which will create a social earthquake. The reason is they are not the normal result of cause and effect. They violate the law of sowing and reaping in the area of social preparation. For whatever reason a slave has become a slave, he is not prepared to be a king. The fool sows seeds which lead to hunger not being satisfied with food, etc. When unprepared people are, for some odd reason, thrust into a role they are not equipped for, then things happen which disrupt the normal social order. And when order reverts to chaos, then wisdom is lost.

For example, most people who win a large lottery are fools because it's primarily fools who play the lottery. So most lottery winners go broke. Before long, most of them are bankrupt, in debt, or in some other desperate financial condition. The advantage of capitalism is most financial positions are earned. But the problem with democracy is, someone only needs to be popular, not wise or experienced, to be elected to a high political office.

30:24 *Four things are small on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise:*

30:25 *The ants are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer;*

30:26 *The shephanim are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks;*

30:27 *The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks;*

30:28 *The lizard you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings' palaces.*

Agur notices four small but *wise* creatures: the ants, the rock badgers, the locusts, and the lizards. The point is: size and outward strength do not necessarily result in wisdom. Wisdom comes to those who are hardworking like ants, shrewd like rock badgers, persistent like locusts, and clever like lizards.

30:29 *There are three things which are stately in their march, Even four which are stately when they walk:*

30:30 *The lion which is mighty among beasts And does not retreat before any,*

30:31 *The strutting rooster, the male goat also, And a king when his army is with him.*

The three creatures and the king represent those who walk in wisdom. The real point to this numerical parallelism is once again the last phrase, that the wise king will make sure his army is with him. Agur is telling us that a wise leader does not just go strutting about insensitive to those around him (as a lion rooster or goat might do). A wise king will make sure his soldiers are taking ownership of their cause in such a way that they want to follow the king.

30:32 *If you have been foolish in exalting yourself Or if you have plotted evil, put your hand on your mouth.*

30:33 *For the churning of milk produces butter, And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So the churning of anger produces strife.*

Anything we do to provoke anger in others will end as strife for ourselves. So, Agur says, *put your hand on your mouth*. Shut up about it. Stop exalting yourself. Stop defending yourself. Because what you are doing when you are defending yourself is exalting yourself. You can't win an argument, you can only stop participating in the discussion. The reason you can never win is that you are always guilty of something.

For example, Jesus said: *Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent* (Matthew 5:25-26). So, never go to court if you can help it because you aren't perfect, and neither is the court system. In addition to that, you will be in a position of pride, defending yourself in a matter which will only result in *the churning of anger which produces strife*.

The Proverbs of King Lemuel's Mother

31:1 *The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him:*

We know nothing else about King Lemuel or his mother. Yet her short description of the *excellent wife* (31:10-31) has been quoted for 3000 years, and probably is the best description of a perfect wife in all of literature. It is not clear whether Lemuel or his mother wrote the words we have here. But, since the text indicates this is *the oracle which his mother taught him*, I will make the assumption these are her words.

She begins by giving her son preliminary warnings about: women, alcohol, and being unjust.

31:2 *What, O my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows?*

31:3 *Do not give your strength to women, Or your ways to that which destroys kings.*

The **first** preliminary warning is about women. Although she doesn't specifically say so, we can safely assume the warning is against sexual immorality. This is, of course, something Solomon address at length in the first section of the book (chapters 5–9) as well as in 23:27; 27:13; and 30:20. Here, Lamuel's mother says sexual immorality will take your strength and destroy you, even if you are a king.

This is such a huge theme in Proverbs that every young man should take extreme caution in his dealing with women. Nothing will destroy your life faster or more thoroughly than sexual immorality. If you run around with guys who boast about their sexual conquests and listen to the media morality, you will feel right about premarital sex, and regret it the rest of you life.

31:4 *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink,*

31:5 *For they will drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.*

31:6 *Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter.*

31:7 *Let him drink and forget his poverty And remember his trouble no more.*

The **second** preliminary issue is drinking alcohol. Interestingly, Lemuel's mother does find a place in society for alcohol. She suggests it is good for the one *who is perishing* and *him whose life is bitter*. She defines a bitter life as *poverty* and *trouble*. It could be argued that she is saying bitterness and trouble are an effect of drinking wine rather than a treatment for it, but this seems unlikely because it would not be true for the *perishing*.

Ryrie says: *The verses do not condone intoxication but indicate the medical use of alcohol in ancient times* ("Ryrie Study Bible," p. 1014). Even in the New Testament Paul tells Timothy: *No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments* (1 Timothy 5:23). Wine and strong drink did have a medical use, and possibly even a social use, for, say, psychological depression. In the Law, Moses indicates that it is also appropriate for certain times of celebration (Deuteronomy 14:26).

But the point being made by Lemuel's mother is that it is not for healthy people in positions of responsibility. She gives two reasons for that. One, it affects your ability to perform your job with your best mental ability. The primary job for a person with responsibility is to think. Alcohol destroys brain cells, which never grow back. Although it is unlikely Lemuel's mother knew that, she knew the results of that. Two, she says alcohol affects your judgment. Specifically, she says you will *pervert the rights of all the afflicted*. In other words, alcohol not only affects your mental ability, it affects your moral judgment as well.

31:8 *Open your mouth for the mute, For the rights of all the unfortunate.*

31:9 *Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.*

The **third** preliminary issue is about justice for the unfortunate. Lemuel's mother is concerned that he be a leader who is sensitive to the needs of those who cannot help themselves. Specifically, she mentions *the mute, the unfortunate, the afflicted and needy*.

The Description of an Excellent Wife

Lemuel's mother has been known throughout history for her description of the excellent wife. This last section of Proverbs is a separate poem and should be set apart from the rest of the chapter. There are 22 verses to the poem, each beginning with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. It is meant to be read as a poem. But for the sake of

analysis, I shall deal with it by subject matter. Since she repeats several issues (apparently for emphasis), I shall quote her topically instead of poetically (as she wrote it).

31:10 *An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.*

In this first verse, she introduces the subject with what could also be her conclusion. The phrase *an excellent wife* is *אִשָּׁת־עֹז*, more literally *a wife (or woman) of strength*. But the descriptive word can also mean she is a wife of *efficiency, wealth, ability, force, or power* as in a powerful army.

Next she gives five significant aspects of the excellent wife:

31:11 *The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain.*

31:12 *She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.*

31:23 *Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land.*

31:28 *Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:*

31:29 *“Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all.”*

(1) The excellent wife serves her husband. Of course, this is contrary to postmodern feminism, but it is consistent with the order of creation. Moses wrote: *Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him”* (Genesis 2:18). The focus in Proverbs 31 is on the results of her service. Specifically, Lemuel’s mother says:

- Her husband trusts her
- He has material gain because of her
- She does only good for him all her life
- Because of her, he is prominent among men as a leader in the community
- Her husband, along with her children, praises her as most excellent, even among other noble women

31:13 *She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight.*

31:14 *She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar.*

31:15 *She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens.*

31:16 *She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard.*

31:18 *She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night.*

31:24 *She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen.*

31:31 *Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates.*

(2) An excellent wife is a home-oriented business woman. The excellent wife is involved in business, but her business is all related to her home. She buys and sells, earns and invests, manufactures and distributes. Her business takes her out into the community, and sometimes beyond her own community. But it never involves her serving some man other than her husband, or focusing on the prosperity of some institution other than her family.

31:17 *She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong.*

31:22 *She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.*

31:25 *Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future.*

31:30 *Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.*

(3) An excellent wife takes care of herself, physically and spiritually. Specifically:

- She stays in shape physically
- She wears excellent clothes
- She also clothes herself with strength and dignity
- She is not afraid of getting old
- She realizes that charm (*חַן* *chen*, meaning *favor* or *grace*) is deceitful (literally *a lie*), and beauty is vain (*הַבָּהָל* *hebel*, meaning *vain, futile, or literally breath*). She wants to be praised only because she *fears the LORD*.

31:21 *She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet.*

31:26 *She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*

31:27 *She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.*

(4) An excellent wife takes care of her household. This is the most obvious quality of an excellent wife. And I suspect this is what most wives do best. It is interesting that Lemuel’s mother doesn’t mention it until verses 19-20. Not that she

is listing things in order. But fearing God and serving her husband are indeed more of a priority. Specifically, she serves her family by:

- Providing quality clothing
- Speaking with wisdom
- Teaching kindness
- Giving them an example of a hard worker who *does not eat the bread of idleness*

31:19 *She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hands grasp the spindle.*

31:20 *She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.*

(5) An excellent wife helps the poor. Lemuel's mother is very concerned about the poor. She has already told Lemuel to speak for them and be careful how he judges them (31:8-9). Here she tells him to look for a wife who *extends her hand* to them, even to the extent that she makes things for them (as *her hands grasp the spindle*).

This concludes our study on the book of Proverbs.